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Fall 2003 | Volume 7 #2

Rating Early Childhood Environments

Director's Notes

A Place for Eliot

A Whole New Yardstick

A Giant in Her Field

A Star Performer

Roadmaps to Quality

FPG Publications

NCEDL Meets with State Representatives

NCEDL Publications

ed

early developments

early developments



news



Don Trull

JIM GALLAGHER, FPG senior scientist and Kenan Professor Emeritus, was one of 24 psychologists among the 53 most influential people in gifted education, according to a survey of programs and centers for gifted and talented education. The list was published in **Gifted Child Today** (Vol. 25, No. 4). The survey was also cited in the May edition of the American Psychological Association's Monitor.



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Director's Notes

4



Ryann Donnelly

A Place for Eliot

6



A Whole New Yardstick

8



A Giant in Her Field

12



A Star Performer

16

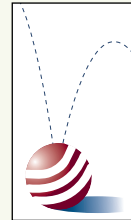


Roadmap to Quality

18

FPG Publications

20



NCEDL Meets with State Representatives

21

NCEDL Publications

15

Director's Notes

by Don Bailey, Director



FPG Archives

Don Bailey during his early years at FPG.

I came to UNC in 1979 as a faculty member in the School of Education to direct a master's degree program in early childhood special education. When I arrived, I realized that funds from several grants had been pooled together to create

this position, including funds from FPG, and thus I had a few other jobs as well! Fortunately for me, one of those assignments was to work with Thelma Harms and Dick Clifford on a grant to train social workers in normal and atypical child development. Together we traveled around the state conducting several workshops. My job was to provide information on children with disabilities, while Thelma and Dick shared information on normal child development and appropriate environments for young children.

At first I focused primarily on my own talks. Having just finished my PhD at the University of Washington, I felt that I knew a lot about the topic but was nervous about talking to practitioners. Initially, I probably didn't pay much attention to what Dick and Thelma were saying. But once I calmed down, I began to listen.

Their message was simple but powerful—children don't develop in a vacuum, but in the context of the *environments* in which their lives are lived. Having been trained as a behaviorist, this was not a new message to me. But my training in the disability world had focused almost entirely on direct instruction, the things

that teachers do directly to teach children. Dick and Thelma showed me that both development and instruction occur in physical environments that shape development and set a tone for learning in ways that are not always obvious. In fact, I began to realize that the environment is a powerful tool that can be used to teach children, to promote social development and to help children feel comfortable, safe and happy.

I was also introduced to the idea that the quality of the early childhood environment could actually be measured. Through this I first learned about the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (ECERS). My behavioral training had taught me that measurement was central to any teaching, but it had focused mostly on ways to count what children did. The idea of using a rating scale to measure quality didn't fit with what I had been taught, but the usefulness of this approach became quickly apparent. Sure, you could go in and count the number of toys in

the room or measure square feet per child. But this kind of measurement misses much of what is important about environments for children. A rating scale, one that provides clear guidelines for differing levels of quality, in the hands of a trained and knowledgeable observer could capture quality in a way that mere counting could not.

I began to think about preschool environments for children with disabilities, the environments in which I had taught, had supervised student teachers and conducted research. As I reflected on those environments and listened to what Thelma and Dick were saying, I realized that much of it was foreign to early childhood special educators. This was at a time when most children with disabilities were in self-contained programs with other children with disabilities, separated from the normal “mainstream” programs for other young children. Together we planned and implemented a study that became one of my first databased publications. We used the ECERS to rate the quality of 25 programs for preschoolers with disabilities and compared those ratings with 56 classrooms for typically developing children in Missouri and North Carolina. The study confirmed our hypothesis. We found that preschool environments for young children with disabilities consistently received lower ratings of quality than did environments for typically developing children. In fact, often they were barren and sterile places that limited opportunities for learning and certainly did not help children feel safe, secure, or happy. This study helped us and the early childhood special education field realize that high-quality environments are important for all children. Since then, much work has occurred to assure that environments for children with disabilities are developmentally appropriate.

My story could be told over and over again by other researchers, policymakers and practitioners around the world, for whom the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* and the ideas behind its development have shaped their thinking about quality and its meaning for children. The ECERS and the other scales that evolved from it now form the basis for many research studies as well as for program improvement initiatives. These studies have consistently documented the range of quality of care in the US and elsewhere, often showing that quality of care for young children is inadequate. Other studies have provided clear evidence that quality matters in the learning and social outcomes for children. Collectively, the scales have had a profound impact on how we think about care for young children.

This issue of *Early Developments* is devoted to the scales and to its authors. Through stories and interviews, you will learn how the scales were developed and see a few of the many examples of their influence. One lesson from this work, which now spans more than 20 years, is that a good tool can facilitate the work of many people, and its use can extend well beyond the place where it was first developed. And how about this for a slogan: **Quality counts, so count quality!** | [ed](#) |

The ECERS and the other scales that evolved from it now form the basis for many research studies as well as for program improvement initiatives.

a place for eliot

Ryann Donnelly



CHOOSING A CHILD CARE CENTER is one of the most important decisions parents make for their young children. Not only is the child's immediate well-being at stake, studies have shown that the quality of care children receive in a prekindergarten setting affects their outcomes in kindergarten and beyond. Too often, however, parents select child care centers based largely on matters of convenience (closeness to home or work, accommodating hours), appearance or the recommendations of friends.

Over the past 25 years, FPG has developed a series of rating scales that provide a detailed assessment of the child care environment, including such factors as space and furnishings, personal care routines, language/reasoning activities and staff training and competency. Four states, including North Carolina, use these scales as the base for a rating system of licensed child care centers. North Carolina uses a star system, granting one to five stars based on the level of quality. A look at one family's experience provides an example for how the rating system can facilitate the informed choice of a child care center.

Alison and Andy Duncan found in June 2001 that they would be having a baby. Typical of many young couples, they lead busy lives: Andy is a graduate student at Duke University and Alison is a graphic designer. Although they intended to start seeking out child care options during the summer, fall rolled around and they still had not visited centers.

Fortunately, Duke University maintained a web site that listed child care options in the area, including their rating according to North Carolina's five-star system. A connecting web site explained what the star ratings meant.

"We used the star system primarily as a means for deciding which centers to visit," Alison says. "It helped us rule out many centers, because we made the unspoken decision to try to stick with centers of four stars or more."

Andy and Alison contacted approximately eight child care centers by phone, and with the advice of friends with young children in child care, they narrowed their selection down to four. The couple visited each center, focusing on the infant rooms (they planned to put their son in child care at three months of age), but also visiting the toddler and preschool rooms.

"For older rooms, we mainly looked for structured activities, attentiveness of the teachers/caregivers and the comfort and complacency of the children," Alison says. "Our attention to the infant rooms was much greater. I considered, 'Does the room look and feel comfortable? What are the caregivers' attitudes? How do they interact with the children? What is their experience? Are they not only experienced with baby care, but are they *nice people*? Are they OK with unannounced parent visits? Is the room clean? What steps do they take to prevent the passing of germs? Is the sleeping area safe and within sight of the teachers? Are the children safe and comfortable? What is the teacher-to-child ratio?'"

The Duncan's were most impressed with the one five-star center they visited, but that center did not have any open spaces. They chose a four-star center and have been happy with their decision.

"We found that the rating system matched up pretty well with what we observed in our site visits," Andy says.

"The center we chose has definitely stood up to its four-star rating. Eliot has been very happy there."

Based on their experience, the Duncans strongly endorse the use of a rating system to help parents narrow down their search of child care options. Beyond that, they have several recommendations.

"Visit centers that you are interested in several times and at different times of day," Alison says. "The first time we visited our child care center, it was early morning, and the children had just arrived. They hadn't really had a chance to begin playing yet, so we didn't see the child-to-child interaction and activities we wanted to see. The merits of this center brought us back for a second look, and this time we visited later in the day. What a difference! The older babies were playing with each other, toys were spread out, and some children were in a circle with the teacher."

"Second and third visits give you the opportunity to catch details you missed on your first trip," Alison adds. "When you've narrowed down your choices, you can really fine tune what you're looking for."

Rating systems for child care centers are a new phenomenon in this country. While the public sees only the end product of the rating process, reflected in such tools as North Carolina's five-star rating, the scales used to rate classrooms are the result of an impressive amount of research and development. In this issue we trace the history and development of the FPG rating scales and feature some of the ways information about program quality is being used today. [led](#)

A Whole New



Yardstick

Though they were initially designed to allow teachers, administrators and supervisors to better assess the quality of child care centers, ECERS (*Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale*) and its companion scales have become valuable tools for research in the field of early childhood care and education. ECERS has been used in at least half-a-dozen major studies here and abroad, as well as numerous small studies. Indeed, ECERS provides researchers with a means of measuring quality that didn't exist before their creation.

Developing the Scales

Researchers have confidence in ECERS as an assessment tool in large part because the scale itself was developed and continues to be refined through a combination of solid research and direct work with practitioners in the field. The first version of the scale was developed in the mid-1970s by FPG investigators Thelma Harms and Dick Clifford. The scale was based on a checklist of items for improving the quality of environments in early childhood classrooms that Harms had compiled during her nearly 20 years of teaching and observation (see *A Giant in Her Field*, page 12).

Recognizing the need for more systematic and reliable ways of assessing program quality, Harms and Clifford developed a series of items based on Harms' earlier checklist focusing more comprehensively on quality issues. They then asked a group of county child care coordinators from across North Carolina to test the items in actual child care settings. With the coordinators' feedback, the FPG researchers made additions and modifications to the various items. Harms and Clifford then sent this modified list to a number of nationally recognized early childhood experts, asking them to review it for relevance and

importance. The scale was finalized and published as a field-test edition by FPG in 1978.

Two years of field testing followed, documenting the ability of trained observers to use the instrument reliably in typical early childhood settings. Harms and Clifford trained a team of students to use the scale and sent them out to assess a selected group of early childhood centers in North Carolina. Pairs of observers conducted assessments and compared the results to check for degree of conformity. Six weeks later, the same centers were assessed again to determine the stability of the measure of the environment.

Finally, Clifford and Harms solicited a team of independent experts to visit 30 early childhood programs in North Carolina and rate them according to the general aspects addressed in the rating scale. FPG researchers then rated those programs with the actual scale. The experts' assessments compared well with the scale ratings of these programs. Satisfied with the reliability and validity of the measurement device, the authors published the first version of ECERS (Teachers College Press) in 1980.

ECERS divides the early childhood environment into seven areas or sub-scales: Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interaction, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff. Within these seven areas, specific items, such as availability of

books and pictures, are scored according to their adequacy.

Under each item, relevant indicators of quality (e.g., very few books accessible) are scored either yes or no. Assessors total their scores in each of these sub-scales to provide a numerical profile of the early childhood environment.

ECERS has been designed such that it captures an accurate picture of the total classroom environment. “We are often asked if people can’t ‘fake it’ when they know we are coming,” Clifford says. “The answer is ‘no.’ They might be able to fake it for the first 30–40 minutes, but the assessment takes 3–4 hours, during which time people inevitably resort to their normal way of doing things.”

Substantial revisions were made for the most current edition of ECERS, published in 1998 as ECERS-R with Debby Cryer as co-author. Separate versions of the scale designed specifically for infant-toddler settings (ITERS), family child care (FDCRS), and school-aged programs (SACERS) have been developed to provide similar means of assessing a wide variety of settings for young children. ITERS was co-authored with Debby Cryer, and SACERS with Ellen Vineberg Jacobs and Donna Romano.

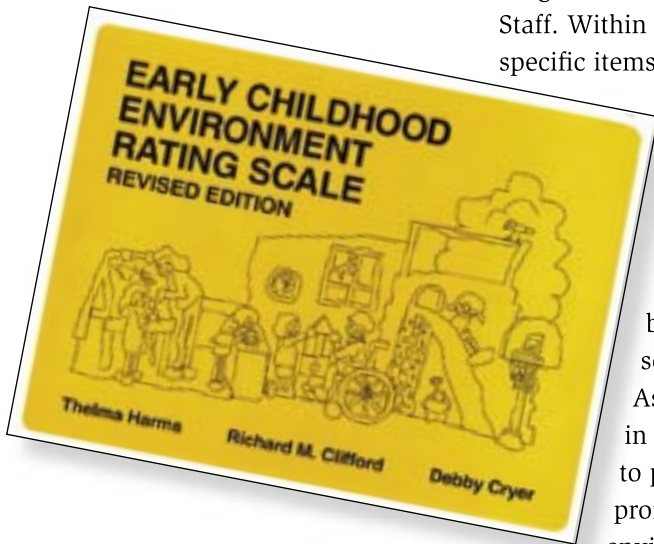
Research with the Scales

Because ECERS has been so thoroughly researched and field tested, professionals feel confident using it as an assessment tool for all manner of research. In 1993, FPG researchers used ECERS to rate the quality of child care centers in four states as part of the Cost-Quality-Outcomes Study. This study was conducted with colleagues at the University of Colorado at Denver, University of California at Los Angeles and Yale University. The study examined over 400 randomly selected early childhood centers in four states chosen to represent the diversity of child care provisions in the nation.

“This study raised big questions about the quality of child care in the US, especially for children under age three,” Clifford says.

“Nearly 40 percent of the infant-toddler classrooms we studied were of poor quality, potentially compromising children’s basic health and safety. Only 8 percent were good quality, what we would consider to be providing developmentally appropriate practices. While the quality was higher for preschoolers, it was not what we felt was needed for America’s youngest citizens. That study was reported in almost every major newspaper in the US and is still the most quoted study about child care in America.”

That study has spurred action on a variety of fronts. Many states have used the results to argue for more stringent regulation of early childhood programs. New approaches to licensing with differentiations based on ratings of quality have been developed because the tools existed to make such distinctions. Additional funding has been made available to help support the higher quality desired.



In 2003, FPG released the results of a long-term evaluation of the Smart Start Initiative in North Carolina. Smart Start is a highly acclaimed program aimed at making high quality early childhood services available to all children who need it. The newly released study shows that early childhood programs that are actively involved in Smart Start had higher quality than other programs, and that the programs with higher quality had a positive impact on children's performance.

"The fact that they were able to demonstrate this change is huge," Clifford says. "It clearly demonstrates that if a state is willing to invest in raising quality on a large scale basis, it can indeed make significant improvements across the board."

Ongoing research at FPG using the scales includes a Continuity of Care study, which is following the progress of very young children who have the same teacher for three years versus those who move to different teachers at least once a year.

Clifford is the first to admit that ECERS is not the perfect assessment tool. "Research has not identified specific factors about the child care environment that are more important than others," he says. "The factors are all intertwined, and it's extremely difficult to tease out the effects of any one over another."

Still, Clifford takes satisfaction in helping to produce a measurement device that simply did not exist beforehand. "Looking at the progress of society over time, the invention of

new ways of measuring things has been hugely important," he says. "In its own little way, ECERS has contributed by giving people who run child care and other early childhood programs a new tool to use in their work, a way to think differently about what they do." | **ed** |

To learn more

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A Giant in Her Field



Don Trull

WHEN THELMA HARMS ENGAGES YOU IN CONVERSATION, the room comes alive. She exudes enthusiasm, voice breathless, eyes bright. When you speak, you get the feeling that she is paying close attention. Indeed, Harms has made a career of being a keen observer both of people and environments. Semi-retired from FPG after 45 years of professional involvement in early childhood education, Harms has as many projects and commitments as ever.

Harms is known around the world for many accomplishments, but the one that stands out above all else is her lead authorship of the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (ECERS), and its companion rating scales for infants and toddlers (ITERS), family day care (FDCERS), and school-age care (SACERS) environments. Employed as evaluative, research and training tools in every state in the Union and many foreign countries, these scales are changing the face of child care. They may not be the last word in defining quality, but they speak so loudly as to overshadow virtually every other tool.

The evolution of the scales and of Harms' career in early childhood goes back to her days as a young mother raising two sons and a daughter in Berkeley, CA. Harms decided to take a hiatus from her job teaching English and German literature to stay home with her children. The delight she took in watching her children grow steered her in a new direction.

"Every child in the neighborhood played at our house," Harms says. "Eventually, a neighbor asked me to take care of her two young school-aged sons. In effect, I became a family child care provider and found that I really liked it. When I went back to school, I wanted to do something that brought together my interests in psychology, teaching and children. I decided to pursue a master's degree in Child Development at UC-Berkeley."

As it happened, Harms landed in the mecca of early childhood research. The University of California at Berkeley is home to the Harold E. Jones Child Study Center, a multi-disciplinary research center with a preschool program similar in nature to FPG's. While pursuing a master's degree, Harms taught at the Berkeley Public Schools Parent Cooperative. There she was exposed to parents and children of all different racial and ethnic groups. She later became head teacher at the Jones Center while pursuing a doctorate.

"I had 15 years of being questioned, challenged and prodded by bright, eager grad students from various disciplines who wanted to learn the best way to educate young children," Harms says. "I realized my point of view was extremely eclectic. It combined intellectual and social development with freedom to experiment and create."

In 1975, Harms was offered a position at FPG as Director of Curriculum Development, then a new initiative at the center. Harms and FPG researcher Richard M. Clifford decided to take the best of what was known through research and writing in the field and turn this into practical materials that could be used to improve the quality of care.

"I was always interested in developing materials to be used in early childhood education," Harms says. "At FPG, I was given free reign to see what was needed in the field. Jim Gallagher encouraged me to visit other programs in the US practicing different approaches to curriculum development."

During her first year at FPG, Harms traveled to community colleges all over North Carolina, explaining what she and others had learned about quality environments through both research and teaching. At one of her training sessions, a county child care coordinator told Harms she needed to provide some kind of written material that listed what should be done to improve quality at child care centers. Harms had a good idea of what to draw upon.

"While teaching at Berkeley, I was very much interested in assessment," Harms says. "At the end of each day, I and my graduate students would evaluate what we had seen, asking how different areas of the room and different materials were employed. I had developed and published a checklist of what I considered important for a quality learning environment. This proved to be the foundation of ECERS."

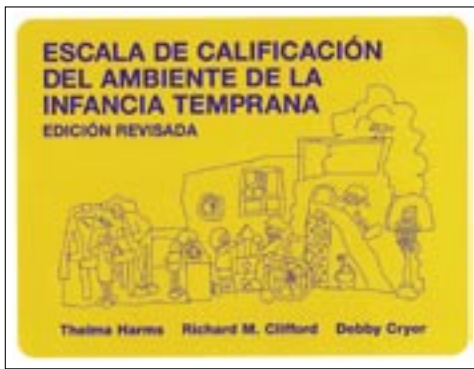
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—Thelma Harms

photo courtesy of Thelma Harms



Harms came to UNC in 1975 as Director of Curriculum Development at FPG.



Since the release of ECERS, Harms has ridden a whirlwind of publishing, training and research and development projects related to the rating scales.

From 1987 through 1990, Harms helped write and produce a 10-part Public Broadcasting television series called “Raising America’s Children.” Funded by the Smith-Richardson Foundation, the Xerox Corporation and the Janirve Foundation, in cooperation with the North Carolina Center for Public Television, this series was widely shown throughout the US and overseas. Other notable publications include the seven-volume *Active Learning Series* with lead author

Debby Cryer, which have been widely used as a curriculum for infants through kindergarteners.

Harms has been a panelist or keynote speaker at more than 200 state, national and international conferences on child care. She has led more than 100 training sessions on the use of the rating scales, both here and abroad. She has served as a consultant to non-profit organizations, states, colleges, the military services and international ministries of health.

The success of Harms’ work overseas testifies both to her interest in and ability to work with people of different nationalities and to the widespread applicability of the rating scales. The scales have been translated into many languages,

including Spanish, Swedish, Italian, French Canadian, Norwegian, Icelandic, Hungarian and Russian. In the mid-1980s, Harms and Clifford traveled to Germany to provide guest seminars on the use of the rating scales. Fluent in German, Harms later helped field test the translation of ECERS into that language. She visited German centers with child care professionals and helped them adapt the scale to a German context.

Today, ECERS-R is widely used in Germany, as are ITERS, FDCRS and SACERS. Professionals say Harms’ influence is affecting the way child care is viewed throughout the country. “There is now an increasing belief that quality in child care can be measured and enhanced in a planned way,” says Wolfgang Tietze, professor at the Institut für Kleinkindpädagogik in Berlin. “The starting point for quality assessment was inspired by Thelma’s work.”



Key Dates in Harms’ Career

1959

Named head teacher at Harold E. Jones Child Study Center at the University of California at Berkeley

1962

Instructor in Early Childhood Education, UC-Berkeley Extension Division

1975

Received PhD in Early Childhood Education from UC-Berkeley

Hired as Director of Curriculum Development at the FPG Child Development Center



1980

Publication of **ECERS** (with Richard M. Clifford)

1988–1996

Publication of **Active Learning Series**, curriculum for infants through kindergarteners (with Debby Cryer)



1989

Publication of **FDCERS** (with Richard M. Clifford)

Cathy Sylva, professor at the University of Oxford, sees similar effects in England from Harms' work. "Thelma has made a substantial contribution to research in the United Kingdom on early childhood education and care," Sylva says. "Many of us have used ECERS for studying quality across a range of British settings. She has shared her experiences with us from countries around the world and asked us the kinds of searching questions that have enabled us to improve our own work."

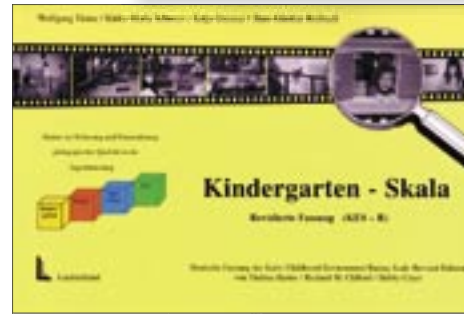
Most recently, Harms has served as Co-Principal Investigator with FPG's Lynette Aytch of the Quality Care for Children Initiative (QCCI) in Washington, DC. Funded by the District of Columbia Office of Early Childhood Education, QCCI is training a team of local professionals to provide on-site consultation and technical assistance to child care providers throughout the District, using rating scale assessments as a basis for program improvement. Now in its third phase, the initiative has led to an explosion of national accreditation of child care centers in DC, from only 7 in 2000 to 63 in 2003.

Barbara Ferguson Kamara is Executive Director of the Office of Early Childhood Development and Harms' lifelong friend and colleague. Kamara is especially complimentary about Harms' ability to convince people from different racial and socio/economic backgrounds of the value of the rating scales.

"Thelma came into communities of color without fear," Kamara says. "If she faced criticism, she'd say, 'Let's sit down and talk about it.'"

"Thelma has been a giant in the field in terms of giving people *a way* to assess how they're doing in creating learning environments for young people," Kamara says. "She has never strayed from that path."

Don Bailey echoes Kamara's thoughts. "Thelma is one of those rare individuals who truly has made a difference in the lives of literally thousands of children, families and professionals," Bailey says. "Her work has always been driven by a single goal—to assure a high quality early childhood experience for every child. The scales that she and her colleagues have developed are recognized around the world for their importance, and their impact on research and services will continue to be felt for years to come." |ed|



1990
Release of public television series "Raising America's Children" (with Debby Cryer)

Publication of **ITERS** (with Debby Cryer & Richard M. Clifford)

1996
Publication of **SACERS** (with Ellen Jacobs & Donna White)

1998
Publication of **ECERS-R** (with Richard M. Clifford & Debby Cryer)

1999
Principal Investigator, Quality Care for Children Initiative

2002
Publication of Spanish translation of **ECERS-R**

2003
Publication of **ITERS-R** (with Debby Cryer & Richard M. Clifford)



A Star Performer

A LONG WITH THEIR APPLICATIONS for research and training, FPG's environment rating scales (ECERS, ITERS, FDCRS and SACERS) are being used widely to support the improvements of quality in early care and education across the country.

In 1997, North Carolina passed legislation requiring all early care and education teachers including family child care homes as well as centers, to be licensed by the state. To encourage higher quality and to help the public differentiate between providers of varying quality, the state decided in 1999 to offer a Five-Star Rating System. This system is based on the environment rating scales and other quality criteria, such as ensuring higher levels of teacher education and fewer children per teacher. Centers that meet the minimum state requirements are given a one-star rating. Applying for more than a one-star rating is not required; however, doing so can give programs a competitive advantage over other centers. For example, high star ratings can enable centers to receive higher subsidies for providing early care and education to children from economically disadvantaged families.

Centers applying for higher numbers of stars are visited by assessors from the North Carolina Rated License Project, funded by the NC Division of Child Development and coordinated by The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Using the rating scales, assessors conduct an extensive evaluation of what children experience in the classrooms. These assessors were initially trained in the use of the rating scales by FPG staff, who conduct regular follow-up checks to verify the assessors' reliability.

"It's very important to us and to the state that the assessors continue to do their work in a reliable way," says Cathy Riley, trainer in the Rated License Project. "We want to avoid the situation where one assessor awards a certain number of points and another gives a widely different score. Our follow-up checks help take the subjectivity out of the process and ensure a degree of fairness and uniformity."

Janice Fain is program manager with the NC Division of Child Development. Asked why the state chose FPG's scales to back up its rating system, Fain says, "They [the scales] are nationally recognized and based on solid research."

Fain says the star system has served as a motivation for centers across the state to improve their services. "We've seen a big increase in three- to five-star programs in the

years we've been running the program," she says. "These centers chose to upgrade in order to get those stars."

Parents clearly benefit from having a rating system as a guide (see page 6), and for reasons other than one might predict. Debby Cryer, FPG investigator and coauthor of the rating scales, has found that parents almost always significantly overestimate the quality of their child's day care. As part of the Cost-Quality-Outcomes Study conducted in 1993, thousands of parents were asked to assess the quality of their children's early childhood settings, considering the same aspects of care that are evaluated in the environment rating scales. Trained assessors then compared the parents' findings to an assessment using the scales. Researchers found that parents tended to rate the quality of services far higher than the assessors did using the rating scales.

"Part of the reason for this discrepancy is that parents naturally want to believe that they are providing their children with the best care," Cryer says.

"But parents aren't there to see what goes on during the course of the day. Further, parents may not understand what is needed to maintain a high-quality group care environment. For example, a parent may not wash their hands after changing their own baby's diaper at home. That's not as big of a problem when you're dealing with just one child. But if child care providers fail to wash their hands after changing diapers, they can quickly spread disease into many families and the greater community."

"The effects of child care are largely imperceptible to parents," Cryer says. "That's why the stars system was developed."

Three other states, Oklahoma, Kentucky and Tennessee, now have rated licenses based on the scales. Arkansas is using the scales as a basis for granting special recognition to high-quality early care and education centers, and the cities of Las Vegas and Salt Lake are pressing for regulations using the scales as the basis for evaluating quality. The scales are performing a starring role in promoting better early childhood environments for young children across the country. |ed|

Don Trull



Debby Cryer, during her tenure as Director of the FPG Family & Child Care Program.

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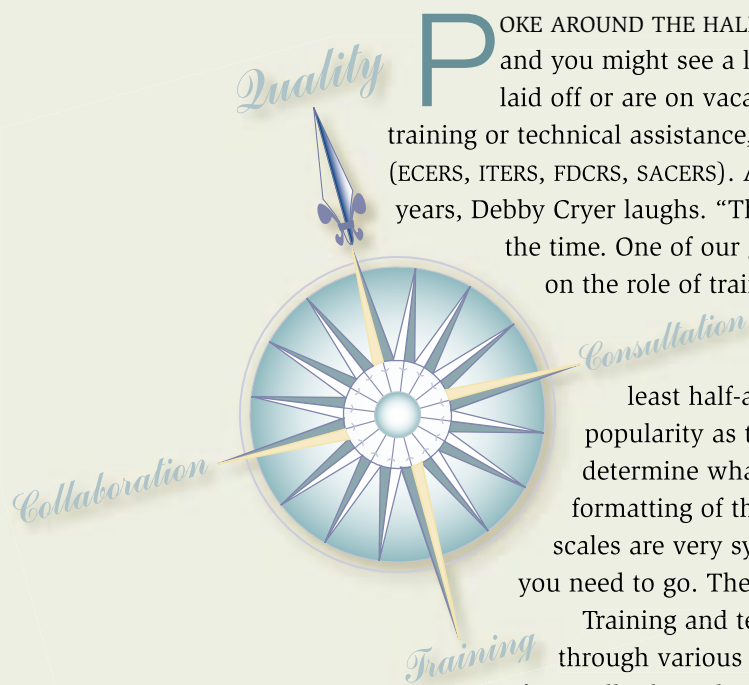
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ROADMAPS to QUALITY



PROKE AROUND THE HALLS OF THE FPG CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE these days and you might see a lot of empty offices. This is not because staff have been laid off or are on vacation. More than likely, they are out doing some kind of training or technical assistance, often related to the use of the environment rating scales (ECERS, ITERS, FDCRS, SACERS). Asked how many people FPG has trained in the last 20 years, Debby Cryer laughs. “Thousands,” she says, “and the demand keeps growing all the time. One of our goals for the coming year is to train other people to take on the role of trainers. It’s more than we can keep up with.”

Currently, FPG’s rating scales are being used for training and technical assistance in every state and at least half-a-dozen countries. Cryer cites two reasons for the scales’ popularity as training tools. “First, research has validated their ability to determine what helps children do well in school,” she says. “Second, the formatting of the scales shows how to improve quality for each item. The scales are very systematic about showing you where you are and where you need to go. They provide a roadmap for change.”

Training and technical assistance using the scales is currently provided through various programs at FPG. Each year, FPG offers short courses (generally three days) and a weeklong institute that provide a basic introduction in the use of the scales. These are held approximately four times a year and offered to early childhood center directors, state licensing officials, researchers and others.

“At first, most of the people who came were from North Carolina,” Cryer says. “Now, they are from all over the country and abroad. We’ve got a long list of people waiting to attend.”

Training to encourage accurate use of the scales is just the beginning of moving towards quality improvement. Once people know how to administer the scales accurately, they can employ the scales to pinpoint exactly where classroom improvements are most needed and focus technical assistance specifically on those areas.

“The scales take much of the guesswork out of targeting technical assistance, and allow people to make the changes most needed to impact the positive development of children,” Cryer says.

To make the necessary improvements, a systematic approach is required to guide staff in their quality enhancement efforts. FPG’s Partnership for Inclusion (PFI) exemplifies one technical assistance model employing the rating scales. Through grants provided by the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the NC Department of Public Instruction, PFI offers early childhood teachers free consultations on how to upgrade their programs and then works with them to achieve those goals. PFI focuses most of their attention, however, on preparing early childhood professionals

as consultants themselves. Through the project's sessions, trainees learn an intensive mode of on-site collaborative consultation that has been proven time and again to increase program quality.

At the request of an early childhood teacher, PFI-trained consultants conduct an assessment of the classroom using the rating scales. At the same time, teachers and other classroom staff, often trained by these consultants, assess the classroom using their own copies of the rating scales. The consultants and consultees compare their findings, and reach a consensus on the areas needing change. Over the next 6 to 10 months, the consultant makes repeated visits to the center to help in whatever way desired, such as rearranging the classroom, providing additional training, or referring the consultee to relevant resources.

"We've come to realize that if you want sustained and meaningful change in early childhood environments, you've got to involve the consultee in calling the shots," says Pat Wesley, director of PFI. "The rating scales are used as a springboard for change, but the emphasis is on collaboration."

To date, PFI has trained more than 900 consultants in this on-site model and has worked with at least that many early childhood teachers.

A similar collaborative approach is employed in the Quality Care for Children Initiative (QCCI), sponsored by FPG, the District of Columbia's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) and the University of the District of Columbia. Washington, DC has a large population of children considered at-risk for school failure, many of whom live in non-English speaking households. Faced with

these challenges, the sponsors have launched QCCI with the goal of building the capacity within the District to improve and sustain quality care and education services.

"Our main strategy to achieve this goal is to train a group of local early care and education professionals—the QCCI Leadership Corps," says Barbara Ferguson Kamara, director of OECD. "Using the rating scales as the foundation for assessment, these professionals provide on-site consultation and technical assistance to child care providers to improve the quality of care and education environments throughout the District."

Each person in the Leadership Corps is assigned one center to contact each week with the goal of developing a close partnership and identifying areas for improvement. Using the *Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale* (ITERS), these consultants conduct an assessment of a classroom and then work with the center to make improvements over time. Now in its third phase, QCCI has 19 trained consultants working with 20 early childhood centers in the District.

"The beauty of this program is that it's a true partnership rather than a hierarchy," says Lynette Aytch, Co-Principal Investigator with Thelma Harms. "The Corp members themselves have their own centers rated by other consultants, so it is a mutual learning process."

In North Carolina, The Duke Endowment funds a project that uses the scales as a major building block to improve the quality of child care. The project is establishing high quality early childhood programs in a select group of centers, which are designed to serve as models for the rest of the state. Cryer is heading a FPG project that provides technical

assistance to these model centers, so they can reach and maintain the required high level of quality. The rating scales serve as the roadmap, showing staff where improvement is needed and what steps need to be taken to get there. Once the model centers are up to speed, the staff then offer similar technical assistance to other programs in the area to meet the higher quality standards.

"People in the model centers learn the key ingredients to quality early care and education, but that is not the end of the effort," Cryer says. "They pass their knowledge on to other child care practitioners, creating a multiplier effect." | [jed](#) |

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Meets with State Representatives

THE PICTURE OF HOW PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS (state-funded educational programs for children prior to kindergarten entry) are faring among states that have invested significant resources in those initiatives came into sharper focus when state representatives met in Chapel Hill, NC, April 28 and 29, 2003. The meeting was sponsored by the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) as part of its groundbreaking multi-state study on prekindergarten. The study's findings are eagerly awaited by states as they consider how much to invest and how best to invest in prekindergarten programs to improve children's educational outcomes.

Under the collaborative leadership of researchers from FPG, the University of California at Los Angeles and the University of Virginia, the multi-state study has been gathering data from 40 classrooms across 6 states—California, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, New York and Ohio. The data includes detailed information about instructional practices, student performance in both prekindergarten and kindergarten and students' home life with respect to socio-economic status, family educational practices and beliefs, and the nature and quality of home-school relationships. The study is the first to examine in detail the interrelationship among classroom

settings, family settings and student performance from prekindergarten to kindergarten.

An important part of NCEDL's study design includes on-going dissemination of information among the participating states, as well as feedback from those states on further interpretation and refinement of the data. With the first year of data gathering complete, the April meeting provided a forum for the release of preliminary findings. Representatives of nine states attended the meeting, 6 of those from participating states and 3 from a larger group of 10 states that serve as an advisory group.

The meeting included presentations of preliminary data on teacher and child characteristics, classroom quality, classroom practices, child outcomes and family data. Discussion sessions were held on subtleties in the data and how those should be interpreted. For example, the study gathered data on whether or not child care instructors held

state teaching credentials (asked as a "yes/no" question.) State officials pointed out that a "yes"

response could have different implications, as some states require coursework in early childhood education as a condition of receiving teaching credentials and others do not.

"This kind of thing will lead to a reanalysis or reinterpretation of the data, as need be," says Diane Early, assistant director of NCEDL. "This is the nature of data collection and analysis in a large, complex study."



The meeting also served as a forum for participants to talk informally about the particular challenges of implementing the study in their states. Sharon Hawley, administrator with the Childhood Development Division in the California Department of Education, serves as a liaison between state officials, child care program operators and data gatherers in the field.

“The real challenge has been to track kids from a pre-k to a kindergarten setting,” Hawley says. “After pre-k, these kids scatter out to all different schools. We had to get cooperation from the teachers and parents to follow these kids at each location. No state had a ready way to track these kids, so we had to improvise.”

Hawley compliments NCEDL project managers for their willingness and ability to work with each state to structure the study in a way that will help them provide the most valuable information and to accommodate the needs and desires of state and local officials.

“I’ve really appreciated the contact that NCEDL has maintained throughout the process,” Hawley says. “They’ve helped us do things like write letters to the school districts explaining what the



Don Trull

The real challenge has been to track kids from a pre-k to a kindergarten setting.

—Sharon Hawley

study is about and the importance of being able to follow these kids.”

Bob Pianta, William Clay Parrish Professor at the University of Virginia, serves as one of the Principal Investigator for the study. He has been impressed with how well the regional coordinators have worked together and how smoothly the data collection has gone.

“As researchers, we didn’t know whether this type of data collection was really possible,” Pianta says. “Here we are in Virginia trying to coordinate data collection in Ohio and New York. It’s actually worked quite well, thanks in large part to information technology. We get daily emails from our data collectors, so we can keep abreast of their work.”

“In a lot of ways, this study has been a model for how you can do larger scale research across universities and have a high quality of data,” Pianta says.

At this point, NCEDL has finished its kindergarten data collection and is preparing first grade teacher questionnaires to track children’s progress. NCEDL will be submitting

findings to peer-reviewed journals, where colleagues in the field will have a chance to examine them. |ed|

To Learn More

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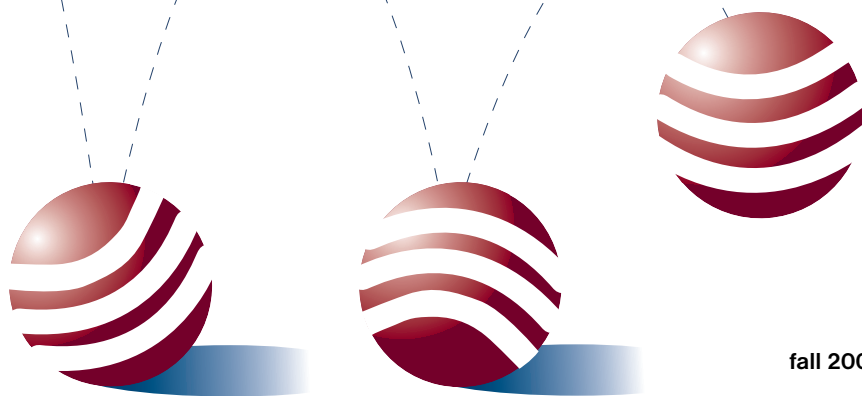
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