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Development  
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The University of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill

# early developments

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UNC

FPG CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

Interventions

# news



## Clifford Testifies on Capitol Hill

This past spring **Dr. Dick Clifford**, senior scientist at FPG, appeared before the U. S. House of Representatives at a hearing on Early Childhood Education: Improvement Through Integration. The hearing addressed the challenges of integrating Head Start with other programs that prepare disadvantaged children for the future.



## FPG Staffer Elected to National Board

**Betsy Ayankoya**, a technical assistance specialist at FPG's National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC), recently was elected to a four-year term as governor on the executive board of the Division for Early Childhood (DEC). The board governs the organization's policies and procedures. DEC is a subdivision of the Council for Exceptional Children.



## Award Goes to *Early Developments*

**Early Developments (Vol. 8, No. 3)**, which focused on Program Evaluation, recently received an Award of Excellence at the 45TH Annual Best in Print competition sponsored by the Printing Industries of Virginia. The award recognizes graphic arts and print quality.

## On the Cover...

Dr. Terry McCandies, FPG investigator, and a friend work on a *LiteracyGames* activity, one of the resources developed for the Partners for Literacy Project. See the article on page 14.

early developments

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Total design, production, and printing costs of this issue of *Early Developments* were \$12,376; 9,000 copies of this document were printed at a cost of \$9289.74 or 46¢ each.

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## About This Issue

# Intervention Studies Then and Now

by Dick Clifford



Dick Clifford is a senior scientist at FPG.

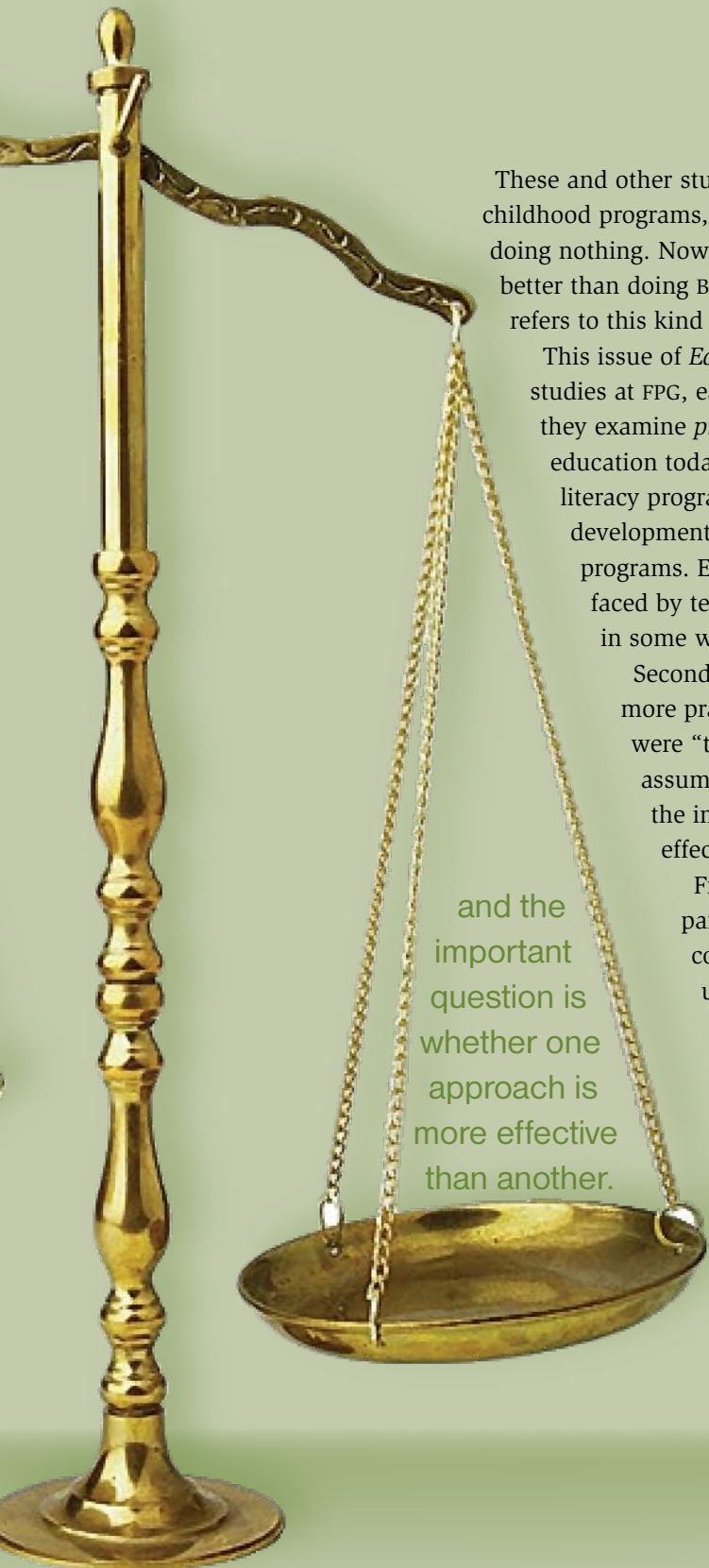
EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION PROGRAMS, schools, mental health agencies, and other human service programs are finding themselves under the microscope these days. Lots of different names have been used to justify this scrutiny—accountability, performance-based planning, results orientation, evidence-based practices—but the bottom line is the same. Policy makers are insisting on evidence showing whether public investment in programs for children has achieved its desired results. No longer will it be sufficient to show that programs are meeting established standards for practice or that families are satisfied with services. Data are needed to show that services are effective.

FPG has a long history of research on the efficacy of intervention programs. Almost everyone in early childhood education knows about the Abecedarian Study (1972–present). In the early 1970s, children from low-income families in the Chapel Hill, North Carolina, area participated in a comprehensive center-based intervention program, beginning at birth and continuing until school entry. FPG investigators are now completing the age 30 follow-up of these former participants. The data are not fully analyzed yet, but it is likely that the results will be consistent with those from earlier assessments showing that the intervention has had a significant and long-lasting impact on the children who participated.

Some years after the Abecedarian project, FPG investigators played a major role in another important intervention study—the Infant Health and Development Program (IHDP). Funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, this study (1985–1994) established the efficacy of early intervention for low birthweight and premature children.



... each FPG study involves a *comparison* of two or more practices....



These and other studies laid an important foundation for early childhood programs, showing that doing something was better than doing nothing. Now, we have a new challenge—showing that doing A is better than doing B. Michael Guralnick at the University of Washington refers to this kind of question as “second-generation research.”

This issue of *Early Developments* describes several important studies at FPG, each sharing a key set of characteristics. First, they examine *practices* that address key issues in early childhood education today: aggression in preschool classrooms; family literacy programs; inservice education and professional development for teachers; and consultation to early childhood programs. Each of these represents a large set of challenges faced by teachers and administrators that must be addressed in some way.

Second, each FPG study involves a *comparison* of two or more practices. Unlike the early studies, which essentially were “treatment-no treatment studies,” these projects all assume that some form of treatment will be provided, and the important question is whether one approach is more effective than another.

and the important question is whether one approach is more effective than another.

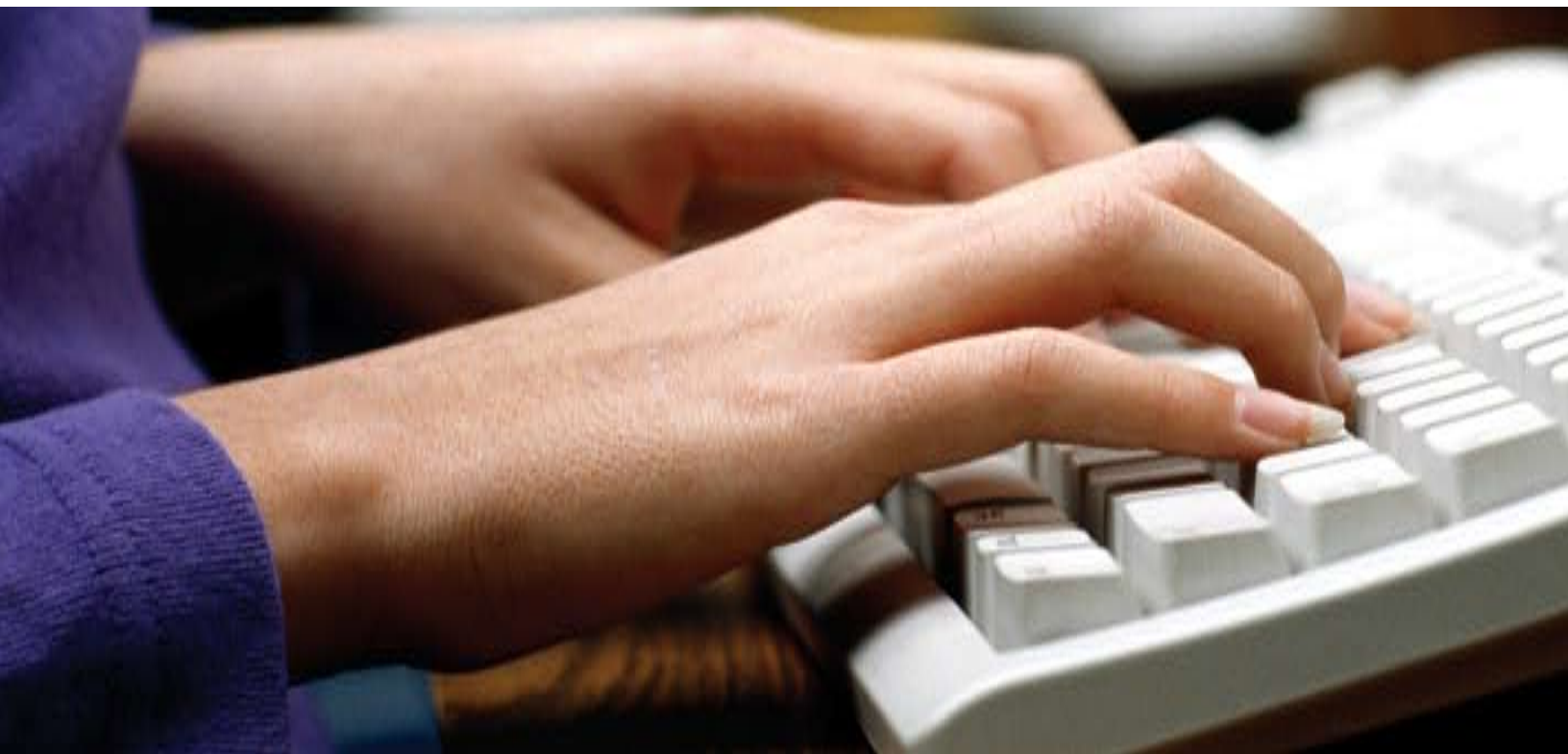
Finally, each study is *rigorous*, randomly assigning participants to different conditions, carefully controlling the treatments provided each group, and using the best and most comprehensive measures available to provide objective determination of the effectiveness of different practices.

Some folks are not happy with the increased focus on accountability, worrying that programs might lose funding or be changed in some fundamental way. Although some concern may be warranted, in reality, I think we all share the same goal—providing services for children and families that are both acceptable and effective. At FPG we believe we have a responsibility to conduct research to help ensure that this goal becomes a reality. |ed|

# Back to School at High Speed

**L**EARNING NEVER SEEMED SO CLOSE yet so far away to 59 early childhood teachers in 16 North Carolina communities. They are participating in Project IMPACT (Improving & Maximizing Professional Development Access & Consultation for Teachers). This two-part model integrates distance-learning courses available through the community colleges with weekly on-site consultations.

Developed by FPG in partnership with the North Carolina Division of Child Development, the North Carolina Community College System, and Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, IMPACT is funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences.



## IMPACT Meets a Critical Need

At least 70% of early childhood teachers in North Carolina do not have any kind of college degree. Receiving further education, whether from a community college or four-year college or university, is logistically difficult because they work most of the day and often care for their own children in the evening. Teachers in rural areas may face the disadvantage of being miles from college campuses. As a result, many young children in North Carolina are being educated by teachers who have only a high school degree.

Experts nationwide have reached a consensus that higher education for early childhood teachers benefits them and the children they serve. North Carolina recognizes this through a number of initiatives and programs. For example, More at Four (Governor Mike Easley's early childhood program for at-risk 4-year-olds) requires teachers with BA degrees. The state also rewards those who continue learning. Under the Division of Child Care Services' STAR rating system, child care centers receive a higher rating and a higher state subsidy if their teachers have more education.

Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Early Childhood Project, a state-sponsored program promoting professional development for teachers, links

At least  
70% of early  
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pursuit of education with job retention. It provides financial support for teachers to return to school and the incentive of a small salary increase. Participants must commit to staying in their job for a year to qualify for this incentive. The program has reduced turnover among teachers and increased the number holding degrees.

Despite these efforts, a growing student population—many located in rural communities—is unable to take traditional courses. As a distance-learning alternative, IMPACT allows students to take courses at home and on their own time.

## Why IMPACT Delivers Quality

North Carolina's community colleges are eager to improve their existing courses in early childhood and, in particular, to increase their ability to meet the enormous demand for early childhood education.

"IMPACT has been a lifesaver for us," says Kristi Snuggs, education consultant for the North Carolina Community College System. "We had 15,000 students enrolled in early childhood courses this year, and there is a potential for 15,000 more. Distance learning is the only way we can hope to meet this demand.

"We already have a virtual learning community [a central resource for online courses], but what IMPACT brings us is the quality component of online teaching," Snuggs adds. "IMPACT states what quality learning should look like and establishes best practices for engaging students through distance learning."

In developing the IMPACT curriculum, FPG, community college and university faculty, and state-level partners tapped into many sources. This includes the latest research on effective classroom practices in early literacy as well as social-emotional development and early childhood teacher competencies and standards. (North Carolina recently published *Foundations*, a set of early learning expectations for preschool children that helped guide the course content).

Sixteen weekly course modules for two 3-hour credit-bearing community college courses—Early Literacy and Child Guidance—are available online. Each module lists the course competencies that lead to specific childhood outcomes along with discussion questions



and assignments. Students proceed at their own pace (“learning in your bunny slippers”) and engage in a discussion board with fellow students and teachers. The community college faculty working with IMPACT instruct the course virtually, facilitate student learning, and provide grade assignments and feedback.

### **Consultants Make a Real-Life Difference**

FPG’s evaluation of the model, coordinated by Dr. Virginia Buysse, focuses on comparing the effectiveness of receiving distance education courses with the stronger intervention of receiving distance courses plus on-site consultation. Approximately half of 31 teachers recruited for an evaluation sample in 2004 were randomly assigned to receive distance courses plus on-site consultation. FPG hired and trained nine consultants to conduct weekly visits with this first group of teachers. “We actually go into the classroom to measure the effect of this training,” says

“When you think about your college teaching leading to concrete outcomes for children, it takes things to a different level.”

Buysse. The comparison group received only the distance courses.

FPG researchers assess children being taught by both groups of teachers at the beginning and end of the school year to measure growth in language and social skills. In addition, they observe the teachers’ classrooms before and after the professional development intervention to assess differences in classroom practices between the two groups.

“The consultants have been trained in a process model of consultation versus an expert model, meaning that they are open to the interests and needs of the teachers,” says Pam Winton, FPG co-director of IMPACT with Debra Torrence.

“Since the teachers have assignments each week that focus on applying what they are learning in their course to the children they teach and their classrooms, the teachers and consultants focus much of their time together on modeling and problem-solving around the

**Debra Dawson, an IMPACT consultant, meets with a teacher weekly to discuss how college assignments are applied practically in the classroom.**







**One-on-one consultations boost teacher confidence and motivation, providing learning techniques that complement classes.**

practical applications of course content. The consultants have been involved in developing the course curriculum, so the link between the consultation and the course content is very strong. This is a unique way to integrate preservice and inservice professional development, which too often are not connected.”

FPG employs treatment fidelity measures with faculty and consultants, monitoring intensity and focus to determine any variability of service.

Forsyth Technical Community College in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is one of three participating community college sites. Fourteen students, most from rural parts of southern and eastern North Carolina, completed the Early Literacy course online. Students were given written assignments about their teaching experiences, used new ideas and instructional strategies in their classrooms and with their students, and engaged in a discussion board.

“We worked closely on the development of this course with staff from FPG and professors from UNC-Greensboro and Meredith College, and I think it came out well,” says Ann Watts, program coordinator of Early Childhood Education at Forsyth Tech. “We probably need to add more video clips that provide examples of things we’re seeking our teachers to emulate—for example, how to read to a group of children.”

The supervisors of a teacher participating in IMPACT have high praise for the project and believe the on-site consultation component is particularly valuable.

“We want you to know of the miraculous change we have witnessed in Cathy since her participation in Project IMPACT,” says one supervisor. “She now comes to work smiling, appears happy in the classroom, is more positive in her interactions with not only the children but also families and staff. She is more relaxed and confident and is eager to go above and beyond her job requirements.

“We feel that the one-on-one consultations are the piece that made all the difference,” she adds. “In the past, [Cathy] has registered for classes but not completed them. In this instance,

**Being in the classroom affords the consultant opportunities to model for the teacher. Here Debra Dawson reads a story about counting and shows how to engage children.**

she actually looked forward to learning new techniques and having the ongoing support to ensure that she was correctly applying them in the classroom.”

### **Into the Second Year**

Despite positive teacher interest, IMPACT experienced challenges enrolling teachers. FPG planned to enroll 100 teachers by August 2004, with 50 being recruited for the evaluation component. However, enrollment and recruitment of teachers proved more difficult than anticipated. Some teachers struggled with the college enrollment process; others had difficulty accessing T.E.A.C.H. scholarship money. Some supervisors were not supportive of data collectors and consultants coming into the classroom.

The pluses of IMPACT outweigh the challenges. “One of the exciting aspects of the project has been the chance to focus professional development on classroom applications and child outcomes,” says Winton. “Traditionally we have evaluated professional development on the basis of student satisfaction and changes in student knowledge and skills as self-reported by students or practicum supervisors. Rarely have we looked beyond these outcomes.

“With IMPACT community college faculty are starting to think more about practical application,” Winton adds. “When you think about your college teaching leading to concrete outcomes for children, it takes things to a different level.”

Project IMPACT is now in its second year. FPG has collected preintervention data for both groups of students and currently is collecting postintervention data. “Our long-term hope is that these courses, and developed resources for early childhood students, such as the IBM donation of lap top computers, will become part of the learning for early childhood teachers across the state,” Torrence says. “This model could then be used to enhance other community college courses and build an early childhood distance learning infrastructure across the state.” |ed|



### **To Learn More**

#### **Early childhood teacher preparation in special education at 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education**

Chang, F., Early, D., & Winton, P. (2005). *Journal of Early Intervention*, 27(3), 110-124.

#### **Preparing the workforce: Early childhood teacher preparation at 2- and 4-year institutes of higher education**

Early, D. M., & Winton, P. (2001). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16(3), 285-306.

#### **Project IMPACT**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~impact/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~impact/)



# cool off preschool aggression

building bridges keeps conflict from heating up

**A**GGRESSION AMONG CHILDREN is traditionally associated with late elementary school or middle school. But now it's observed increasingly in children as young as 3 or 4 years old. FPG is researching an intervention strategy—Building Bridges—designed to reduce aggressive behavior in preschool classrooms, thanks to a grant from the National Institute of Child Health Development. Building Bridges focuses on developing a social and emotional curriculum that is combined with a preacademic curriculum to help students and teachers develop the necessary skills to understand and ward off aggressive behavior. The project builds on earlier FPG work targeting children enrolled in Head Start.

## Aggression Hurts the Whole Classroom

FPG senior scientist Dr. Donna Bryant and Dr. Janis Kupersmidt, principal investigator of the Building Bridges study, have studied the frequency of antisocial behaviors in 448 children in Head Start and community child care programs. These behaviors include hitting, pushing, pinching, threatening, playing mean tricks, and lying. Although most of the children exhibited such acts only occasionally, 10% displayed aggression an average of once a day or more.

“Preschool teachers say reducing aggression and helping children learn social skills are one of the biggest challenges they face,” Bryant says. “They say the presence of only one or two aggressive children can negatively impact the nature of the program for the whole class.”

The proportions of aggressive children were almost the same for children from low-income families and those from families who were better off. In other word, *all* teachers of preschoolers need knowledge and skills to address the needs of such children.

## Training and Tools for Teachers and Parents

The developers of Building Bridges are researching two intervention conditions—one involving teacher training workshops and the other involving workshops plus a consultant visiting the classroom weekly. Teachers receive a year of training

focused on children’s social and emotional development, behavior management skills, and strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills.

“We not only need to intervene with the child but also with the teacher to help children develop communication skills,” says Kupersmidt. “Communication difficulties often lead to frustration, which can lead to aggression. Literacy provides a means of dealing with aggression.”

FPG has adopted or developed a number of instructional materials for use in and out of the classroom. Teachers affiliated with Building Bridges use the Second Step curriculum, which includes 25 lessons introducing a social, emotional, or problem-solving skill. They then carry those lessons a step further.

“For example, we may deal with a situation where a child has been hurt,” Kupersmidt says. “We talk about how to assess the intent of someone’s hurtful action. We find a preschool book that amplifies this theme. We teach teachers a strategy called Dialogic Reading where they engage children in a dialogue around the book. We ask children if this kind of hurtful action ever happened to them and what they did about it.”

The Building Bridges team provides teachers with

a book each week to accompany prescribed activities. Clearly outlined with a preacademic and social-emotional goal, every activity is simple and fun. Teachers can conduct the activities throughout the day, even during transition periods (going from one room to the next) when aggression often occurs. During weekly visits to the classroom, the consultant will ask how the intervention has been going, answer questions, and suggest additional strategies.

FPG has also developed materials to help parents talk with their children about the lessons they are learning. For example, a child may come home wearing a sticker that reads “Angry feelings are normal. Ask me how I calm down when I am angry.” Parents also receive a newsletter that explains the social-emotional learning task and recommends activities they can do at home to support the learning.

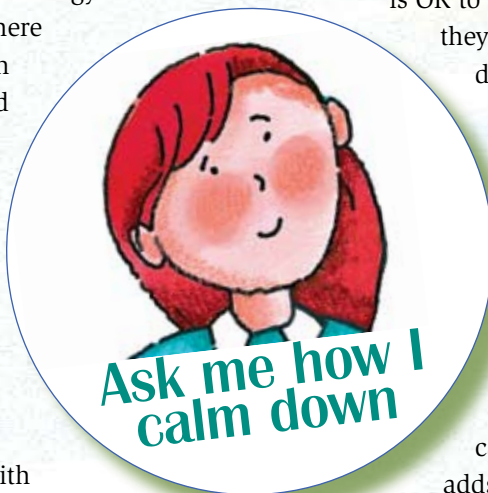
## The Power of Intervention

Preliminary reports suggest that the intervention can be highly effective. “This program has been wonderful,” says Amanda Moore, director of Child Time Children’s Center in Guilford County, who received Building Bridges training as a teacher and now trains her staff. “We had a lot of aggressive behavior to start. Now the kids know it

is OK to be angry or sad, but they have the tools to deal with it.

“I love the fact that the instructional materials use real photos of children acting out certain emotions as opposed to cartoons,” Moore adds. “Kids really enjoy

*“Preschool teachers say reducing aggression and helping children learn social skills are one of the biggest challenges they face.”*



using the puppets to express how someone is feeling. There's even a song kids can sing to cool down someone who is angry. I would recommend Building Bridges to any child care center."

Head Start and community child care centers in Guilford County, North Carolina, participated in Building Bridges in its first year. One-third of the centers were randomly assigned to the group attending the workshops only, one-third to the workshops plus consultation group, and one-third to a control group that continued their typical services. The initial first-year goal was to recruit 60 teachers, though the actual number is just under that. New programs will be recruited for two more years.

Evaluation of the program is ongoing. Students and teachers are assessed in the fall and spring. Researchers randomly sampled 360 children (180 in Head Start and 180 in community child care) whose teachers participated in the Building Bridges Project. They assessed kindergarten readiness, taking into account knowledge of emotion, preliteracy skills, writing skills, attention skills, speaking skills, knowledge of numbers and math, and general attitude toward school.

"We will follow these children to kindergarten and ask the teachers how well the children fared," Kupersmidt says.

Long after they have left Building Bridges, these children will have the promise of practicing positive communication for a lifetime—a skill that will serve them well in school, work, relationships, and one day their own families. |ed|



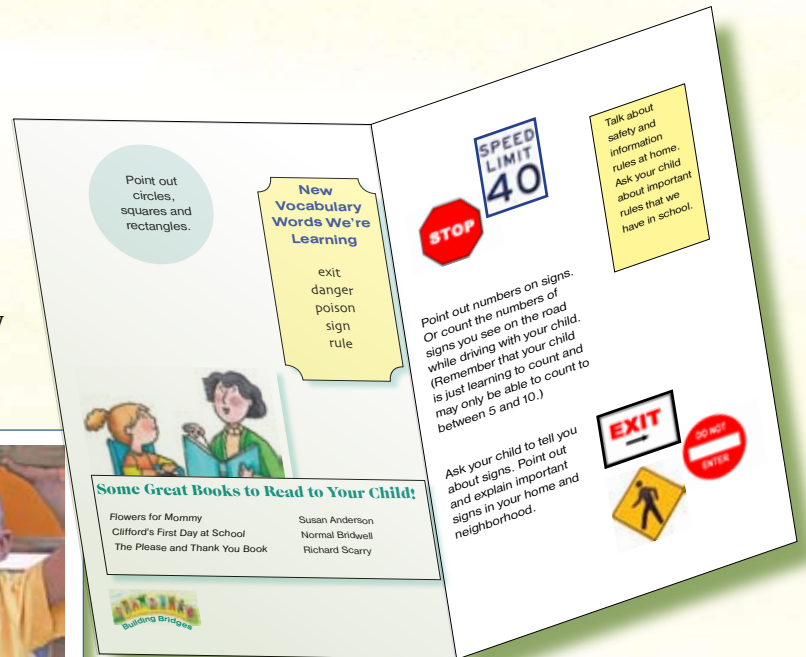
happy



angry



surprised



**Building Bridges trains teachers to help children develop communication skills that address aggression and hurt. The lessons also extend to home, where parents receive a newsletter recommending activities that support social-emotional learning. Also, children may come home with a sticker highlighting new skills to prompt discussion with parents.**

### To Learn More

**A review of interventions for preschoolers with aggressive and disruptive behavior.**

Bryant, D., Vizzard, L. H., Willoughby, M., & Kupersmidt, J. (1999). *Early Education and Development*, 10(1), 47-68.

**Prevalence of aggressive behaviors among preschoolers in Head Start and community child care programs.**

Kupersmidt, J.B., Bryant, D., & Willoughby, M. (2000). *Behavioral Disorders*, 26(1), 42-52.

**Overt and covert dimensions of antisocial behavior in early childhood.**

Willoughby, M., Kupersmidt, J., & Bryant, D. (2001). *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 29, 177-187.

**Head Start Quality Research Center on SocioEmotional Interventions**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/projects/project\\_detail.cfm?projectID=261](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/projects/project_detail.cfm?projectID=261)

A black and white photograph of a woman with short dark hair, wearing a light-colored top and a necklace, sitting and reading a book to a young child. The child is wearing a patterned dress and is looking at the book. The woman's hands are visible, holding the book open. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# Partners for Literacy

Parents work with teachers to  
foster family learning

**D**OES HIGH QUALITY, INTENSIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION make a difference? Does a strong parenting education component add significantly to child outcomes? Is there a connection between program fidelity and child outcomes?

The U. S. Department of Education is looking for answers to these questions through an Even Start Family Literacy Program called Classroom Literacy Interventions and Outcomes Study (CLIO). And FPG is participating. It has developed one of the two curricula—Partners for Literacy—for the study. It also trains Even Start staff in the curriculum and examines the extent to which programs can implement the curriculum as designed.

Authorized in 1988, Even Start endeavors to improve the academic achievement of young children and parents with low literacy skills and low incomes. Programs offer four components: early childhood education, parenting education, parent and child interactive literacy activities, and adult education (including literacy skills, job training, and English language training). Family literacy programs afford parents an opportunity to learn and practice new parenting skills in a supportive setting.

“When the Department of Education issued an RFP to compare high quality curricula for Even Start, we saw an opportunity to expand our work by making it appropriate for family literacy programs,” says Dr. Barbara Wasik, principal investigator of Partners for Literacy.

Partners for Literacy continues a long FPG history of researching early interventions for young children and their families, including the Abecedarian Study (1972–present), Project CARE (1978–present), and the Infant Health and Development Program (1985–1994).

### Cultivating Parent and Teacher Participation

Partners for Literacy employs distinct yet related games for both parents and teachers. *LearningGames*, FPG’s original curriculum developed for the

Abecedarian Study, is designed for use by teachers or parents with children ages 0–60 months. It is one of the most studied early intervention projects in the world, with results published in more than 100 academic journal articles and book chapters. Updated and redesigned for use with 3- and 4-year-old children, *LearningGames* is also available in Spanish. Partners for Literacy uses these games as part of the parenting education component.

*LiteracyGames*, a classroom version of *LearningGames*, has been specifically created for early childhood classes. It provides teachers with considerable information on how to engage children in these gamelike learning activities. *LiteracyGames* contains a set of 50 games for 3- and 4-year-olds, and each has three cycles that employ progressively more difficult content.

“... children need good interaction many hours of the day.”

The Partners for Literacy curriculum also has a very strong interactive book reading focus. “We have created a set of strategies that can be used by both parents and teachers to engage in instructional conversations with children when reading with them,” Wasik says.

Another key component of the curriculum involves “enriched caregiving.” In following this strategy, the adult, whether teacher or parent, uses everyday caregiving routines as opportunities to foster children’s language and literacy as well as social development.

“The importance for parent involvement, versus just a teacher, comes from the notion that when it comes to literacy, children need good interaction many hours of the day,” says Joseph Sparling, an FPG fellow. “What’s unique about this program is that it works with both parents and teachers. This curriculum gets parents excited by giving them a role and gives teachers new respect for the parents by putting them on the same page. Parents and teachers become partners with the child for literacy.”

**Partners for Literacy incorporates the curriculum *LiteracyGames*, which shows teachers how to involve children in gamelike learning.**





**Joe Sparling and Barbara Wasik lead week-long training sessions for teachers, parent educators, and administrators participating in Partners for Literacy. Training has included small groups in which participants exchanged knowledge and ideas from the Parents for Literacy curriculum in the first year and gained new skills for curriculum implementation in the second year.**



## Evaluation

Westat Research Corporation received the contract to conduct the CLIO study, to recruit participants, to collect child and parent data, and to evaluate the results of the study. To evaluate Partners for Literacy, Westat recruited 120 Even Start sites nationwide, which were randomly assigned to one of five treatment groups.

Partners for Literacy is implementing two treatments. One focuses on early childhood education, while the other integrates early childhood education, parenting education, and parent and child literacy interaction activities. More than 250 teachers, assistant teachers, site directors, parent educators, and home visitors are using the curriculum at 45 Partners for Literacy sites. Approximately 600 children in Even Start are enrolled at these sites. (A second developer is responsible for two groups, and the fifth group is a control.)

Five full-time FPG consultants visit the sites to offer assistance and to gauge the fidelity of the programs. Participating staff use six instruments to report regularly to the developers on curriculum implementation. For example, each teacher fills out a monthly *LiteracyGames* form, indicating how many games he or she has played with each child and evaluating the child's literacy skills.

The project has begun its second year of intervention. Staff from each site has received two curriculum training sessions. Advanced training took place in the summer of 2005.

As with many new programs, ease of adoption by sites has been mixed. "Some programs are having a great year; our intervention is appropriate and well received," Sparling says. "Other sites are having difficulty, especially those addressing language differences, difficulties in hiring qualified staff, and difficulties adhering to the Even Start Family

Literacy program expectations."

"We have many home languages represented by our families, including Hmong, Creole, Somali, Cantonese, and Russian. Over half our families are Spanish speaking" Wasik noted. "As a result, we have provided increased training to help staff implement the curriculum with English Language Learners and we have translated numerous materials into Spanish."

The program evaluation will likely reflect the varying capabilities of sites. Sparling says it will be important to identify those sites where the program was properly carried out and include that information in its evaluation.

"When you do an analysis, you need to look both at how the program did as a whole, and which programs were able to implement the program fully and which only partially," Sparling says. FPG is obtaining fidelity information on how well the curriculum is being implemented so that this information can be included in the outcome studies. **led**

## To Learn More

### **Integrating services for family literacy**

Harbin, G., Herrmann, S., Wasik, B., Dobbins, D., & Lam, W. (2004). In B. Wasik (Eds.), *Handbook of family literacy* (pp. 373-397). York, PA: Tech Books.

### **Family literacy: History, concepts, and services**

Wasik, B. H., & Herrman, S. (2004). In B. H. Wasik (Eds.), *Handbook of family literacy* (pp. 3-22). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

### **Learninggames, The Abecedarian Curriculum (36-48 months)**

Sparling, J., & Lewis, I. (2003). Chapel Hill, NC: MindNurture Press, Inc. [www.fpg.unc.edu/products/product\\_detail.cfm?apubsID=521](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/products/product_detail.cfm?apubsID=521)

### **Partners for Literacy**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/projects/project\\_detail.cfm?projectID=349](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/projects/project_detail.cfm?projectID=349)

### **Abecedarian Project**

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~abc/)



# Nuestros Niños Early Language and Literacy Project

Changing  
teaching practices  
to improve  
prekindergarten learning



The prekindergarten period is a critical time for Latino children, many of whom face the difficult task of developing skills in a new language while experiencing the beginning-to-read process. Yet little is known about the effects of prekindergarten schooling on Latino children who are English language learners and on teachers who are largely unprepared to work with this population. The Nuestros Niños Early Language and Literacy Project, a three-year FPG study that began in 2004, is developing and testing an intervention to improve the quality of teaching practices related to language and literacy learning among Latino children enrolled in North Carolina's More at Four Prekindergarten Program for at-risk children.

More at Four currently serves more than 12,000 low-income children, of whom approximately 20% are Latino children. A total of 60 More at Four teachers and classrooms in which Latino children are enrolled will be recruited for this study and randomly assigned to either a treatment or comparison group. The sample will reflect the regional and urban/rural distribution of the entire population of Latino children enrolled in More at Four throughout the state. From these 60 classrooms, a minimum of 240 Latino 4-year-olds and their families will be recruited to participate in this study (120 from treatment and 120 from comparison classrooms).

The professional development intervention consists of three components: 1) acquisition of content knowledge through a series of training institutes; 2) ongoing support from a consultant with expertise in early childhood bilingual education to help teachers implement new instructional strategies in the classroom; and 3) opportunities for reflection and shared inquiry with other teachers through regular community of practice meetings.

The content for the professional development activities will be based on *LiteracyGames*, a special version of *LearningGames* recently updated and expanded to promote language and literacy skills in early childhood classrooms. *LiteracyGames* will be adapted for use with Latino children who are English language learners.

A battery of measures will be administered in early fall and late spring to examine changes in teaching practices, the quality of the literacy environment, and children's developmental growth in language proficiency and literacy. Measures of treatment fidelity will assess training facilitation, consultation content and process, and classroom teaching practices.

The child assessment measures were selected on the basis of adequate psychometric properties, developmental appropriateness, availability in both English and Spanish, and comparability with other national samples of prekindergarten children. The study also will identify a variety of child, family, and program factors that moderate children's language and literacy outcomes. |ed|

## To Learn More

**Addressing the needs of Latino children : A national survey of state administrators of early childhood programs**  
Buysse, V., Castro, D. C., West, T., & Skinner, M. L. (2005). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20, 146-163.

## Latino Language and Literacy Project

[www.fpg.unc.edu/projects/project\\_detail.cfm?projectID=393](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/projects/project_detail.cfm?projectID=393)

## Addressing the Needs of Latino Children : A National Survey of State Administrators of Early Childhood Programs

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~nuestros/pages/products.cfm?tab=prod](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~nuestros/pages/products.cfm?tab=prod)

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A national study  
exports the  
Partnerships for Inclusion  
consultation model

# Collaborative Consultation as a Key to Child Care Quality



**I**N THE EARLY 1990S, most inservice training for child care providers entailed only workshops. Childcare providers would attend a workshop and take information back to their center. At FPG, Partnerships for Inclusion (PFI) staff sought to create a model aimed at improving the quality of child care programs by providing intensive on-site consultation. Consultants would develop in-depth relationships with child care providers and work with them in their own programs. Now a large-scale national study—Quality Interventions for Early Care and Education (QUINCE)—is evaluating the effectiveness of this 12-year-old model.

PFI is a technical assistance project in North Carolina that supports the inclusion of young children with disabilities, ages 0–5, in all facets of community life. By recruiting consultants and child care providers in California, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, and North Carolina, QUINCE takes PFI’s approach to consultation to a national level.

### The PFI Model

“PFI acknowledges that child care providers know their children best, know the classroom, and are most familiar with the day-to-day operation of the program,” says Pat Wesley, director of PFI. “PFI consultants invite providers to be active partners with them in the quality enhancement process. In fact, the provider is in the driver’s seat as far as what to change, how, and when. This is very different from the commonly used expert model where the consultant stops by and imparts a few nuggets of wisdom. The latter can lead to short-term change but generally does not last.”

The PFI approach includes six key components:

- 1) delivery of services on-site, 2) a focus on the global program, with particular attention to any special needs of children, 3) collaborative assessment of needs by the consultant and provider at the onset of consultation, 4) joint development of a written action plan based on the collaborative assessment, 5) provision of supportive and empowering skills during implementation, and 6) evaluation of the effectiveness of the consultation.

The model involves 10–14 visits by a consultant over a period of 6 to 10 months. In the early years of the program, consultants were university based. Subsequent studies involved community-based consultants—those trained at community colleges or working for local resource and referral agencies.

Beginning in the initial visits, the consultant develops a trusting relationship with the child care provider. Then the consultant introduces FPG’s internationally recognized environment rating scales (FDCRS, ECERS-R, and ITERS-R), which both consultant and provider administer as a springboard for discussing priorities for change. The consultant and provider then work together to implement agreed upon strategies to enhance total quality. The model is intensive and complex, but as Wesley says, “If enhancing child care quality were an easy undertaking, we wouldn’t have the problems that we see in centers and child care homes across the country.”

### Assessing the Model

Children show better developmental outcomes when child care quality is high, so federal block grant money provided to the states includes a 4% set aside to be spent on quality enhancement of child care services. In 2003 the federal government spent \$881 million on quality enhancement. That money has been spent on a variety of projects, workshops, leadership programs, and consultation services. In an effort to understand what works and what does not, the Child Care Bureau of the Department of

“The relationships we have developed with the providers are very strong, and the providers are proud of the differences we’ve been making in their environments.”

Health and Human Services issued an RFP in the summer of 2003. FPG was chosen to conduct an evaluation of the PFI consultation model. The evaluation is funded at \$1.5 million per year over four years and will include measures of child outcomes.

Each of five participating states recruits agencies to serve as partners. The agencies employ the consultants, who are randomly assigned to be trained in the on-site model through PFI or to serve as a control group and trained later in the PFI model. Consultants recruit the child care providers, and the providers help recruit parents and children. The study will ultimately involve over 200 child care providers and 400 children ages 20 months–5 years.

Wesley and PFI coordinator Carla Fenson are training the consultants with help from others on the PFI team. During 2004 FPG trained 36 consultants. Approximately 40 are being trained in 2005. Consultants come to FPG for an initial week of training on environmental assessments and the PFI consultation process. They continue their training in their own communities by implementing PFI consultation in a practice site. They attend five seminars that explore in more detail the link between quality and child outcomes and that provide opportunities to discuss consultation challenges. Consultants also receive support from FPG in-state partners.

### Action Informs Theory

Anecdotal information from consultants suggests that the PFI model is working. “I’m very thankful for what I’ve learned at training,” says Jessica LaChere, consultant with the Early Childhood Training Center in Omaha, Nebraska. “The relationships we have developed with the providers are very strong, and the providers are proud of the differences we’ve been making in their environments. I did informal consulting before, operating more or less by the seat of my pants. It’s been such an advantage to have a game plan.”

Eliana Elias, an Early Childhood Consultant with Every Child Counts in Alameda, California, concurs that the PFI model is very useful, though not without its challenges. “I have to confess it’s hard at times,” Elias says. “Our approach as consultants is that quality is defined by certain

standards, such as ECERS. However, some providers may have different opinions. For example, they may feel that rote memorization is the best way for children to learn, whereas we may emphasize play. The PFI model gives you the steps to deal with these situations. It shows you how dialogue can take place.”

Program evaluation is ongoing. “The research teams have been making observational visits as soon as the provider is enrolled,” says Donna Bryant, principal investigator of QUINCE. “We look at quality three times—right when the provider enrolls, at the end of the intervention, and six months after the intervention. We want to know if changes were made and if they last. We do this both for PFI and the control group.”

The control group varies in the services they provide across the agencies. Some professionals give limited help, while others provide quite extensive quality enhancement activities. “This study is letting FPG test the efficacy of this variety of quality enhancement services as well as the effects of the PFI consultation model,” Bryant says. “This is the first time we have studied such a wide array of technical assistance services to child care providers and measured their success at both the program and child level.” |ed|

### To Learn More

#### *Consultation in early childhood settings*

Buyse, V., & Wesley, P. W. (2005). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

#### *Improving quality in early childhood environments through on-site consultation*

Palsha, S., & Wesley, P. (1998). *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 18(4), 243-253.

#### Partnerships for Inclusion

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~pfi/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~pfi/)

#### Quality Interventions for Early Care and Education

[www.fpg.unc.edu/~QUINCE/](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~QUINCE/)

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**All Together Now!** (Spring 2005, Vol. XI, No. 2) features articles about the Family Support Network (a resource for North Carolina families with children of all ages who have special needs and for their service providers), a parent creating an inclusive environment for her children, and the profile of a five-star child care home for Spanish-speaking, English-speaking, and bilingual children.

**Children with Special Needs in North Carolina Child Care Programs Survey Report** (2005) represents the first effort in the state to determine how many children with special needs are enrolled in licensed child care facilities.

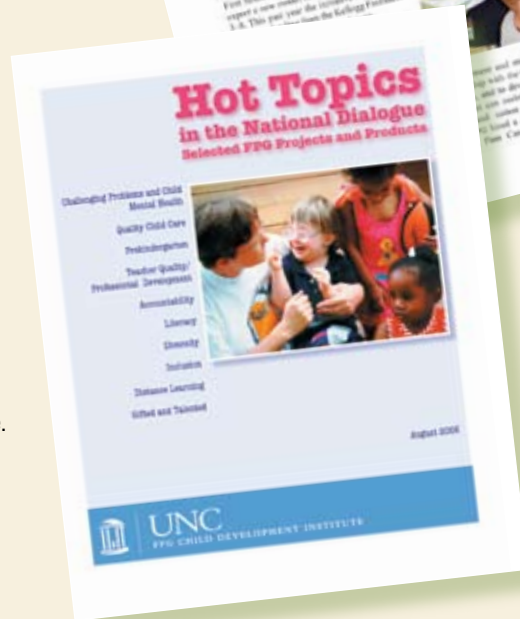
**Combined SWEEP and Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten Findings** (2005) is the first presentation of the combined data from these two studies. It provides a descriptive picture of pre-k children and classrooms only. This report is a “first glance” at what prekindergarten looks like. Future results will appear on the web site.

**FPG Highlights: 2004–2005** (2005) report features accomplishments, research findings, new grant awards, outreach efforts, and goals for the coming year at FPG.

**Family and Child Outcomes for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education** (2005) represents the initial step in collecting data on child and family outcomes for the Part C early intervention and Part B preschool programs of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

**Part C Updates. Seventh in a Series of Updates on Selected Aspects of the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, (Part C) of IDEA** (2005) contains information about Part C program administration, such as funding and contacts at the federal and state level. It also includes a list of sources of states’ Part C rules, regulations and policies; state eligibility definitions; survey of Part C coordinators and assistive technology; Part C data for child count, settings, exiting, services, and personnel; and the full text of Part C of IDEA of 2004.

**Hot Topics** (2005) highlights FPG projects and products related to issues in the national dialogue. Current themes include prekindergarten readiness, professional development, diversity, literacy, inclusion, and quality child care.



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