

Early childhood special education research: needs and priorities



FPG Snapshot # 6 May '03

This *Snapshot* summarizes testimony by Don Bailey, director of the FPG Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, before the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education.

President Bush appointed the commission in October 2001 to collect information from experts on many aspects of special education programs in the U.S. Department of Education. Bailey testified along with Dr. Mark Wolery of Vanderbilt University in April, 2002. Wolery has also been a researcher at FPG.

The complete text of their testimony is in the most recent issue of the *Journal of Early Intervention*. The paper was the featured article in the journal and three leading experts in the field published reactions to their testimony.

The URL for the commission is: <<http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspeiaeducation/index.html>>.

Research needed to address services, interventions

1. How can we increase the efficacy of early intervention for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities? Studies are needed

- a. on the relative efficacy of different models of treatment
- b. on the importance of intensity or amount of treatment
- c. on the importance of quality of treatment
- d. to identify the mediating and moderating factors that influence intervention efficacy

2. What new treatment approaches are needed for specific domains and issues?

- a. New models and treatment practices need to be developed and validated in selected areas.
- b. Studies are needed to address the behavioral challenges of children in homes and classes, particularly those who are at risk for developing long-term mental health problems.
- c. Studies are needed to evaluate procedures for embedding interventions into children's ongoing activities in the settings where they spend time (homes, child care classes, and community settings).

3. How can we ensure that empirically supported practices are used regularly and appropriately? Studies are needed

- a. that focus on selected, highly visible practices within the

(continued on reverse)

Research priorities are proposed

1. What are the best ways to document family outcomes?
2. What are the best ways to measure children's progress in, and outcomes from, early intervention programs?
3. What are the effects of community and family risk and opportunity factors on children's development and learning, and what are the implications of those factors for planning and carrying out intervention services?
4. How do factors such as race, language, culture, and poverty influence child and family participation and outcomes from early intervention?

This *Snapshot* is based on "Early Childhood Special Education Research," testimony by Donald B. Bailey Jr. and Mark Wolery before the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. The complete text of the testimony and comments by other experts is in the *Journal of Early Intervention*, 2002, Vol. 25, pp. 88-107. It is also posted on the FPG web site at <<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/MediaInfo/pr/detail.cfm?PressreleaseID=83>>.

Proposal for continued OSEP involvement

1. Fiscal support should continue to be provided to states to assist in the provision of early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and preschools with disabilities and their families. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) should
 - a. support states to assure that universal access to high-quality early intervention is available to all infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities and their families
 - b. support technical assistance to help states address complex and often recalcitrant problems faced in implementing early intervention services
2. Support for building the human capital in early intervention is needed
 - a. to study and use procedures for transferring research knowledge into ongoing practices of existing early intervention providers.
 - b. for preparing practitioners—particularly practitioners who can be leaders in their communities—at the preservice and professional development levels.
 - c. for doctoral and postdoctoral preparation in early intervention emphasizing personnel preparation as well as research and policy issues.

Recommendations for research funding, OSEP infrastructure

1. Continue and expand field-initiated and student-initiated research.
2. Facilitate and encourage proposal revision and resubmission.
3. Revise the time of review and notification of selected competitions.

Research needed ... (continued from front)

field of practice

- b. to document the supports required by child care providers to include children with disabilities effectively
- c. to understand the processes by which adoption of recommended practices can be realized by practitioners

4. What practices promote family well-being and help families in facilitating their children's development? Studies are needed to

- a. identify families whose parenting confidence is shaken by the birth of a child with disabilities, as well as procedures for providing support to them
- b. identify family-friendly ways to promote parent competence related to difficult daily routines and complex developmental skills with their children and to promote parent-professional communication
- c. develop models and practices for supporting families living in high-risk conditions

If you want to know more

Guralnick, M.J. (Ed.). (1997). *The effectiveness of early intervention*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Guralnick, M. J. (2001a). A developmental systems model for early intervention. *Infants and Young Children*, 14(2), 1-18.

Guralnick, M.J. (2001b). Connections between developmental science and intervention science. *Zero-to-Three*, 21(5), 24-29.

National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early child development*. Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development. J.P. Shonkoff & D.A. Phillips (Eds). Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education: Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Spiker, D., Hebbeler, K., Wagner, M., Cameto, R., & McKenna, P. (2000). A framework for describing variations in state early intervention systems. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 20, 195-207.

Snapshots are summaries of research articles, books and other publications by researchers at the FPG Child Development Institute at UNC-Chapel Hill. Permission is granted to reprint this article if you acknowledge FPG and the authors of the article on which this *Snapshot* is based.

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