

Science and Solutions from  
UNC's Frank Porter Graham  
Child Development Institute



UNC

FRANK PORTER GRAHAM  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

# From the Director

With intensely mixed emotions I write my last introductory letter for our annual report, as I am retiring as director at the end of 2017. When I joined FPG as director in 2006, I knew that the average tenure for a leader of such an organization was typically 6 or 7 years, although the tradition at FPG has been for directors to stay longer. I expected to stay for perhaps a decade, and now half way through my 12TH year, I reflect on what a positive experience it has been for me, and what a productive decade-plus we have had.



Leaving the directorship is a little sad, but there are rays of sunshine personally for me and for FPG. A personal positive is that I will be staying at FPG as a senior research scientist. The other positive is that FPG is heading in a very good direction. With a very strong set of researchers, technical assistance specialists, and implementation scientists, we have successfully competed for national center projects that extend our work well into the future and that have major national impacts. The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center has supported the development and dissemination of recommended practices in early childhood special education, and it recently received funding for the next five years.

The Center on Early Development, Teaching, and Learning has drawn across research groups to support the quality of early childhood education in Head Start centers. The Early Education in Rural North Carolina project is using the NC Pre-K Program to examine the effects of quality on children's development in North Carolina. The National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practices is leading the way in identifying practices that have a basis in research and that can be translated into knowledge that will be used by teachers and families. In fact, when reflecting on the progress we have made over the last decade-plus, FPG investigators have successfully competed for seven national research and professional development centers. This is extraordinary in our field.

So, as I leave, I encourage you to read the stories of FPG. They describe the variety of work we do and their impact on children and families. Also, in leaving the directorship, there are too many people in the FPG community who have been a personal support for me, so I will not commit the sin of omission. But, the future is bright for FPG with the leadership that Desiree Murray and Greg Burress provide as Associate Directors, and the great mix of senior and emerging leadership in research and evaluation, technical assistance, professional development, and implementation science. And they will provide the support that a new director will need to move FPG forward into the future.

Samuel L. Odom  
UNC's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute



# Contents

## ii FPG at a Glance

### 1 The Latest Science

Groundbreaking Research on Behalf of  
Children of All Backgrounds and Abilities

### 17 *Spotlight*—The Research-to-Practice Pipeline

FPG Launches a New National Clearing-  
house on Autism Evidence and Practice

### 19 Shaping Dialogue and Guiding Practice Bringing Research to Real-World Solutions

### 35 *Spotlight*—30 Years of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education

An Interview with FPG's Joan Danaher  
and Christina Kasprzak

### 40 Projects

Our Work on Behalf of Young Children  
and their Families

### 42 *Spotlight*—Megan Vinh

A Q&A with the New Vice President  
of the DEC Executive Board for the  
Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of  
the Council for Exceptional Children

### 44 Partnerships

Leadership, Collaboration, and  
Donor Support

### 47 *Spotlight*—James J. Gallagher

Honoring the Former FPG Director with  
the *James J. Gallagher Conference Room*

### 49 Resources

Journal Articles, Reports and Briefs,  
Online Learning, and More

***Science and Solutions from  
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# FPG at a Glance

*Advancing knowledge. Enhancing lives.*

The Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute enhances the lives of children and families through interdisciplinary research, technical assistance, professional development, and implementation science. FPG generates knowledge, informs policies, and supports practices to promote positive developmental and educational outcomes for children of all backgrounds and abilities from the earliest years.

## PEOPLE

- 190** Staff
- 51** Investigators
- 34** Fellows
- 19** Executive Leadership Board Members
- 15** Postdoctoral Research Associates and Graduate Assistants

## AFFILIATED DISCIPLINES

Anthropology, Audiology, Biostatistics, Dentistry, Education, Epidemiology, Information & Library Science, Linguistics, Maternal & Child Health, Neuroscience, Nursing, Nutrition, Occupational Science, Pediatrics, Psychiatry, Psychology, Public Health, Public Policy, Social Work, and Speech & Hearing Sciences

## MAJOR AREAS OF EMPHASIS

Developmental Disabilities; Early Care and Education; Physical and Social Health; Professional Development, Technical Assistance, and Implementation Science; Public Policy and Evaluation; the International Initiative; Racial, Ethnic, Linguistic, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Diversity

## FUNDING SOURCES

Federal grants, nonprofit organizations, foundations, education and research institutions, business and industry, state grants and appropriations, fees, sales, royalties, and other sources



# The Latest Science

## *Groundbreaking Research on Behalf of Children of All Backgrounds and Abilities*

This past year brought new research from FPG with implications for children and families in North Carolina, across the United States, and around the globe. For 50 years, our studies have capitalized on FPG's wide and varied expertise to generate knowledge about how best to educate and care for children and their families. This science has explored numerous topics, and what follows are snapshots of some of our recent accomplishments.





Noreen Yazejian

## A SINGLE YEAR OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION HAS BROAD EFFECTS

New research reveals that one year of high-quality early education and care brings multiple benefits for children in poverty. Not only do language skills improve, but children also have more positive interactions with their parents and display fewer problem behaviors.

“The achievement gap for children from low-income families has been an enduring problem, but relatively few programs have been successful in narrowing that gap,” said Noreen M. Yazejian, FPG senior research scientist and the study’s principal investigator. “These findings suggest that a comprehensive, research-based early childhood education program can make a difference for children even after just one year.”

Yazejian led a randomized study of 239 infants and toddlers in Educare schools in Chicago, Milwaukee, Omaha, and Tulsa, comparing children who were assigned to attend Educare to those who were not. Educare is an enhanced Early Head Start and Head Start program for children from low-income families. It includes children from 6 weeks old until they enter kindergarten.

“We found that children in Educare schools had significantly greater auditory and expressive language skills,” said Yazejian. “The size of Educare’s effect on language was greater than effects reported for other early interventions.”

Previous research has shown that language skills are most malleable for children before age 4, which in large part explains high-quality early education’s potential power. Early language skills are a precursor to emergent literacy skills and are strongly related to later language, reading, and school achievement.



“FPG’s Abecedarian Project demonstrated that early language development almost entirely accounts for differences in child outcomes after preschool,” said FPG senior research scientist Donna Bryant, the Educare study’s co-principal investigator. “All children entered the new Educare study before age 19 months, with both the Educare and control groups scoring near national average on a language measure at study entry. Whereas Educare children maintained their developmental level over the course of a year, children in the control group decreased relative to national norms.”

Yazejian said Educare’s positive effect on problem behaviors is also a key finding, because prior studies have shown that the same behavior regulation skills promoted by Educare are linked with school success.

“Many researchers view social-emotional and academic skills as interconnected,” she said. “Children with problem behaviors may frustrate teachers, and teachers may provide such children with less positive feedback and instruction.”

The study also found a positive effect on sensitive and responsive parent-child interactions.

Yazejian and Bryant attribute this to the family support and opportunities for parent engagement that Educare schools provide.

Previous studies have shown that early parent-child relationships are important because they predict social and academic outcomes in the elementary school years, through middle grades, and even in high school.

Twenty-one Educare schools currently serve 3,400 children across the country, providing full-day, full-year center-based education and care.

“Educare is able to offer a high-quality early education experience by promoting high-quality classroom instruction, partnering with families to promote children’s development, offering ongoing professional learning for staff, and collecting and using data to improve the program,” said Jessie Rasmussen, president of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, a leading partner of Educare.

“We know that healthy development in the first years of a child’s life is essential, and this study shows that a high-quality, comprehensive early learning program like Educare has the potential to improve the outcomes of low-income infants and toddlers,” said Diana Rauner, president of the Ounce of Prevention Fund, also a leading partner of Educare.

Yazejian and Bryant’s research team included FPG’s Margaret Burchinal, as well as Sydney Hans from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, Diane Horm from the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa, Lisa St. Clair from Omaha Program Evaluation Services, and Nancy File from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Their study will follow children until they enter kindergarten.

Findings from the new Educare study add to a growing body of research revealing better outcomes for children from low-income families who receive high-quality early education, including prior research on Educare. In 2015, Yazejian’s study of children across all 21 Educare schools revealed that both an earlier age of entry and a longer duration of care boosted language skills.

“Now,” she said, “our new findings suggest that even a single year of high-quality care can improve outcomes in multiple areas.”

**abstract and full article**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8803](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8803)

**NEW FINDINGS FROM THE ABECEDARIAN PROJECT  
REVEAL LONG-TERM IMPACTS ON RELATIONSHIPS  
WITH PARENTS, A HIGHER THAN EXPECTED  
RETURN ON INVESTMENT, AND MORE**

New findings from FPG's Abecedarian Project show that children who are given high-quality education at an early age, starting at 6 weeks old and continuing through their first 5 years of life, are more likely as adults to be employed full-time and have better relationships with their parents.

This past year, Nobel laureate James Heckman and colleagues released *The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program*, the results of a new analysis demonstrating that high-quality birth-to-five programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% per year return on investment—a rate substantially higher than the 7-10% return previously established for preschool programs serving 3- and 4-year-olds.

Heckman's team used data both from FPG's Abecedarian Project and FPG's Carolina Approach to Responsive Education, and this new analysis includes the value of health outcomes, as well as the economic benefits of providing child care to mothers.

In a two-page research snapshot, Heckman and colleagues recommend "more and better" programs for young children in poverty.

"Child poverty is growing in the United States," they write. "Investing in comprehensive birth-to-five early childhood education is a powerful and cost-effective way to mitigate its negative consequences on child development and adult opportunity."

The authors also suggest that policymakers coordinate early childhood resources "into a scaffolding of developmental support for disadvantaged children" and that such support "provide access to all in need."

According to the researchers, "the gains are significant because quality programs pay for themselves many times over. The cost of inaction is a tragic loss of human and economic potential that we cannot afford."

Meanwhile, Craig Ramey, the original principal investigator on the project at FPG, also presented new results. Ramey, a professor and distinguished research scholar of human development at the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, led the team there that produced a new follow-up report on the original Abecedarian participants.

"The most recent findings from the Abecedarian Project are about the quality of life, tied to what the children experienced in the first five years of life," said Ramey.

"We have demonstrated that when we provide vulnerable children and families with really high-quality services—educationally, medically, socially—we have impacts of a large and practical magnitude all the way up to middle age," said Ramey.

Both the control group and treatment group received health care, nutrition, and family support through social services; however, the treatment group also received five years of early care and education.

According to Ramey, high-quality education all day for five days a week, and for 50 weeks a year, beginning at 6 weeks of age and continuing until the child starts kindergarten, makes a lifetime of difference.

"And in our early education program, the most important thing is the quality of interaction between the teachers and the children," Ramey said, pointing to the teachers' abilities to tailor educational activities to a child's specific needs, in a fun and natural way, as a critical element of the study's



results. “It’s pretty clear that’s what the magic ingredient is.”

The quality of natural teaching, via social interaction between the teacher and child, is highly important, especially in infancy, according to Ramey. This includes such things as the conversational aspect of language and the focus on interactive reading as enjoyable, rather than a chore.

“The data show that children who received the educational treatment are successful socially, especially in a familial setting, as indicated by their close relationships with their mothers and fathers in middle age,” said Libbie Sonnier-Netto, a doctoral student in human development at Virginia Tech’s College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, who conducted the follow-up interviews for this study.

Sonnier-Netto also noted that individuals in the educational group are more likely to be employed full-time, with more assets, such as owning a car, a home, and having a savings account. According to Ramey, the connection between the results is obvious.

“What we’ve discovered is that if you treat people well, they thrive and they, in turn, give back,” Ramey said. “Part of our task is to make what we now know to be so important—high-quality, early childhood education and care—widely available to all who need it in this country.”



Sharon Ramey, a professor and distinguished research scholar at the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute, co-wrote the book on the Abecedarian approach with Craig Ramey and FPG senior scientist emeritus Joseph Sparling. Sparling co-created

the original curriculum for the project.

Beyond the familial bond and employment status, Sharon Ramey says the researchers are seeing another trend among the treatment group participants. “We also discovered that individuals who received early high-quality care and education also have a keen sense of social equality—and make decisions that balance the equation between those who ‘have’ and those who ‘have much less.’”

The researchers expect to continue analyzing the dataset about the effects of early care and education on the children as they progress through middle age.

In addition, Sparling has developed new training on the Abecedarian Approach, which will be available through FPG’s Professional Development Center.

### **Nobel Laureate James Heckman’s report**

[go.unc.edu/HeckmanOnFPGAbecedarian](https://go.unc.edu/HeckmanOnFPGAbecedarian)

### **training on the Abecedarian Approach**

[pdc.fpg.unc.edu/abecedarian-approach-level-1-only](https://pdc.fpg.unc.edu/abecedarian-approach-level-1-only)

**INTENTIONAL  
TEACHING MAKES THE  
BIGGEST IMPACT ON  
EARLY CHILDHOOD  
OUTCOMES**

A comprehensive review of research on several measures of the quality of early childhood education suggests that the instructional practices of preschool teachers have the largest impact on young children's academic and social skills. The review helps untangle a complicated knot of factors that affect young children.

"High-quality preschool is one of the most effective means of preparing all children to succeed in school," said Margaret R. Burchinal, the FPG senior research scientist who conducted the review. "However, this review of research indicates the need to expand our definitions of quality."

Burchinal said her review of the science suggests the field should continue to measure the quality of relationships of preschool teachers and children, especially the sensitivity and warmth of the teachers. In addition, the review suggests factors such as the levels of education of program directors and teachers and the teacher-child ratio also influence outcomes.

However, the areas with the strongest connection to beneficial results for young children involve what teachers teach and how they teach it.

"The largest effects on child outcomes involve curricula," Burchinal explained. "Some of the biggest impacts on literacy, math, and other skills involved curricula focused on those specific skills with accompanying coaching or training for teachers."



According to Burchinal, many of the most effective curricula incorporate planned, engaging activities for preschoolers, with a schedule of lessons and activities in a variety of learning settings. Effective learning opportunities often include some whole group instruction and more time in small groups, learning centers, and computer work.

Burchinal also said the research shows that the teaching practice of "scaffolding" brings big benefits. "Scaffolding occurs when the adult caregiver talks with and models a learning activity for the child, making the activity fun through conversation that builds on and extends the child's interest and knowledge about the world."

Some of the largest impacts on children's outcomes have arisen from the strongest prekindergarten programs, Burchinal added. These programs show even larger impacts for dual-language learners and for children from low-income families.

"These prekindergarten impacts are larger than impacts from traditionally measured dimensions of quality," Burchinal said. "This is further evidence that more focus on scaffolding and intentional teaching is needed."



Burchinal pointed to FPG's Abecedarian Project as an example of a program that combined intentional teaching with warmth and sensitivity. The project used an intensive, language-driven approach that involved teacher scaffolding of activity-based learning to build children's knowledge base and language skills. The center-based, birth-to-5 program for children from low-income homes famously contributed to better cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical health outcomes that have persisted for decades.

Burchinal's new review of research includes several studies based in the United States and other countries. "Measuring Early Care and Education Quality" appears in *Child Development Perspectives*, which the Society for Research in Child Development publishes.

"As we think about the components of high-quality early childhood education, our policies and practices can reflect what this research tells us," she said. "Ideally, our new models of quality will encompass evidence-based curricula and intentional teaching within content areas, as well as professional development that focuses on the teaching practices that promote the skills young children need to succeed in school."

#### **about Margaret R. Burchinal**

[fpg.unc.edu/profiles/margaret-r-burchinal](http://fpg.unc.edu/profiles/margaret-r-burchinal)

#### **NC PRE-K EARNs HIGH MARKS FOR ITS FIRST 15 YEARS**

North Carolina's pre-kindergarten program has supported over 350,000 children in multiple areas of learning and development, according to a new summary report from FPG. The report says favorable outcomes from the program can last for years after children enter elementary school.

"The NC Pre-K Program has enhanced children's language development, communication skills, cognitive development, and social and emotional development," said FPG senior research scientist Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, who has led annual evaluations of the program since its inception as "More at Four" in 2001. "Not only does the program benefit children while they attend it, but its positive effects persist."

NC Pre-K is a statewide educational program for eligible 4-year-olds, primarily children whose family income does not exceed 75% of the state median. The program was designed to prepare children for kindergarten by enhancing their school readiness skills.

"Our studies have shown that children who participated in NC Pre-K have made greater than expected gains in language, literacy, math, general knowledge, and social skills through pre-k and into kindergarten," said Peisner-Feinberg.

FPG's most recent evaluation compared children who did not attend NC Pre-K to those who did. At the end of kindergarten, the children who attended the program had significantly better math skills, as well as significantly better executive function skills, a group of abilities related to self-regulation that predict children's later academic performance.

Peisner-Feinberg said the FPG team's earlier evaluations have found that some of NC Pre-K's benefits endure even longer.

“One of the hallmarks of the program is that it brings some of the greatest benefits to children who have the most to gain,” she said. “Our research has shown that children from low-income homes who attended the program scored higher on third-grade reading and math End-of-Grade tests than their peers who hadn’t attended the program.”

“Stability has been crucial to the impact of NC Pre-K,” said Peisner-Feinberg. “Over time, many of the characteristics of the program have been consistent with good quality standards for early care and education practices.”

FPG’s summary report of the program’s first 15 years notes that classroom quality steadily has been in the medium-to-high range, and teacher qualifications have been improving regularly from year to year.

“In our most recent evaluation, more than 99% of lead teachers in the NC Pre-K Program have a BA degree or above,” she said. “In addition, nearly all NC Pre-K teachers in public school settings and over three-quarters in private settings have a ‘B-K’ license.”

Peisner-Feinberg said FPG’s history of bringing researched-based recommendations to NC Pre-K has helped the program maintain its quality as it has grown.

Peisner-Feinberg’s evaluations of NC Pre-K also have revealed strong benefits for dual-language learners, whose skills improve in both English and Spanish.

“Children with lower levels of English proficiency make gains at an even faster rate than other children in NC Pre-K,” she added.

The NC Pre-K Program primarily has served a diverse population of children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including a substantial number of dual-language learners. The majority of children in NC Pre-K have not previously been enrolled in a preschool program.

“The state has examined our evaluation findings to ensure that all children are benefiting from the program and to consider areas where they might improve practices,” she explained. “It’s been very positive from our perspective to see the program make such good use of our research.”

The NC Department of Health and Human Services houses the Division of Child Development and Early Education (DCDEE), which administers the NC Pre-K Program. Officials report the results of FPG’s evaluations to the state legislature each year.

“The evaluation results show that NC Pre-K continues to yield a high return on investment for





our state—improving children’s outcomes through third grade, which we know reduces later costs in grade retention and special education services,” said Susan Perry-Manning, Deputy Secretary for the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services. “The Department is committed to maintaining the high-quality standards that yield NC Pre-K’s positive results for children, and we couldn’t be more pleased that the legislature approved expansion funding for more than 1,500 additional children this school year.”

#### **full report**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9065](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9065)

#### **GEORGIA’S PRE-K STUDENTS SUSTAIN PROGRESS IN FIRST GRADE**

According to a new FPG report, students in Georgia’s Pre-K Program continue to exhibit positive outcomes through the end of first grade across all domains of learning.

“These findings clearly indicate that Georgia’s signature early education program impacts children’s academic development years after they participate in the program,” said Amy M. Jacobs, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). “The findings validate the important work accomplished by our teachers and assistant teachers every day and confirm that pre-k provides the strong foundation needed for future learning.”

DECAL commissioned FPG’s multi-year, comprehensive evaluation in 2011 at the request of the Georgia General Assembly. The study began with a sample of 1,169 children who participated in Georgia’s Pre-K Program during the 2013–2014 school year and will follow them through their third grade year in 2017–2018.

“This study provides an important opportunity to follow over 1,100 children who attended Georgia’s

Pre-K through elementary school,” said Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, FPG’s principal investigator on the project. “The results indicate that children made significant gains from pre-k through first grade on most skills that were measured in English as well as the same skills when measured in Spanish for children who were Spanish-speaking dual-language learners. However, children’s gains tended to be greater in pre-k and kindergarten than in first grade, suggesting that this earlier exposure may be especially beneficial.”

Georgia’s Pre-K Program is available in all 159 counties of the state. Approximately 60% of Georgia’s 4-year-olds are served by the program. Approximately 50% of Georgia’s counties serve at least 70% of all eligible 4-year-olds in their counties.

“This study provides evidence of the impact of the program,” said Assistant Commissioner for Pre-K and Instructional Supports Susan Adams. “It shows that Georgia’s Pre-K is a beneficial and strong component of the state’s educational system. The study also helps inform decisions we make about policies and strategies that best support all of Georgia’s youngest students.”

#### **full report**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9207](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9207)





#### **RURAL FAMILIES' USE OF MULTIPLE CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS IMPACTS CHILDREN'S KINDERGARTEN BEHAVIORAL AND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES**

FPG scientists have completed a new study using data from the Family Life Project that reveals both the prevalence of multiple arrangements for child care among rural families and that multiple arrangements are related to children's negative behaviors.

FPG researchers Mary Bratsch-Hines and Irina Mokrova, and Lynne Vernon-Feagans, principal investigator of FPG's Family Life Project, examined the use of multiple concurrent arrangements for children in the project. They followed 1,292 children in six high-poverty rural counties from 6-months old until kindergarten, looking at associations between the number of child care arrangements and behavioral and academic outcomes in kindergarten.

The majority of children in the United States receive child care from people other than their parents and commonly experience more than one concurrent child care arrangement. Previous studies have shown that multiple child care arrangements are negatively related to young children's health and behavioral outcomes.

Roughly 20 percent of children in the United States live in rural communities, but surprisingly little research had looked at children from these areas. Since 2003, rural North Carolina and Pennsylvania residents in the Family Life Project have been providing valuable evidence to researchers about how parenting, child care, and many other factors affect young children and their families.

Over the years, in collaboration with Mark Greenberg at Penn State University and researchers at several other universities and institutes, Vernon-Feagans and her colleagues have published numerous articles that have shed light on what it means to be a child in rural America. With data from living rooms to schools, the project has shown the impacts of parenting, poverty, early child care experiences, classroom quality, and other variables on a wide variety of child outcomes.

Key findings have shown how important it is for parents and teachers to engage in complex and detailed interactions with their young children, how poverty brings challenges that affect parenting, how fathers make crucial contributions to child development, and more.

**abstract and full study**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9203](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9203)

### PIONEERING SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAM EXPANDS AS YOUNG STUDENTS MAKE SUBSTANTIAL GAINS

For the third consecutive year, young students have benefited significantly from the Family Success Alliance (FSA) summer enrichment program, according to a new evaluation report from FPG.

“Math, literacy, and classroom skills significantly improved for the children who entered kindergarten, first grade, and second grade this fall,” said FPG senior research scientist Margaret Burchinal, who led the evaluation of the program. “Language skills also improved for rising kindergartners.”

FSA’s summer enrichment program is designed to close the opportunity gap for students whose families are struggling to make ends meet. Burchinal said FPG’s evaluation of the program last year showed it had a positive effect on attention and basic literacy skills for all children in English, as well as on language and literacy skills in Spanish.

“Children who made the largest gains entered the program with lower skill levels, suggesting it is most successful for the students who need it most,” she explained. “We also found that these gains were not lost during the ensuing school year.”

This past summer, FSA partnered again with Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools and Orange County Schools to serve kindergartners, while expanding the program to serve rising first and second graders. At two elementary schools in Orange County, FSA enrolled 92 students in a four-week program that focused on promoting self-regulation skills, attention, and academic skills, while also providing children with meals and time to play.

According to Burchinal, across grade levels the proportion of students at or above state benchmarks

for their grade roughly doubled from the beginning to end of the summer camp.

Burchinal added that the program’s design has fostered a reciprocal relationship between the teachers and scientists who evaluate the program. “Rather than having the researchers decide what the children were supposed to learn, we focused on how well children learned what the teachers said they were going to teach in the summer program.”

Rising kindergartners participated this year from FPG Bilingüe, Carrboro, Northside, and New Hope elementary schools, while New Hope also served children entering first and second grade.

Coby Jansen Austin, FSA’s director of programs and policy, said teaming with researchers at UNC has helped to improve the summer program.

“FSA places a high value on measuring the quality of its programs, including outcomes for individuals and at population-level,” Austin said. “Funding agencies increasingly expect local service groups to demonstrate the impact of the services and programs they implement, and the FSA-UNC partnership was designed to provide data for us to continuously evaluate, adapt, and improve services.”

Courtesy of Family Success Alliance





FSA brings together community members, schools, local government agencies, non-profits, and other community leaders who are committed to ensuring that all children in Orange County have the opportunity to thrive in school, jobs, and community. A core group of staff located at the Orange County Health Department facilitates the work.

“By giving kids a leg-up, we believe we can do our part to not only help close the opportunity gap but provide the chance for these kids to reach their full potential as members and leaders of our vibrant community,” said Austin. “The Family Success Alliance has prioritized the need for equity from the onset of a child’s academic career in helping children feel successful and be successful throughout their educational journey and into college and career.”

#### **FPG’s 2016 evaluation of FSA’s summer program**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8628](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8628)

#### **ORAL STORYTELLING SKILLS IMPACT READING DIFFERENTLY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS AND GIRLS**

The oral storytelling skills of African American preschoolers make a difference in how quickly their reading skills develop, according to a new study from FPG. Researchers say the effect is much different for girls and boys.

“Knowing how to tell a clear and coherent story is an important skill for helping young children to develop strong reading skills, which, in turn, can help them to be successful across a number of different subjects in school,” said FPG advanced research scientist Nicole Gardner-Neblett. “Prior research suggests that historical and cultural factors foster strong storytelling skills among African American children, which has implications for their development as readers.”



Two years ago, Gardner-Neblett’s own research was the first to demonstrate the connection between African American preschoolers’ storytelling abilities and their early reading skills in kindergarten. That study found a link between storytelling and reading only for the African American children, from households across income levels, but not for any other demographic group.

Stark differences in reading achievement exist between Black and White elementary schoolchildren, as does a gender gap in reading outcomes, with girls outperforming boys. Because of both disparities in achievement, Gardner-Neblett and FPG advanced research scientist John Sideris wanted to better understand if and how gender plays a role in the link between African American children’s storytelling skills and reading development.

“We asked preschoolers to tell a story from a wordless picture book and analyzed their skill in structuring and organizing the story,” Gardner-Neblett explained. “We examined how boys’ and girls’ storytelling skills as preschoolers predicted their

scores on a reading achievement test for each grade, from first through sixth.”

According to Sideris, the connection between children’s storytelling skills and reading achievement is more complex than expected.

“We found that oral storytelling is linked to different trajectories for boys and girls,” he said. “Boys’ storytelling skills had an effect on how quickly their reading scores increased from first through sixth grade. The stronger the boys’ storytelling skills as preschoolers, the faster their reading scores increased over time.”

Gardner-Neblett explained that preschool girls told more coherent and organized stories than boys did.

“Girls’ storytelling skills appeared most important for their reading achievement during the first years of school,” she added. “In contrast to the boys, storytelling skills were less important over time for the girls and unrelated to how fast their reading scores increased.”

According to Gardner-Neblett, a number of studies have looked at factors that account for low reading achievement, but researchers have not paid as much attention to investigating competencies that are associated with successful reading outcomes among African American children. However, she said, this study suggests that educators and parents could capitalize on a cultural strength to support reading development by promoting storytelling skills among African American girls and boys.

“Expanding skills for nurturing children’s reading development beyond book reading to include oral storytelling could be crucial for African American children,” she said. “This could help to provide a strong foundation for success—and not only for how well boys and girls do in school, but in life.”

**[abstract/full article](#)**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8909](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8909)

## **FPG PARTNERS WITH SPANISH-IMMERSION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TO ANSWER CLASS PARTICIPATION QUESTIONS**

When the principal of a Spanish-immersion elementary school approached FPG with a mystery, a groundbreaking new project was born. Researchers Doré R. LaForett and Ximena Franco have been examining how the school’s language immersion program affects different students’ academic engagement and social networks.

“The principal had noticed something that immediately got our attention,” LaForett explained. “She said it seemed to her that students whose home language was Spanish weren’t participating in classes—even when teachers primarily taught in Spanish.”

According to LaForett, if in fact this were the case, it could contradict theory and expectations about Spanish-speaking learners in immersion classrooms. Many researchers believe that dual-language education can help to reduce the achievement gap for English learners, and LaForett and Franco were eager to launch a partnership with the elementary school on the “Social Networks and Academic Engagement in a Bilingual Education” project.

“We followed 340 pre-k to fifth-grade students,” explained Franco, who also previously served as project director for a multi-site study on the relationship between language exposure and language development of bilingual children. Equally split by gender, 67% of the participants in the new study were White, and 65% did not receive free school lunch. Students’ home language backgrounds differed: 58% mostly English, 30% mostly Spanish, and 12% equal English and Spanish. “The school employs a variety of models across classrooms, from a 50–50 English–Spanish mix to 90–10 mostly Spanish instruction, depending on the grade level, track, and subject.”



In addition to conducting their own classroom observations, LaForett and Franco gathered data from teachers and children.

“We’re looking at which students hang out with whom and which students actually are participating in class,” said LaForett, who has been involved in several research projects and initiatives focused on young dual-language learners and their families. “We’re even asking the students to tell us who they consider to be good students.”

In the end, the researchers hoped to answer questions about home language, the language of instruction, peer networks, and classroom participation—and how these pieces of the puzzle fit together.

“No one else is doing this,” LaForett said. No previous research had studied academic engagement in dual-language settings, nor English-language learners’ peer relationships in such settings.

With regard to student engagement, when LaForett and Franco controlled for student socioeconomic status and gender, they found that ratings of teachers in English and in Spanish instruction classrooms using the 50/50 model did not reflect differences by home language.

However, home language had a significant effect on engagement based on ratings of teachers in the 90/10 model. In these settings, teachers rated students from equal Spanish and English home language families as significantly more engaged than students from mostly Spanish backgrounds.

Overall, peers and teachers rated students with higher socioeconomic status and students who were not from mostly Spanish-speaking households as engaged.

When LaForett and Franco looked at student social networks, they found that across student and teacher reports, more segregation by home language occurred in the earlier grades (pre-k to first) and later grades (fourth and fifth), but that there was openness in second and third grades. Across the full sample, again controlling for socioeconomic status and gender, they found no significant differences by home language with regard to whether students were liked by their peers.

Teacher ratings also showed no differences by home language across the school as a whole, but in kindergarten and second grade they rated students from equal backgrounds in Spanish and English as having more social connections than mostly English or mostly Spanish students.

According to LaForett and Franco, these results suggest there may be grade-level variations in students’ cross-cultural peer relationships. Nonetheless, overall, dual-language educational settings may create the conditions to promote cross-cultural friendships, and students who are more “bilingual” may serve as important social bridges in connecting students with different cultural backgrounds.

**free online training, “Dual Language Learners: Strategies for Successful Opportunities in ECE”**  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8383](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8383)



## PROGRAM FOR PARENTS IMPROVES ADHD BEHAVIORS IN YOUNG CHILDREN

A program that focuses on strengthening parenting skills also improves symptoms of Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in 3-8 year-olds. FPG scientists completed a rigorous review of evidence that demonstrated the effectiveness of the “Incredible Years™ Basic Parent Program.”

“Prior research already has shown that this program improves behavior difficulties in young children,” said Desiree W. Murray, FPG’s associate director of research. “This review provides new evidence specifically about its effectiveness for ADHD symptoms.”

Murray explained that parents not only reported sustained improvements for their children’s ADHD behaviors, but also for their social skills and interactions with peers.

She said effective early intervention is crucial for young children with ADHD, due to the unfavorable short-term and long-term outcomes associated with the disorder.

“ADHD in preschoolers can bring conflict with family members, and it carries elevated risk of physical injuries and suspension or expulsion from child care settings,” Murray said. “Negative trajectories over time can include the development of other psychiatric disorders and difficulties with social adjustment.”



Previous studies have also shown that children with ADHD struggle academically, with lower test scores and higher risk of dropping out of high school.

“We can help to prevent the wide array of negative outcomes that are associated with ADHD,” Murray said. “We believe the most effective intervention approaches may be those that target preschoolers with symptoms of ADHD but who have not yet met the full criteria for diagnosis with ADHD.”

Murray and her team, which included FPG research scientist Doré R. LaForett and UNC doctoral student Jacqueline R. Lawrence, screened 258 studies and narrowed their list to 11 studies that met stringent criteria for rigor and methodology. The evidence—primarily parent reports—showed the effectiveness of the Incredible Years™ Basic Parent Program for ADHD behaviors in young children. *The Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders* recently published the results of the team’s review.

The Incredible Years™ Basic Parent Program is designed for parents of high-risk children and those who display behavioral problems. It focuses on helping parents strengthen relationships with their children, providing praise and incentives, setting

limits, establishing ground rules, and effectively addressing misbehavior.

Murray, a trained mentor for the Incredible Years™ Teacher Classroom Management program, explained that a key caregiver strategy that all IY programs teach—

and which is particularly relevant for ADHD-related difficulties—is “coaching” young children to develop persistence, as well as academic, social, and emotional skills. As parents and others prompt, describe, and praise targeted behaviors, children learn to regulate their own emotions and behavior, and they become motivated to use these skills.

“We think an effective 12–14 session program is a modest investment for preschool children who are at risk for ADHD,” she said. “The research shows it may promote long-term benefits that can move these children towards a more positive developmental path.”

**[abstract/full article](#)**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9140](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9140)

#### **PEER NETWORK INTERVENTIONS INCREASE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH AUTISM AND MAY REDUCE BULLYING**

With Melissa A. Sreckovic from University of Michigan-Flint, FPG advanced research scientist Kara Hume and FPG fellow Harriet Able have published findings from a new study examining how peer network interventions impact the social interactions of high school students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

“Developing positive peer relationships is important,” write the authors in a publication for the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. “Unfortunately, due to challenges in social communication and increased complexity of peer groups during adolescence, many secondary students with autism spectrum disorder engage in limited positive social interactions with peers.”

According to their article, previous research has shown that positive peer relationships impact “students’ success in school, acceptance among peers, sense of belonging, and overall well-being.” In addition, “adolescents have reported friends to be the most significant factor influencing quality of life.”

However, previous studies have also demonstrated that secondary students with autism “spend significantly more time in solitary activities and less time in cooperative activities at school when compared to their peers” and that “youth with ASD have fewer friends, lower frequency of contact with peers outside of school, shorter duration of friendships, and lower level of reciprocity in friendships.”

Peer network interventions have shown promise for alleviating isolation that students with autism may experience in high school. The authors write that “peer networks promote social skill development through observational peer learning and increased social interaction with peers by providing scheduled opportunities for students to interact.”

When Sreckovic, Hume, and Able examined the effects of a peer network intervention implemented with high school students with autism, the findings revealed that peer networks are indeed effective at increasing social interactions of high school students with autism—and that their results offer “preliminary support for the use of peer networks to reduce rates of bullying victimization.” The authors call for new research to explore other settings outside of K–12 where peer network interventions can be effective.

**[abstract and full article](#)**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9130](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9130)

**[FPG’s autism projects](#)**

[fpg.unc.edu/learn-more-about-autism-fpg](http://fpg.unc.edu/learn-more-about-autism-fpg)

## Spotlight

# The Research-to-Practice Pipeline

## *FPG Launches a New National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice*

The Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM) began with a simple idea. An FPG team had just published its 2014 comprehensive report about the most effective, evidence-based practices for use with children and youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), but the field didn't yet have an authoritative resource that showed how to use each of the very practices that the research was backing.

As a result, FPG's autism experts began designing AFIRM online instruction to teach the step-by-step process of planning for, using, and monitoring each of the report's evidence-based practices. Free learning modules would include engaging case examples, audio and video clips, and interactive assessments that would provide feedback. Supplemental materials and handouts would also be available to download.

Through these resources, users could learn key components of the evidence-based practices, including the various approaches that addressed specific behaviors and skills of learners with ASD. Each AFIRM module also would offer an option to earn a certificate for professional development credits and licensure requirements.

In June 2015, thanks to support from the Office of Special Education Programs in the U.S. Department of Education, AFIRM went live, and anyone with internet access could view the first two free modules



Kara Hume



on “Peer-Mediated Instruction and Intervention” and “Prompting.”

The AFIRM team—which includes principal investigator Sam Odom, co-principal investigator Ann Cox, and research scientist Ann Sam—has now developed user-friendly modules for 17 evidence-based practices, with more currently underway. Since that first day online two years ago, AFIRM’s instruction has netted over 3 million page views from more than 100,000 people in dozens of countries around the globe. Online visitors have logged 70,000 cumulative hours of professional development and worked toward 30,000 AFIRM certificates.

As families and practitioners quickly took to the modules, the FPG team’s report on evidence-based practices also helped guide North Carolina legislators who were drafting a new law to extend health care insurance to cover proven practices for use with people with autism.

“This could set a precedent in the nation for a more expanded view of evidence-based services that could be funded by insurance,” said Odom, shortly after then-Governor McCrory signed the bill into law.

Under the legislation, qualifying health benefit plans now must cover screening and treatment of ASD, including “Adaptive Behavioral Treatment” therapies, which the new law defines as research-based “behavioral and developmental interventions that systematically manage instructional and environmental factors or the consequences of behavior.”

Odom said that the widespread impact of both the 2014 report and AFIRM’s free instruction led FPG to design and launch the new National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice.

FPG advanced research scientist Kara Hume, who directs the Clearinghouse, said her team will systematically review new studies in order to update the field more often on the latest and best evidence-based practices for use with children and youth with ASD. The Clearinghouse also will establish a system of review that will facilitate annual updates.

Hume said that not only would the new National Clearinghouse develop necessary structures to provide ongoing updates of the most reliable evidence, but she and her team plan to further broaden the range of people with ASD who can benefit from the latest science.

“As a field, we know very little about what interventions work best for older people with autism,” she said. “We’re hoping to identify funders to partner with us to expand our review in order to include research focusing on adults.”

ASD incurs an additional average lifetime cost of \$1.4–\$2.4 million per diagnosis, depending on the level of severity, but research suggests that early diagnosis and effective interventions can reduce that cost by two-thirds.

FPG’s research-to-practice pipeline is especially relevant, of course, in an era when more children are being diagnosed with autism.

“We’re catching them earlier, with better tools,” said Odom, “and these children need the right services.”

**support FPG’s National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice**

[go.unc.edu/AutismPractices](http://go.unc.edu/AutismPractices)

# Shaping Dialogue and Guiding Practice

*Bringing Research to Real-World Solutions*

FPG actively contributes knowledge and expertise to enhance the lives of children and their families at home and abroad. However, scientific study drives positive outcomes for children and families only when evidence-based practices find successful implementation, support, and maintenance. Therefore, many scientists and specialists at FPG have dedicated much of their service to spreading awareness and to traversing that well-known gap between research and practical application. The following stories sample some of the many initiatives from FPG that help marry evidence-based practices with real-world solutions for children and families.





Minister Tan Chuan-Jin (right)  
with FPG's Joe Sparling and  
Pam Winton



#### SINGAPORE DELEGATION ON EARLY LEARNING PROGRAMS VISITS FPG

A delegation from Singapore that included Mr. Tan Chuan-Jin, the country's Minister for Social and Family Development, traveled to Chapel Hill to meet with scientists at FPG about high-quality early learning programs. UNC Global joined FPG in welcoming the Singapore delegation, and several community organizations offered tours for the visitors of local early education programs.

"Harnessing the full potential of people is very important, and that is why we invest in early childhood development to nurture the next generation of Singaporeans," said Minister Tan Chuan-Jin. "We want to learn from U.S. experience in early childhood programs and how we can sustainably partner families and the community to best support our children."

Chih-Ing Lim, an advanced technical assistance specialist at FPG, organized the two-day visit. Before joining FPG, she served in Singapore as a preschool officer with the Ministry of Education, and she continues to work with various organizations in Singapore.

"The request to visit FPG came from Singapore's Early Childhood Development Agency, which

oversees their preschools and child care sector," Lim said. "The interest in FPG was sparked by an introduction to FPG's Abecedarian Project when a team from KK Women's and Children's Hospital in Singapore first visited FPG a couple of years ago."

Since its inception in the early 1970s, FPG's Abecedarian Project has become synonymous with positive, long-term effects of high-quality early care and education. According to Lim, FPG and the KK Hospital in Singapore created a memorandum of understanding in February 2015, and the hospital subsequently contacted FPG senior scientist emeritus Joe Sparling, the co-creator of the Abecedarian curriculum, to invite Sparling to provide training in Singapore.

"The main objectives of this trip were to understand the design and implementation of various early childhood programs, especially those that serve children and families in poverty in the United States," said Lim. "They wanted to hear about key success factors, how we've scaled up or adapted programs to meet the needs of local communities, and what challenges they might expect to face."

"It behooves us to do more on the early childhood front, specifically with lower-income families who



are vulnerable, through a new pilot program called KidSTART,” said Minister Tan Chuan-Jin. “Under this pilot, we can incorporate new ideas to enhance the resources and support for disadvantaged families for the development of their young children and to build strong parent-child bonds.”

Lim said that in addition to the Minister, the delegation included five officials from Singapore’s Ministry of Social and Family Development, including the Early Childhood Development Agency. FPG’s guests visited the Orange County Head Start and Early Head Start Programs, Pathways Elementary School in Hillsborough, and the Jordan Center in Raleigh.

Over the past decade, FPG has broadened its global reach through several partnerships, and people in 180 countries now use FPG resources.

“Given their commitment to and current excellence in education and early learning, we are honored to host the delegation from Singapore,” said Sam Odom, who has headed several individual FPG projects that included international collaborations. “As with all of our global collaborators, we will ‘get more than we give,’ in that learning about their systems of early learning will enrich the work we do here in the United States.”

Ronald Strauss, executive vice provost and chief international officer, noted that FPG’s collaborations are part of a broad University-wide engagement with Singapore.

“UNC has longstanding ties to organizations in Singapore and the National University of Singapore, and I’m pleased to see us collaborating on the important topic of early childhood education,” Strauss said.

#### **about Chih-Ing Lim**

[fpg.unc.edu/profiles/chih-ing-lim](http://fpg.unc.edu/profiles/chih-ing-lim)

#### **FPG SCIENTISTS PUBLISH THE NEW INFANT/TODDLER ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE**

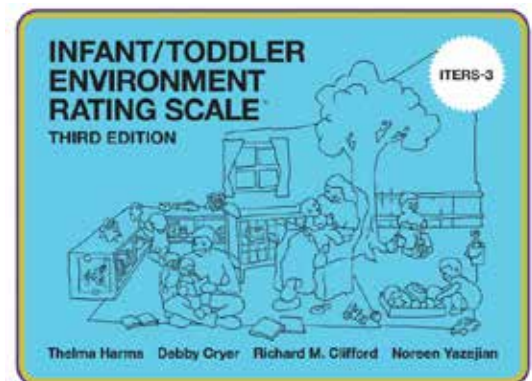
Building on extensive feedback from the field as well as vigorous new research on how best to support infant and toddler development and learning, a cadre of current and former FPG experts have revised and updated the widely used *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale*. Thelma Harms, Debbie Cryer, Dick Clifford, and Noreen Yazejian authored the third edition of the scale, which focuses on the full range of needs of infants and toddlers and provides a framework for improving program quality.

The “ITERS-3” also assesses both environmental provisions and teacher-child interactions that affect the broad developmental milestones of infants and toddlers, including: language, cognitive, social-emotional and physical development, as well as health and safety.

FPG’s experts designed the ITERS-3 for statewide and district-wide Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS), which assess and depict the level of quality in early care and education settings and in after-school settings. The ITERS-3 also will be an essential resource for continuous quality improvement, program evaluation, teacher self-evaluation, monitoring by agency staff, and teacher training programs.

#### ***Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition***

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9128](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9128)





The panel of federal experts at FPG's 2017 Inclusion Institute

#### THE NATIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSION INSTITUTE STREAMS LIVE

With an audience once again testing the limits of the capacity of UNC's Friday Center, for the first time in its 17-year history, FPG's National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute live-streamed its opening day events.

The Inclusion Institute is the field's premier educational opportunity for anyone involved in the care and education of young children with special needs in inclusive settings. Every year the popular three-day conference sells out quickly.

This year's online visitors could experience the Institute starting with the welcome from Pam Winton, former chair of the Institute, and Tracey West, the current chair, who discussed the state of inclusion and outlined the events to follow over the next three days.

Janice Fialka followed with her keynote address, *The Unusual is NOT Impossible: Why Stories Matter to Building Partnerships*. Fialka—parent, poet, storyteller, social worker, and advocate—discussed how unusual challenges provide unique opportunities to discover creative ways to support one another and children with delays and disabilities. She shared the story of her family's quest to shift the unusual into the possible as they raised and supported their 32-year-old son, who has an intellectual disability—and who delivered the keynote address at the 2013 Inclusion Institute.

Winton also moderated the highly popular annual panel of national experts, whose discussion reflected this year's theme of *Trusting Partnerships in a Time of Change*. Officials from federal agencies and national early childhood professional organizations shared information on early childhood directions and initiatives related to inclusion and to supporting children with disabilities and their families.

#### National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute

[inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu](http://inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu)

#### keynote address (video)

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9059](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9059)

#### NEW "PARTNERSHIPS FOR INCLUSION" WEBINAR SERIES LAUNCHES

Over the past year, the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning (DTL), with support from the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, released four webinars that comprised the new "Partnerships for Inclusion" Webinar Series.

FPG is a primary partner with national nonprofit ZERO TO THREE on the DTL, a new center to im-

prove outcomes for children and to support professional development systems for childcare providers.

“The National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning will bring research-based solutions to real-world settings for children and the people who care for and educate them,” said senior research scientist Allison Metz, FPG’s principal investigator on the project, when the project launched in 2016. “The Center will create resources, provide training, and offer technical assistance to early childhood programs, specialists, and lead agencies.”

Co-principal investigator Pamela J. Winton, longtime chair of FPG’s National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute, said at the time that FPG’s longtime commitment to supporting the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings would fuel a key part of the DTL’s mission. “FPG has a lengthy, proven track record of training, technical assistance, and research that ignites and strengthens inclusive services for children who have a wide range of abilities.”

Research has long demonstrated that high-quality inclusion benefits children with and without disabilities, and that non-inclusive environments can impact learning negatively.

The DTL’s free webinars focus on essential features of high quality inclusion. The first in the series, *Ensuring Access to High Quality Evaluations and Services*, uses a joint policy statement on inclusion to define access as “providing a wide range of activities and environments for every child by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development.” Federal leaders addressed screening, referral, evaluation, and the eligibility process for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act services, as well as



resources available for these processes. Participants also learned about Response to Intervention and its relationship to screening, evaluation, and referral—and more.

The DTL’s next three webinars included *Supporting Participation for all Children*, *Collaboration with Families and Other Partners*, and *Supporting the Early Childhood Workforce to Implement High Quality Inclusion Practices*.

Planners designed the webinars to benefit a wide-ranging audience: Head Start directors, disability coordinators, and mental health consultants; local preschool disability coordinators; Pre-K specialists and early interventionists; child care technical assistance specialists; higher education faculty in two-year and four-year early childhood programs; and State Part C and 619 coordinators. FPG archives the webinars, which are free and available for public use.

### **The Partnership for Inclusion Webinar Series**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8867](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8867)





**FPG'S MARY RUTH COLEMAN AUTHORS OP-  
ED ON SUPPORTING GIFTED STUDENTS OF ALL  
BACKGROUNDS AND ABILITIES**

In an op-ed for the *Raleigh News & Observer*, FPG senior scientist emerita Mary Ruth Coleman explained the importance of focusing on inequities in the placement of bright students from low-income homes in programs intended to challenge students identified as academically and intellectually gifted.

Coleman's research has focused on students with exceptional learning needs, in particular, students with learning disabilities and students with gifts. She has directed several FPG projects, including Project U-STARS~PLUS (Using Science, Talents, and Abilities to Recognize Students ~ Promoting Learning for Under-Represented Students) and Project ACCESS (Achievement in Content and Curriculum for Every Student's Success). This past year, she received the *Romaine P. Mackie Award for Leadership* from the Council for Exceptional Children and the *Ann Harrison Service Award* from East Carolina University.

Coleman's op-ed was in response to a series that the *Raleigh News & Observer* and the *Charlotte Observer* had run jointly, which focused, as Coleman wrote, on "persistent inequities in the placement of bright, low-income students in programs intended to challenge students identified as academically and intellectually gifted." She commended both newspapers for correctly arguing "that our failure

to meet the needs of these students shortchanges them individually and also the state and nation, which depend on the success of all— regardless of race, ethnicity, or income level."

Coleman continued by noting the need inside and beyond North Carolina to address multiple aspects of educational systems. "Education in North Carolina and elsewhere remains a work in progress," she said, "whether the focus is on students who struggle to master basic skills or those who are outpacing their peers."

Coleman also characterized achievement gaps across student populations as "an injustice and a challenge to schools everywhere."

"These gaps are also a test of political will for individual communities, our state, and our nation," she wrote. "Success in closing these gaps demands committed leadership, sufficient resources, effective strategies, and caring and capable educators, as well as strong partnerships with families."

**full op-ed and related reading**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9157](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9157)



### FPG'S XIMENA FRANCO DISCUSSES THE BENEFITS OF BILINGUALISM FOR THE "LATINO EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT PARTNERSHIP"

FPG research scientist Ximena Franco spoke in April at the largest fundraiser of the year for the Latino Educational Achievement Partnership (LEAP). She discussed the benefits of bilingualism, as well as her work at FPG with dual-language learners and immersion schools.

Children who are learning more than one language are a large and growing group in early childhood education programs, and Franco has more than 10 years of experience in clinical, life-span developmental psychology, and applied research—most of which stems from working with ethnically diverse children and families within clinic, school, and community settings. She is especially interested in the study of socio-emotional development of preschool-aged dual-language learners.

Her recent work includes creation of free online training that provides an overview of the cognitive, social-emotional, and language development of dual-language learners, including examples of how early childhood professionals can support children. With FPG's Nicole Gardner-Neblett, Franco developed videos and reflection assignments to teach professionals how to identify ways to support dual-language learners in their own care settings.

Franco's experience dovetails with LEAP's mission to "enhance children's literacy with developmentally-appropriate instruction and support." The program originally began in 2008 when a single attendee at St. Philip's Episcopal Church started providing English-as-a-Second-Language tutoring to adults at another Episcopal church in Durham, North Carolina. That first volunteer subsequently persuaded other parishioners to join her, and two



Ximena Franco

years later, church members requested that volunteers focus on school-aged children.

Since it began, the program has expanded across three churches, and over the ensuing two years volunteers tutored children twice each week, specifically targeting literacy skills. By 2012, LEAP had opened its first pre-k class, convened a board of directors, and began hiring staff. In partnership with the East Durham Children's Initiative, LEAP's second pre-k opened in 2015.

Franco said that although the fundraising event has passed, LEAP continues to seek additional community support through volunteers and donations.

#### about Ximena Franco

[fpg.unc.edu/node/539](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/539)

## FIRSTSCHOOL HELPS TEACHERS HEAR EVERY STUDENT'S VOICE

Over 11,000 pre-kindergarten to third-grade students have directly benefitted from a new online course that FPG's FirstSchool team has developed for teachers and administrators. The course, which researchers piloted in North Carolina's Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools and later offered statewide in Minnesota, provides strategies to capitalize on the educational value of increasing opportunities for students to speak in class.

FirstSchool principal investigator Sharon Ritchie said experience in the field, as well as data the project has collected, have shown that teachers rarely allow children to talk in class.

"Children listen to teachers and, when they have a chance to talk at all, it's often in very short utterances," Ritchie explained. "For instance, at the front of the room, a well-intentioned teacher directs students' attention to the figure of a plant on the board, pointing to the plant parts and only asking students to name them out loud. We've seen this sort of scenario a hundred times. It's especially common in schools that principally serve students of color and those who come from less-advantaged homes."

Ritchie said that no matter what district, state, or grade across the pre-k to third-grade age span, the data reveal that meaningful conversations between teachers and students are limited to an average of 28 total minutes per day—and that intentional vocabulary development is almost non-existent. "This is despite research showing that oral language and vocabulary development are strong predictors of third-grade outcomes," she added.

Sam Oertwig, a scientist on the project, said at times it has seemed as if "a culture of silence" pervades classrooms.

"There are many reasons for this creeping silence," Oertwig said. "Some teachers feel pressure from administrators who direct them to stay on schedule with the curriculum, while others fear never regaining students' attention if they start letting them talk. There's a mindset that suggests that silence and compliance are the mark of a good teacher."

According to Oertwig, however, silent classrooms are cause for concern.

"Too often children of color and those who come from less advantaged homes are relegated to memorizing isolated facts and doing what they are told," she explained. "They don't learn how to tell their stories or articulate their experiences. They don't learn how to use language as a tool to craft an argument or explain their thinking. New vocabulary doesn't feel relevant to them, and working together with a friend to solve a challenging problem isn't part of their experience."

With a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and funding awarded by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the FirstSchool team developed an online course in order to foster more in-class opportunities for oral language.

Gisele Crawford, a social research specialist on the project, said the FirstSchool team developed course content, activities, and quizzes that draw on research and lessons they had learned from thousands of hours the team has spent in pre-k to third-grade classrooms.

"Our focus is on letting the children talk," Crawford said. "Oral language opportunities contribute to equitable education experiences, particularly for children of color."

The first participants from Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools included a central office administrator, two principals, and several teachers across each pre-k to third-grade level. Leaders, staff, and



students at the participating schools were each comprised of diverse populations.

After the pilot course's completion, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) contacted FirstSchool, and, based on feedback from the pilot and in collaboration with MDE, FirstSchool revised the course and added supports. MDE hired school personnel to serve as regional liaisons, supporting course participants in person and online.

Adam Holland, a researcher who evaluated the course's impact, said that throughout the course teachers worked on pre-planning higher-order thinking questions, having sustained conversations with children, asking children to explain their reasoning, and building classroom community through morning and afternoon meetings, among other strategies.

"Research supports prioritizing communication in these ways," said Holland. "These kinds of practices can change the classroom atmosphere dramatically."

Holland's evaluation showed that the longer teachers participated in the course, the more likely they were to teach children new vocabulary.

"We found that teachers' dispositions can be changed with few resources and little time," he added. "Teachers' responses suggested they valued student expression and vocabulary development more—and that they also saw data as more important after their participation in the course."

For example, teachers reported the course offered "great strategies" and, as a result, that they were "allowing students to communicate more and probe their thoughts as well as engage in storytelling."

Another teacher said she especially valued one of the course's core principles. "I hope that the phrase 'the one doing the talking is the one learning' will stick with me throughout my teaching career."

"I didn't know what I didn't know," said Dewey Schara, principal of Neveln School in Minnesota's Austin Public Schools. Schara took the online course as part of a series on leadership training and noted the importance of access to current research.

Neveln teacher Maria Mickelson said that such research supports allowing her students to speak in class.

"My students' oral language and vocabulary are key predictors of future successes," she said. "So I'm giving my students more opportunities to express themselves."

Dawn Pope, a speech language pathologist in the Austin school district, said that insights from the course guide her instruction. "It really focused me in making sure that while students were in my room, they were able to practice the oral language targets that I was trying to teach them."

Educators also said the course made them more aware of how their colleagues were teaching.

"When I see other teachers' work or hear what they are doing in their classrooms, I am now noticing the ways they incorporate communication to deepen



learning,” said one teacher. “And I am inspired to try these or similar ideas in my own classroom.”

According to Holland, not only does FirstSchool’s online course deliver critical information to pre-k to third-grade educators, but it does so cost effectively.

“We’ve directly impacted over 10,000 children, extending our reach far beyond what we would have been able to do with in-person professional development,” Holland explained. “These children will complete third grade with improved skills around vocabulary and with having had more opportunities to collaborate with their peers around learning. They’ll be better readers and better learners, allowing them to take advantage of more opportunities in school and later in life.”

Sharon Ritchie, now a 12-year veteran of FirstSchool, said that bringing such change to schools is difficult.

“Even when teachers are ready to learn new ways of teaching, resources in education are strained,” she said. “Education agencies often do not have the funds or the time to put the right opportunities in front of the right educators.”

However, she added, teachers will go to great lengths for their students.

“FirstSchool always finds educators who are willing to advocate on behalf of their students,” said Ritchie. “They become articulate about the research behind their practices, find ways of meeting school and district expectations and providing rich experiences for their students—and they develop their own skill and knowledge base in order to be more effective in their roles.”

### **FirstSchool**

[firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/](https://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/)

### **REPORT RECOMMENDS TEACHING SELF-REGULATION IN SCHOOLS**

A new federal report recommends that schools emphasize building children’s “self-regulation” skills in order to increase opportunities for student success in a number of areas. The recommendation is one of several in the report, the fourth in a series on self-regulation research and practice from the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Through several studies, researchers have zeroed in on the importance of self-regulation skills, which allow children to manage their thoughts and feelings, control impulses, and problem-solve.

“Self-regulation affects wellbeing across the lifespan, from mental health and emotional wellbeing to academic achievement, physical health, and socioeconomic success,” said Desiree Murray, FPG’s associate director of research and the lead author of the report. “Unfortunately, prolonged or pronounced stress and adversity, including poverty and trauma, can delay children’s self-regulation development.”

Murray said the good news is research shows that interventions can improve outcomes for children from backgrounds of risk and adversity. Her research team, which includes Duke Center for Child and Family Policy’s Katie Rosanbalm and Christina Christopoulos, recommend embedding a focus on self-regulation in schools and other settings.

“For optimal self-regulation, a child or adolescent needs to have a full bucket of skills and supports on which to draw,” Murray said. “There are two crucial periods when children are developing their self-regulation skills the most—in early childhood and early adolescence—when teachers and parents can help them build the skills they need for the rest of their lives.”

Murray said many self-regulation interventions are designed for use in schools.

“Schools are an ideal place for interventions because

there is opportunity to build skills in a cohesive approach from preschool through secondary school and because of the potential power of shared learning with peers,” she said. “Interventions in schools can impact the culture and climate in a way that benefits all students.”

According to the report, strengthening self-regulation can be thought of like teaching literacy. Similar to literacy, self-regulation develops with simpler skills first, which build upon one another.

Murray and her team outline a comprehensive approach to the development of self-regulation, which includes teaching skills through repeated practice and frequent feedback in a supportive context. They suggest providing universal interventions across childhood and into early adulthood, with a strong emphasis on teaching caregivers (including teachers and other school staff) how to support children. She said the keys to this support are warm and responsive relationships, paired with positive discipline and consistency.

The report also recommends providing more intensive intervention to children who are experiencing self-regulation difficulties. In 12 elementary schools,



Murray’s team is currently delivering and studying a small-group pull-out program teaching socio-emotional skills from “The Incredible Years™.”

“Some children and youth may need additional supports, such as those provided by ‘Incredible Years’™ programs,” Murray said. “These and other interventions may be particularly beneficial for youth who live in adversity, increasing children’s resilience to the negative effects of stress.”

Murray’s team based their report’s recommendations on two comprehensive reviews of research. “We capitalized on important recent findings from developmental neuroscience, and looked at a wide range of interventions that have been evaluated in the last 25 years,” she said.

The Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation in the DHHS’s Administration for Children and Families commissioned the report. Murray and Rosanbalm currently are developing a series of briefs to support use of their recommendations for different age groups, including new professional development for practitioners in the field.

#### ***Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress Report 4: Implications for Programs and Practice***

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8713](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8713)





#### FPG'S RACE, CULTURE, AND ETHNICITY COMMITTEE LAUNCHES PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Co-chaired this year by advanced technical assistance specialist Betsy Ayankoya and advanced research scientist Allison De Marco, FPG's long-standing Race, Culture, and Ethnicity Committee has continued to elevate awareness, promote dialogue, and facilitate a positive work climate, while fostering the development of culturally attuned and culturally relevant work.

Members of the committee have joined other FPG strategic groups to strengthen collaborations. The committee also has held recent workshops on the impact of implicit bias on decision-making, recognizing the need for cultural competence, anti-harassment bystander training, and more. During the past year, the committee also created a professional development program that provides funding for FPG staff to attend trainings with a priority on cultural humility, racial equity, and diversity awareness.

Most recently, the committee kicked off a public awareness campaign about racial equity with popular infographics that have netted thousands of online downloads and thousands more impressions through social media. *Racial (In)Equity: An Infographic* was the inaugural offering in the committee's series; *Racial Inequities in School Discipline* soon followed, showing how black students, especially boys, are disproportionately more likely than their white peers to face multiple suspensions from pre-school. The committee also has offered a popular tip sheet called "A Brief Primer on Racial Equity."

**FPG's Race, Culture, and Ethnicity Committee**  
[go.unc.edu/RacialEquity](http://go.unc.edu/RacialEquity)

### FPG WINS NEW GRANT FOR THE STATE IMPLEMENTATION AND SCALING UP OF EVIDENCE- BASED PRACTICES CENTER

A new five-year award from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services will enable FPG to build on the work of its seminal center on State Implementation and Scaling Up of Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP). Over the last decade, the SISEP Center has supported state and local education agencies as they have worked toward building their capacity for obtaining improved outcomes for students with disabilities, their families, and educators.

"We're thrilled to continue and to expand upon the past ten years of work of the SISEP Center," said Caryn Ward, the center's current co-principal investigator, who will head the project through its next grant. "SISEP has strengthened our education systems by supporting our educators in making a difference for students and families."

Ward said that as a longtime cornerstone in FPG's National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) portfolio, SISEP has informed the sciences of implementation, improvement, and scaling.

"The center will continue this work by further developing the capacity of state and local leaders to build aligned and coherent infrastructures that support effective implementation of evidence-based practices with fidelity," she explained. "This helps ensure that outcomes for students and families are realized."

SISEP's work has been critical to contributing to the development and operationalizing of NIRN's Active Implementation Frameworks for use within the field of K-12 education. These frameworks outline the practices needed to create and refine the structures and conditions necessary to successfully implement and sustain evidence-based practices.

"A critical piece of our work will include validating and refining our implementation capacity measures," said FPG senior implementation specialist Dale Cusumano, who will serve as co-principal investigator on the new grant. "These measures guide not only allocation of supports and action planning but also our ongoing learning about capacity development within and across education systems."

Ward said SISEP will work over the next five years with state education agencies and their respective educational service agencies, local educational agencies, and charter management organizations to help create the conditions necessary for educators to make full and sustained use of instructional and leadership practices that evidence supports. The Center also will work collaboratively with other Department-funded technical assistance centers and organizations that prepare district superintendents to strengthen the alignment of policy and practice and that further develop state infrastructure.

#### SISEP

[sisep.fpg.unc.edu](http://sisep.fpg.unc.edu)





Allison Metz

## NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH NETWORK PARTNERS WITH THE CENTRE FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICES TO DEVELOP SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION SPECIALISTS

Implementation science now has a defined set of skills and competencies essential for building a professional workforce to support the translation and use of evidence in practice and policy. In collaboration with the Centre for Effective Services (CES), FPG's National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) recently debuted the *Global Implementation Specialist Practice Profile* at the Global Implementation Conference in Toronto.

"This is the first set of competencies for implementation practitioners," said NIRN director Allison Metz. "It garnered a lot of positive attention at the conference, with participants interested in building a workforce to support implementation efforts. With our plans to collaborate with global partners to vet and build consensus for these implementation specialist competencies, it will have a major impact on the field."

According to Katie Burke, senior manager at CES, an intermediary organization based in Ireland and Northern Ireland, "the field of implementation science has identified key variables, strategies, frameworks, and conceptual models that help systems and communities adapt and sustain change. However, building the capacity to use implementation science requires much more than mere knowledge of it."

"This capacity building requires our implementation specialists to have particular skills and competencies," she said. "Our new profile describes these skills and competencies in terms of philosophical principles, which guide the work of implementation specialists, and as essential functions, which explain a range of activities they undertake."



Laura Louison, associate director of NIRN, said the implementation science principles undergirding the *Global Implementation Specialist Practice Profile* draw on the work of NIRN, more broadly of FPG and the UNC community, and global partners such as CES. Implementation science focuses on effectively using evidence in real-world practice settings and policy contexts.

“By using these competencies, Implementation Specialists can strategically use evidence more quickly, widely, and efficiently in complicated systems,” Louison explained. “This benefits more people, and it does so more immediately.”

Five principles provide a foundation for implementation scientist-practitioners: empathy, curiosity, commitment, using science to inform decisions, and an embrace of transdisciplinary approaches. The NIRN and CES teams also categorized the essential functions of implementation specialists, including supporting the active involvement of stakeholders through all stages of the process, facilitating regular feedback that powers ongoing improvement, and promoting sustainability.

Not surprisingly, implementation specialists must be willing to wear many hats. Among their numerous and varied roles, they create spaces for new ideas to emerge, connect otherwise disconnected individuals and groups, and even address power imbalances. They synthesize diverse perspectives of thought, schedule meetings, clarify expectations, help manage risks—and much more.

Sustainability, of course, is a critical objective of their work.

“The field views an intervention or approach as sustainable when its core elements continue, as originally intended, after initial support for implementation has ended,” said Caryn Ward, NIRN associate director. “Implementation Specialists must develop the capacity to maintain these core elements with fidelity.”

This means that implementation specialists must be able to cultivate leadership and enable what the NIRN/CES team calls “participatory problem-solving.”

“One area of our core activities that supports participatory problem solving requires that when complex challenges come without easy solutions, implementation specialists must help stakeholders generate alternatives, supporting a free-flowing conversation that is open to all points of view—a discussion that suspends judgment,” Ward said.

Personal interactions and connections are crucial to sustainability. According to the *Global Implementation Specialist Practice Profile*, the implementation specialist’s job description explicitly includes a charge to “grow and sustain diverse, authentic, respectful, and trusting relationships with stakeholders” in order to support change efforts.

Metz said NIRN and CES are currently forming international partnerships with other organizations to conduct “usability testing” of the profile, piloting it with implementation scientist-practitioners in a range of global contexts. “We want to ensure these skills and competencies are relevant, understandable, helpful, and measurable.”

Metz also said that having a tried and tested profile of core competencies will be additionally useful for universities, including UNC, as they consider creating or adapting graduate degree and certificate programs in implementation science.

“These principle-based functions and activities can inform how best to tailor a curriculum for the next generation of implementation specialists,” she said.

### ***The Global Implementation Specialist Practice Profile***

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9178](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9178)

## NIRN CO-PUBLISHES RESULTS OF SEMINAL PARTNERSHIP TO IMPLEMENT EVIDENCE-BASED CHILD WELFARE IN NYC

In 2011, the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS), in partnership with Casey Family Programs, began introducing 11 evidence-based and evidence-informed practice models into its preventive services. This initiative

was the largest and most diverse continuum of evidence-based and evidence-informed preventive programs in any child welfare jurisdiction in the country.

ACS also decided early in the process to utilize implementation science as a framework for the initiative. As a result, FPG's National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) became an integral part of the initiative, helping to operationalize an

implementation science framework.

The work that ACS embarked on was pioneering in scope for the field of child welfare. By 2015, an evidence-based model served almost 5,000 families annually, representing one in every four families the ACS preventive system served.

This year, NIRN and Casey Family Programs published *Implementing Evidence-Based Child Welfare: The New York City Experience*, which shows how to successfully integrate evidence-based models into daily practice and describes the outcomes of ACS's preventive services.

### ***Implementing Evidence-Based Child Welfare: The New York City Experience***

[fpg.unc.edu/node/9273](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/9273)

## FPG'S "NORTH CAROLINA IMPLEMENTATION CAPACITY FOR TRIPLE P" PROJECT HOSTS REGIONAL WORKSHOPS

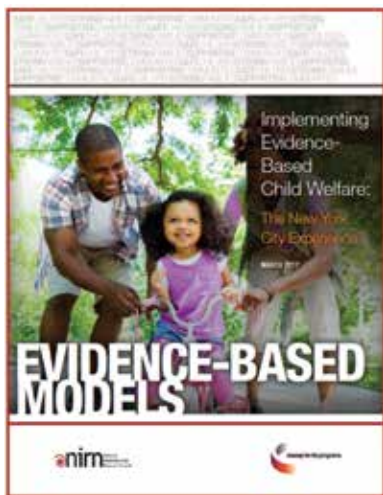
The North Carolina Implementation Capacity for Triple P (NCIC-TP) project hosted five regional half-day workshops across North Carolina this past year. The NCIC-TP team met with approximately 200 stakeholders and technical assistance providers in Boone, Charlotte, Elizabeth City, Greenville, and Raleigh.

The NCIC-TP project is a collaborative effort to help counties across the state successfully and sustainably implement the evidence-based Triple P-Positive Parenting Program system of interventions. The project began in 2014 with a two-year implementation evaluation of Triple P in Cabarrus and Mecklenburg counties. Data from that evaluation, along with emerging evidence from implementation science and best practice, are the foundation of the information, learning, and implementation support resources that NCIC-TP offers to North Carolina counties interested in or currently scaling-up Triple P.

The Triple P-Positive Parenting Program offers evidence-based parenting and family support strategies designed to reach all families for community-wide impact. Triple P is currently being implemented in 25 countries around the world.

### **NCIC-TP**

[ncic.fpg.unc.edu](http://ncic.fpg.unc.edu)



# 30 Years of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education

*An Interview with FPG's Joan Danaher and Christina Kasprzak*

FPG's Trohanis Technical Assistance Projects, named for technical assistance pioneer Pat Trohanis, have provided integral support for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education—programs that annually enrich the lives of hundreds of thousands of children with disabilities in every U.S. state and territory. Thanks to a new five-year award from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services in the Department of Education, FPG will continue and build on this work to support programs that serve young children with disabilities and their families.

The passage of Public Law 99-457 in 1986 established Part C and mandated Part B: Section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These programs have helped to improve child and family outcomes while defending the rights of young children with disabilities and the families of those children. On the occasion of the legislation's 30th anniversary, FPG's Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA Center) director Christina Kasprzak and associate director Joan Danaher talked about FPG's role in supporting the implementation of PL 99-457.

## THE PASSAGE OF PUBLIC LAW 99-457

**Joan Danaher:** Before he came to FPG, former director Jim Gallagher was an important influence in

federal policy for early intervention and early childhood special education, including the first federally funded demonstration projects and technical assistance projects to support them. At FPG, Jim mentored graduate students in policy development and analysis, and FPG also became a locus for national technical assistance projects under the leadership of Pat Trohanis. Barbara Smith, one of Jim's students who is now at the University of Colorado Denver, was instrumental in developing policy options to expand the early childhood provisions of the law. Working with the Council for Exceptional Children, those ideas were funneled through congressional committee staffers to the legislators who passed the law.

When PL 99-457 was passed, FPG was already positioned to support it after fifteen years of experience providing technical assistance to local and state programs.

**Christina Kasprzak:** The Trohanis TA Projects have a long history of supporting early intervention and preschool special education—45 years and counting—and Pat Trohanis was an early innovator here at FPG. For many years, he designed and delivered TA that focused on building effective systems and implementing effective practices. He was a brilliant leader. He understood people, and he understood systems. He also had a passion for young children with disabilities and their families. His work supported programs nationally and internationally,





Christina Kasprzak

bringing recognition and support for systems for young children with disabilities.

**Joan Danaher:** At the time that PL 99-457 was passed, FPG was supporting states in planning statewide services for birth to school-aged children with disabilities through the OSEP-funded State Technical Assistance Resource Team [START], which Gloria Harbin directed. The new law created the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers and added a disincentive for states not to serve all children 3-5 years old with disabilities. Because of these changes to the early childhood programs, OSEP [the federal Office of Special Education Programs] ended the START TA project and issued a call for a new national early childhood TA center that would promote the development of comprehensive, coordinated interagency systems of family-centered services for children birth through age 5. But services for infants and toddlers with disabilities were different from the preschool Special Education program. The governor of a state could assign the lead agency for their Early Intervention program, and some federal requirements meant it was a much different animal from preschool Special Ed. So, it wasn't easy within states for services for infants and toddlers to sync up with services for preschool-aged children.



Joan Danaher

Under Pat Trohanis, promoting a new seamless system of services for children birth to age 5—between two agencies for different age groups—became the responsibility of FPG's new center, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System [NECTAS]. It was an exciting time for having the opportunity to get early intervention institutionalized, but it was very challenging—and we really had to hit the ground running.



## THE LEGACY OF TA AT FPG

**Joan Danaher:** Our technical assistance projects have responded to the evolution of the federal early childhood programs, and we have a perspective on the complete system implementation, starting from local services and demonstration projects and outreach. If you take each aspect of what we have helped clients with over the years—from the Technical Assistance Development System [created in 1971] and START, then, NECTAS and then NECTAC [the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, which evolved into the present-day ECTA Center]—some of the same ideas and concepts are refined and enhanced through a spiraling of sophistication, complexity, and an expanding evidence base. The evolution of the TA centers through NECTAC is described in a 2009 article, as is this notion of increasing complexity.<sup>1</sup>

For example, in the early days, we were doing TA for demonstration projects and helping them document their models in order to replicate them in other places. Today we approach it through implementation science, which gets to that same core of providing a service to the client that is replicated effectively. Services have to be institutionalized, through “systems drivers,” like infrastructure for personnel and finance and governance and all of those aspects that we addressed three decades ago at a much more basic level. Yet, because we have marched down that road in each succeeding generation of projects, we are now seeing the implementation of the law more completely.

**Christina Kasprzak:** The Trohanis TA Projects have contributed to the field by defining what it means to deliver effective TA. Effective TA is grounded in social science. It is grounded in the questions *What outcomes are we trying to accomplish?* and *What changes can we make that will result in improvement?* Effective TA takes

an outcome-orientation based on program evaluation, addressing questions like *Which services are producing intended results?* *Who is benefiting?* and *Where are improvements needed?*

Effective TA is also grounded in systems change literature, adult learning principles, and shares concepts with improvement science, and, in more recent years, it has incorporated the learnings from implementation science.

From 45 years of TA we also have learned some principles of effective TA. We’ve learned that TA providers must offer a broad range of TA strategies and different levels of intensity in order to effectively respond to the diverse and unique needs of clients. We’ve learned that to be effective, we must build and maintain trusting relationships. Clients must have confidence that their TA providers understand the context of their work, have the content expertise to address their needs, and will provide timely, evidence-based information and resources. Our experience has seen that effective TA requires TA providers and clients to work collaboratively and that successful improvement efforts are built on existing strengths and initiatives. Over the years, we’ve provided technical assistance to all 60 states and territories—helping them build their systems of service. Our TA projects have supported that evolution from the early stages of establishing a system to serve children with disabilities, to supporting their access to services, and then to focusing on improving the quality of services and outcomes for children and families.

**Joan Danaher:** We’ve helped write state policies—guidance for practitioners and how children are served—helped with personnel systems issues, and much more. Over time, the evolution from the emphasis on access to services to quality of services to improving outcomes from services means



it's not good enough anymore only to get children in the door. Today, the question is: *What kinds of services and how high is the quality and what are the outcomes?* This is what has to be the measure of success for the law. Not just getting the kids in the door and providing enough trained professionals—we want to see improved outcomes.

#### IMPACTS ON SYSTEMS, PRACTICES, AND CHILD AND FAMILY OUTCOMES

**Joan Danaher:** Over the years, we would always provide OSEP with documents concerning the implementation of the law in states. Those were summary kinds of documents—a look at what's going on—as well as survey information from the states about how and what was happening on that level. For a number of years, we produced annual yearbooks for part C and 619, almanacs that covered a lot of different topics about what the states were doing.

Staff here also participated in writing journal articles and other papers that congressional staff received, and Pat Trohanis provided testimony to congress. All of this would help OSEP and the administration formulate decisions about what changes they needed to address.

**Christina Kasprzak:** One area where we've impacted the field is around the measurement of child outcomes. Prior to 2004, some state Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education programs had individualized efforts to measure outcomes. The efforts that existed were disparate. Between 2004 and 2008, the Early Childhood Outcomes [ECO] Center and NECTAC collaborated with federal partners, state administrators, researchers, family members, practitioners and other partners to define outcomes for EI and ECSE, and to assist states in developing systems for measuring these outcomes. Lynne Kahn

was director of NECTAC and led our subcontract for the ECO Center, and Kathy Hebbeler was the director of ECO at SRI International. That work led to recommendations to the Office of Special Education Programs, which eventually became requirements for reporting outcomes.

We continued to provide TA through ECO, NECTAC, and now ECTA on collecting, reporting, and using child outcomes data. Today, there is nationally aggregatable data; there is usable data for program improvement efforts. The focus now is to improve data quality and use these data for program improvement. Our annual analysis shows a steady increase in the number of states meeting national criteria for data quality.

Another example of Trohanis TA impacts is summarized in a 2009 publication on long-term systems change.<sup>2</sup> The article describes our comprehensive plans with state EI and ECSE programs to improve systems, practices and outcomes. Systems issues included fiscal issues, political turnovers, personnel issues (including staff turnover), and other barriers that states deal with all the time.

At the end of our project, we analyzed 37 state plans to identify impacts on systems, as well as their practice and family-childhood outcomes. All plans showed state system-level impacts. Fifty-one percent of plans demonstrated practice changes, and in 35% we saw an actual change in improved outcomes for children and families. Those numbers increase to 67% and 44% when you take out plans that were not yet fully implemented.

More recently, the ECTA Center has developed a System Framework that describes the components and quality indicators for a high-quality system. It was developed using a 2-year collaborative process, because it was developed with national experts and



state partners and was field-tested in states. In a recent national survey, we found that 47 state EI and ECSE programs are using the framework. So we can see widespread efforts around evaluating EI/ECSE systems and planning for improvement using the ECTA System Framework.

**Joan Danaher:** The ECTA Center has an important focus on practice improvements, which includes supporting the DEC [Division for Early Childhood] Commissioners' work on Recommended Practices, as well as developing materials that support state and local implementation of the DEC Recommended Practices. Through our cooperative agreement with OSEP, we've developed a suite of products for practitioners and families to learn how to apply the DEC Recommended Practices to developmental interventions in everyday routines and settings involving children and families. All of the products and resources are free, including videos starring "aRPy," an animated spokesperson we created. And we've recognized the need to reach practitioners and professional development providers, in addition to state level personnel, with our products. We selected 16 experts across the country to serve as "ambassadors" to spearhead the use of the new recommended practices in their states. We hand-picked the ambassadors for their broad expertise and skills. They form a national cohort with knowledge of evidence-based practices, professional development and training, and their state's early childhood services and practitioner networks.

Not only will ambassadors collaborate with one another to develop and share strategies and resources, but each will develop and implement goals aligned with a state improvement effort. They'll also participate in designing, documenting, and making recommendations for subsequent groups as we continue to disseminate materials nationally.

**Christina Kasprzak:** Although we work with every state, we are working very intensively with four states in implementing and scaling up the DEC Recommended Practices. In that intensive work, we developed and are using a number of tools at the state level with state teams to look at benchmarks of quality, as well as looking in turn at local teams, using local benchmarks of quality. And, at the practice level, we're using observation skills to see what changes are happening in practices and child measures to capture changes at the individual level. In these four states we are documenting changes at the systems, practice, and child outcomes levels, and putting together case studies that illustrate the impacts of our TA.

I'm fortunate to have such a fabulous leadership team. Joan Danaher, Betsy Ayankoya, Megan Vinh, Robin Rooney, and Siobhan Colgan serve as leaders for the Trohanis TA Projects.

<sup>1</sup>Gallagher, J. J., Danaher, J. C., & Clifford, R. M. (2009). The evolution of the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 29(1), 7-23. doi:10.1177/0271121408330931

<sup>2</sup>Kahn, L., Hurth, J., Kasprzak, C. M., Diefendorf, M. J., Goode, S. E., & Ringwalt, S. S. (2009). The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center model for long-term systems change. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 29(1), 24-39. doi:10.1177/0271121409334039

### Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

<http://ectacenter.org>

# Projects

## *Our Work on Behalf of Young Children and their Families*

FPG is one of the nation's oldest and largest multidisciplinary centers devoted to research and its application on behalf of young children and their families. Over 300 researchers, implementation and technical assistance specialists, staff, and students worked on dozens of projects during the past year across seven major areas of emphasis: developmental disabilities; early care and education; physical and social health; professional development, technical assistance, and implementation science; public policy and evaluation; the international initiative; and racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity.

What follows is a compendium of the past year's active projects, through which FPG continues to enhance the lives of children and families.

A Family-Genetic Study of Autism and Fragile X Syndrome

A Study of Child Care Settings in Multiple Communities

Active and Ongoing Implementation Support for State and County Child Welfare Systems in California

Active Implementation Frameworks to Support Effective Implementation of Family Success Centers

Advanced Online Course in Foundations

An Efficacy Study of the School-Based National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder's Model

An Epidemiological and Longitudinal Study of Rural Child Literacy Trajectories

Analyzing the Impacts of Two Influential Early Childhood Programs on Participants Through Midlife

Blueprint for Implementing a Statewide System of Evidence-Based Professional Development for NC's Early Education and Care Workforce

Building Coaching Capacity for Smart Start of Forsyth County

Capacity Building and Evaluation to Support the Implementation of Healthy Places North Carolina

Center for IDEA Early Childhood Data Systems

Center on Secondary Education for Students With Autism Spectrum Disorder (CSESA)

Co-Creating the Conditions to Sustain the Use of Research Evidence in Public Child Welfare

Collaboration Between NCSI and SISEP Centers

Creating Professional Development Resources for Child Care Providers Working With Dual Language Learners

Early Childhood Development Secondary Data Analysis Project

Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

Early Education in Rural North Carolina

Early Life Stress and the Environmental Origins of Disease: A Population-Based Prospective Longitudinal Study of Children in Rural Poverty (ECHO)

Early Literacy Module Project in Singapore

Educare Follow-Up Studies

Effects of the Incredible Years™ Classroom and Teacher Combined Intervention on Preschool Children's Self Regulation and Academic Achievement

Evaluation of Shape NC Phase II

Evaluation of Supporting Change and Reform in Inclusive Personnel Preparation (SCRIPP)

Evaluation of the Head Start Designation Renewal System

Evaluation of the NC Pre-Kindergarten Program

Exploring Early Language and Executive Function in Deaf Preschoolers With Recent Cochlear Implants

Family Life Project Obesity Grant

FirstSchool Nevada Partnership

FirstSchool Online Education and Support: Minnesota Partnership

FirstSchool Support for Demonstration Classrooms

From Evaluation to Inquiry

Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Evaluation	Project to Provide Implementation Support for Permanency Innovations Initiative Grantees
IDEA Data Center	
Illinois QRIS Validation and Child Outcomes Study	Promoting the Use of Evidence-Based Practices for Children and Youth With Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Families in Saudi Arabia
Joint Attention Mediated Learning Intervention for Toddlers With Autism Spectrum Disorders and Their Families	Self-Regulation Skills for Success
Large Scale Psychometric Assessment of the ECERS-3	SISEP-NCDPI-OEL
Montana Maternal and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MECHV) Evaluation	State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-Based Practices (SISEP) Center
More Than Baby Talk: Improving Child Care Providers' Capacity to Promote Infant/Toddler Language and Communications	Strengthening Linked Leadership and Implementation Teams That Create a System of Support for Effective Implementation in Sacramento Child Protective Services
National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning	Stress Exposure and Immune Outcomes in Children
National Evaluation Partner for the Educare Learning Network Implementation Study	Stress, Self-Regulation, and Psychopathology in Middle Childhood
National Implementation Science Research Network's Active Implementation Model	Student Engagement: The Roles of Chaos, Self-Regulation, and Classroom Quality
New Jersey Department of Children and Families Evidence-Based Practices	Summarizing Abecedarian Over Time
NIRN Implementation Research: Wake County Public Schools	Targeted Reading Intervention NC Quest
North Carolina Early Learning Network	Technical Support to CDC EHDI Team on Part C Programs
North Carolina Family Survey Project	The Partners Project: Working Together to Enhance Inclusive Early Childhood Environments
North Carolina Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge Support	The Targeted Reading Intervention: Investigating the Efficacy of a Web-Based Early Reading Intervention Professional Development Program for K-1 English Learners
Online Module Development of Evidence-Based Practices for Learners With Autism Spectrum Disorder	Toddlers and Families Together: Addressing Early Core Features of Autism
Partnership in Using Implementation Science to Improve Implementation of Evidence-Based Home Visiting in Montana	Utilizing County Evaluation Findings to Build Implementation Capacity and Infrastructure to Support the Triple P System of Interventions in North Carolina
Partnership With Casey Family Programs and Colorado Department of Human Services to Develop a Predictive Analytics Practice Model to Reduce Children's Reentry Into Foster Care	Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions: Examining the Quality-Child Outcomes Relationship in Child Care and Early Education
Post-Doctoral Training in Special Education and Autism Research	Vermont Early Childhood Consultant
Prekindergarten Education Monitoring System Design Consultation and Coordination	Vermont FirstSchool Partnership
Preschool Special Education Evaluation Project	<b>FPG's projects</b> <a href="http://fpg.unc.edu/projects">fpg.unc.edu/projects</a>



## Spotlight

# Megan Vinh

*A Q&A with the New Vice President of the Executive Board for the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children*



Megan Vinh is a member of the leadership team for FPG's Trohanis Technical Assistance Projects. She also recently was elected Vice President of the Executive Board for the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children, and she agreed to discuss her new role with us.

### **HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR NEW RESPONSIBILITIES WITH DEC?**

I'm really excited and honored to be selected as the Vice President of the DEC Executive Board. It's a big responsibility, as it means I will start as the Vice President, become the President Elect, eventually become the President, and end as the Past Presi-

dent. I must admit I'm a little nervous, but overall I can't wait to get started. DEC has some great leadership and I know I have a lot to gain, contribute, and learn from the current Executive Board.

### **WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES GOING FORWARD?**

The DEC Executive Board has three primary jobs: ownership linkage, policy development, and assurance of organizational performance.

I hope that as Vice President I can help DEC to continue to support and cultivate diverse membership, support leadership capacity, promote policies and advocacy for the key issues that professionals face, and help aid in the dissemination and implementation of the DEC Recommended Practices to a wide range of audiences.

### **HOW HAS YOUR EXPERIENCE AT FPG PREPARED YOU FOR YOUR ROLE AS VICE PRESIDENT OF THE DEC EXECUTIVE BOARD?**

At FPG we have the opportunity to connect with a wide array of professionals that come from different backgrounds and have different priorities and goals. I think this is much like DEC, where different professionals come together because they believe in the "advancement of evidence-based practices to support families and enhance optimal development of young children (0-8) who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities."



DEC is the professional home to hundreds of practitioners, administrators, researchers, professional development providers, faculty, etc. from across the world. I think my work at FPG has helped prepare me to interact, collaborate, and hopefully support and work with DEC members.

My work at the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA) and the Early Childhood Recommended Practices Modules Project (RPM) dovetails or complements my new role at DEC. Both ECTA and RPM are committed to supporting the work of DEC, specifically the dissemination and implementation of the DEC Recommended Practices. I have been supporting DEC's aim to *disseminate* the DEC Recommended Practices, as co-principal investigator of the RPM project, which is currently developing interactive, online modules that will support faculty and professional development providers with embedding the DEC Recommended Practices into their coursework and training. At ECTA, I work closely with other professionals and state leaders to identify ways to implement and evaluate the *implementation* of the DEC Recommended Practices.

#### **HOW DID YOU GET INTO THE EDUCATION FIELD?**

It sometimes feels like I have been destined for a career in early childhood special education all my life. My younger sister was born two months premature, before the establishment of the early intervention program in IDEA. She had a feeding tube, trach, around-the-clock in-home nursing, and a host of other strengths and challenges. It was from a young age that I recognized the impact early services can have on families and children's lives. As I grew and had a wealth of personal and professional experiences, I learned that I have a passion for inclusion, access, and equity that extends to supporting diverse families, children, and leaders.

#### **WHAT ARE THE MOST PRESSING CHALLENGES FACING THE FIELD TODAY?**

I think currently early childhood education is needed more than ever. Our research base about the importance of high-quality services is the strongest it's ever been and continues to showcase the impact of early childhood education.

I think some of the most pressing challenges we face today are the access to high-quality inclusive services and the equity for diverse families in early intervention and early childhood special education. The Departments of Education and Health and Human Services came out with a series of policy statements. These focused on a range of issues, including early childhood suspension and expulsion, inclusion, and family engagement. These policy statements build on years of research and professional knowledge that showcase the need to increase access, participation, and supports for infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities in high-quality inclusive programs and to reduce the suspension and expulsion of young children, especially young boys of color, from early care and education environments.

I think these access and equity issues—especially the disproportionate practices used for children of color and the need to increase access, participation, and supports for young children with disabilities to high-quality inclusive programs—continue to be our important and pressing challenges for the field today.

#### **Early Childhood Recommended Practice Modules**


[rpm.fpg.unc.edu](http://rpm.fpg.unc.edu)

#### **ECTA Center**

[ectacenter.org](http://ectacenter.org)

# Partnerships

## *Leadership, Collaboration, and Donor Support*



FPG's partners continue to make more work possible and to extend its impact. Through this network of collaborators, FPG grows and evolves, bringing better outcomes for children, families, and communities around the globe.

**FPG's Executive Leadership Board** offers experience and expertise, helping to define FPG's mission and focus. These board members infuse FPG with a wealth of knowledge, and we are grateful for their service.

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In addition, FPG collaborates with several **centers, institutes, schools, and departments at UNC**, including:

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- Department of Psychology and Neuroscience
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  - *Division of Speech and Hearing Sciences*
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- Department of Psychiatry
- TEACCH Autism Program

School of Nursing  
School of Social Work

FPG's work transcends the university's boundaries, too, through collaborations with many **external groups and organizations**:

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## Spotlight

# James J. Gallagher

## *Honoring the Former FPG Director with the James J. Gallagher Conference Room*

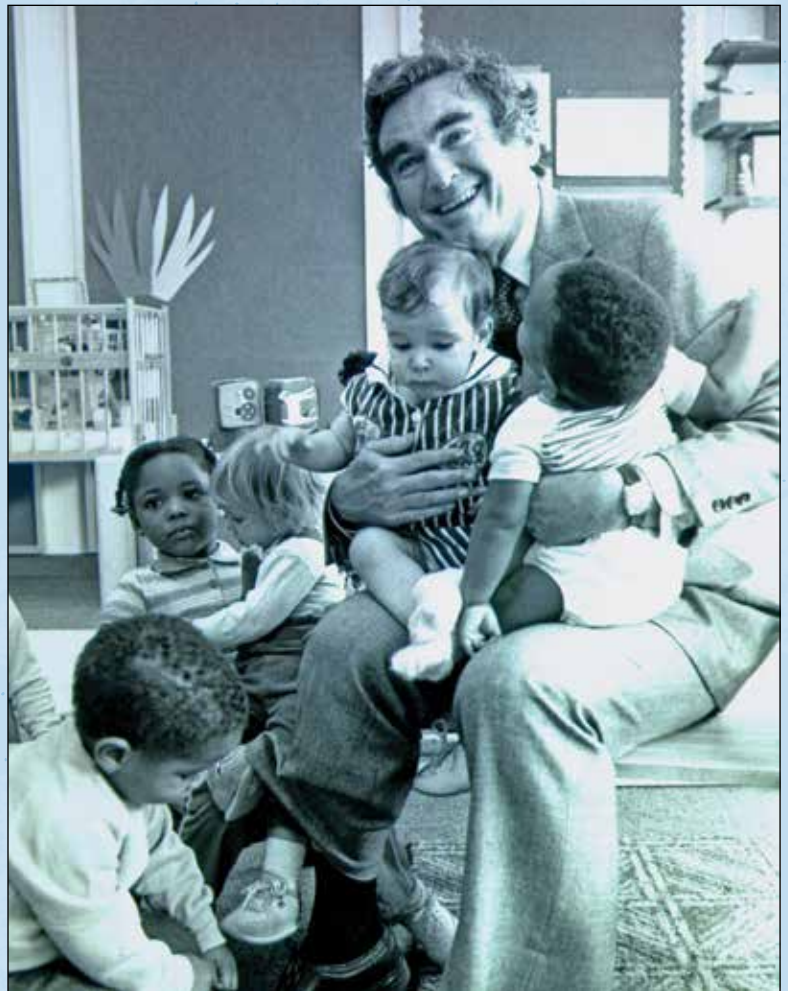
In May, FPG held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to recognize former FPG director James J. Gallagher through the dedication of the *James J. Gallagher Conference Room*. Friends, colleagues, and others gathered to honor Gallagher's life and legacy.

Gallagher was a psychologist, teacher, and seminal researcher, who worked for over 60 years on behalf of children and youth with developmental disabilities, children with gifts and talents, and the field of early childhood education at large. Prior to joining FPG, during his federal career, he approved the initial funding for *Sesame Street*, as well as the initial development of closed captioning technology.

FPG, under his leadership, became one of the nation's most respected institutions working on behalf of children.

"Throughout his illustrious career, Dr. Gallagher sparked, shepherded, and inspired an age of enlightenment as a pioneer in the disciplines of child development and social policy and as the nation's premier scholar in the fields of giftedness and developmental disabilities," said FPG director Sam Odom. "We are recognizing Dr. Gallagher for his countless hours of work around a table, with different groups of people, sharing ideas and shaping policy."

FPG senior scientist emerita Mary Ruth Coleman was a longtime colleague of Gallagher's, beginning



James J. Gallagher at FPG's Child Care Center



*“Childhood has always been a source of wonder and astonishment to people. It is a land through which we have all traveled, but to which we can never return. Our memories of that journey are fragmentary and, at least, partially incorrect. Still, one can stand in awe of the process by which an infant develops over time into a mature adult. At FPG, we try to do more than just admire this complex process. We seek to understand how childhood unfolds and how we can help children develop the best in themselves.”*

—James J. Gallagher  
Director, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (1970–1987)

when she was a graduate student. “Team work was essential to Dr. Gallagher,” she said. “Anyone who worked with him likely remembers sitting around a table in deep discussions about critical issues and looking for ways to improve the world.”

The conference room, the very center of many of Gallagher’s meetings during and after his time as FPG’s director, now displays his many awards, seminal books, special photos, a book of memories, and a portrait of him.

Don Stedman, a long-time colleague of Gallagher, former associate director of FPG, and former Dean of UNC’s School of Education, called it “more than a Conference Room.”

“Jim spent more than half his life here,” Stedman said. “It is a ‘Den for Schemers,’ a hideaway to plot new directions and proposals. It is a ‘Way Station,’ not for stopping and resting, but to learn from other scholars invited here to teach us and to guide our plans and operations, to take stock of our core mis-

sion and our directions... It is a place to pop ideas, create new partnerships, and share futures. Wherever it lands, it is not just a ‘Think Tank’ but a ‘Think and Do Tank.’”

Stedman, a long-serving member of FPG’s executive leadership board, also remarked at the dedication that it was fitting to preserve the conference room in order to preserve FPG’s sense of innovation for current and future researchers, staff, and supporters. “They, too, can come to scheme and dream and, recalling our roots, take FPG to places now unknown.”

#### **about James J. Gallagher**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/6653](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/6653)

# Resources

## *Journal Articles, Reports and Briefs, Online Learning, and More*

FPG experts have served as leaders in professional associations, government task forces, and community organizations, as well as on advisory, editorial, and foundation boards. They have testified before Congressional committees and briefed their staffs, and our projects have drawn national and international coverage from hundreds of media outlets. Equally important, FPG's local, state, national, and international reach includes a vast array of highly anticipated and widely respected scholarly publications and other valuable resources, which take numerous forms for multiple audiences at home and abroad. What follows is a compilation of these resources from the past fiscal year.



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