



Professional Development/Knowledge

Head Start's Ninth National Research Conference, Creating Connections: Linking Policy, Practice, and Research across Early Childhood Development, Care, and Education occurred in June, 2008 in Washington, D.C. This biannual conference brings together practitioners, researchers, administrators and policy makers involved in Head Start, early childhood, childcare, and health care to share research that promotes positive development in young children. Through the conference's varied presentations, roundtable discussions, and posters, attendees learned about new research and how it can be effectively transformed into practical applications. Professional Development/Knowledge was one key topic of the conference. All researchers who presented papers or posters related to this topic were invited to submit their presentations for inclusion in this summary sheet; all presentations received were included.

Professional development is a process of improving skills and competencies to ensure that early childhood care and education staff and teachers are fully prepared to work effectively and creatively in the communities they serve. Professional development can take many forms, including structured lectures or training sessions, peer mentoring, reflective supervision, consultant coaching, distance learning, online discussion groups, continuing education and degree requirements, and other models that theoretically increase individual or program competence. At Head Start's Ninth National Research Conference, several speakers addressed the critical role that professional development plays in developing and sustaining high-quality programs for infants, toddlers, and families. Keynote speaker Margaret Burchinal, Ph.D. spoke about competencies and credentials in the early childhood classroom, noting that quality of early childhood education is not necessarily higher when teachers have a bachelor's degree or more education. She noted that the quality can be improved when teachers receive carefully selected and implemented professional development. Respondent Robert C. Pianta, Ph.D. concurred, asserting that the field should move from simply accepting academic degrees as evidence of classroom effectiveness. He emphasized that the field would benefit from developing further valid assessments of teachers' practice and knowledge, and investing professional development funds in training components with demonstrated effectiveness.

As summarized in the session and poster descriptions below, research and evaluation efforts are working to identify the necessary components of effective and replicable professional development programs. Many studies focused specifically on professional development models that support evidenced-based early literacy and language development strategies. In projects such as these, researchers presented critical elements of professional development models for improving the quality of instruction and care for young children. Discussion tended to focus on how those models accounted for classroom quality and teacher outcomes.

Highlights of Professional Development/Knowledge: Key Points Presented at Head Start's Ninth National Research Conference

- Dr. Anita McGinty and colleagues examined a scientifically-based language and literacy curriculum supplement for at-risk preschoolers that attempted to bridge the research-to-practice gap by providing carefully designed professional training for educators. The researchers concluded that children who received the Read It Again (RIA) intervention significantly outperformed a comparison group on measures of both language and literacy abilities. In addition, RIA demonstrated at least an equal effect on the growth of language and emergent literacy skills of children with low language abilities as it did on the growth of skills of children with average language abilities. ([Feasibility of a Language and Literacy Curriculum Supplement for At-Risk Preschoolers](#))
- Dr. Andrew J. Mashburn and colleagues investigated the use of a Web-based professional development program designed to improve teachers' emotional, instructional, and organizational interactions with children and found that the program was positively associated with children's development of phonological awareness, emergent literacy skills, and receptive language skills. Participation in the program (My TeachingPartner; MTP) had stronger positive associations with children's print awareness and emergent literacy development in classrooms where teachers had fewer years of experience teaching pre-k. ([Effects of a Web-Based Professional Development Intervention on Children's Development of Literacy, Language, and Social-Emotional Skills](#))
- Dr. Carol Vukelich and colleagues noted that professional coaches play many roles, including communicator, observer, assessor, model, and resource provider (Buell, et al., 2008). The researchers found that within the context of the Early Reading First curriculum enhancements, multiple sites developed professional development supports. Development, implementation and evaluation efforts varied across sites, and qualitative and quantitative results highlighted features of key importance to future research. ([Professional Development to Improve Literacy Instruction: Lessons from Early Reading First \(Poster Symposium\)](#))
- Dr. Linda M. Platas discussed how accurate measurement of teachers' knowledge and beliefs is essential to developing effective professional development programs that build teachers' capacities to provide mathematically rich instruction and environments. Her project described the development and pilot validation of two instruments to measure pre- and in-service early childhood teachers' knowledge of early mathematical development (Knowledge of Math Development (KMD); 40 items) and their beliefs about mathematics teaching and learning (20 items). ([Measuring Teachers' Knowledge of Early Mathematical Development and Their Beliefs about Mathematics and Its Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Programs](#))

Special Sessions

This section includes poster symposia and paper symposia related to the topic of professional development/knowledge.

POSTER SYMPOSIUM: Professional Development to Improve Literacy Instruction: Lessons from Early Reading First

Discussants: Susan Fowler, Rebecca A. Marcon

POSTER One: Early Reading First: A Professional Development Model for Early Reading First Classrooms

Authors and Presenters: Mary Abbott, University of Kansas, and Amy Lea Herring, Project EAGLE Community Programs, Kansas City, KS

The Early Reading First professional development model for Project Eagle was specifically designed to maximize the quality of Early Reading First implementation in the urban classrooms. The model included high-quality initial teacher training, weekly in-class coaching and mentoring, periodic mini-trainings for teachers and mentor-coaches, and fidelity checklists to provide feedback to teachers on how effectively they were implementing the model. The professional development activities served as a tool for monitoring and increasing the fidelity of curriculum implementation.

POSTER Two: Child Outcomes in an Urban Early Reading First Program: Results of a 3-Year Program Evaluation

Authors and Presenters: Jane Atwater and Stephani Howarter, University of Kansas

The authors presented results from a 3-year evaluation of the Wyandotte County (KS) Early Reading First program and offered evidence of children's progress. In all 3 years, there was a substantial fall-to-spring reduction in the percentage of children whose scores indicated risk for early reading failure. Despite risks associated with poverty, a majority of children showed gains greater than expected on age-referenced assessments.

POSTER Three: Lessons Learned from Early Reading First: The Coach's Role in Achieving Literacy Goals

Presenter: Martha Buell, University of Delaware

Authors: Carol Vukelich, Myae Han, Martha Buell, Jeff Benatti

Early literacy coaches can contribute in many ways to teacher support, including serving as a communicator, observer, assessor, learner, model, professional developer, resource provider, knowledgeable educator, and trusted mentor. In exploring the outcomes and obstacles of coaching within the context of the Early Reading First, early literacy coaching appeared to be associated with positive changes in teachers' instructional practices and classroom climate. In addition, several coaching challenges were identified, including the need for a support system for coaches; professionalization issues, such as teacher buy-in

and teacher turnover; and the need to achieve balance between teachers' independence and dependence on their coaches.

POSTER Four: Coaching, Classroom Quality, and Child Outcomes

Presenter: Barbara D. DeBaryshe, University of Hawaii at Manoa

Authors: Barbara D. DeBaryshe, Dana M. Gorecki, Melanie Ho, Lori Mishima-Young, Melissa Fujimoto, Ji-Yeon Kim

This work examined piloting/demonstration of the coaching and professional development processes used in the University of Hawaii's 2005 Early Reading First project, combining aspects of technical coaching, cognitive coaching, and whole school reform. The coaching was applied within the context of larger scale curriculum and professional development activities. The authors highlighted numerous collaborative features of successful professional development efforts, which they recommended be incorporated into future models and research addressing coaching effectiveness.

POSTER Five: Early Reading First: Translating Research on Early Literacy Intervention to Practice in Head Start Programs

Authors and Presenters: Judith J. Carta, University of Kansas, and Martha Staker, Project EAGLE Community Programs, Kansas City, KS

This presentation provides an overview of strategies that are the cornerstone of the Wyandotte County (KS) Early Reading First model and describes steps taken to move these strategies into practice in real-world, community-based classrooms.

POSTER Six: Qualitative Investigations of Key Elements of a Promising Early Reading First Classroom

Author and Presenter: Yi-Juin Liu, University of Kansas

In order to more effectively transfer the Early Reading First program to other preschool programs, it is important to identify the elements that may have helped foster successful implementation. Data collected included results of student assessments, documentation of fidelity of program implementation, and interviews with educators. In follow-up, explorational analyses, two classrooms with high fidelity of Early Reading First (ERF) implementation but with differing student outcomes were compared to determine what elements of ERF differed across settings. Findings suggest that the factors unique to the classroom with greatest gains were professional development, leadership, and staff commitment.

POSTER Seven: Focused Coaching for Preschool Teachers

Authors and Presenters: Sheila A. Smith and Sarah Elizabeth Dennis, New York University

In 2005-2008, an Early Reading First project in New York City included coaching methods used to support teachers' use of practices that promote preschoolers' language and literacy development. Supportive coaching, in combination with the curriculum and

professional development training, appeared to help teachers achieve a higher level of curriculum fidelity and more frequent use of good practices than a comparison group (treatment group=12 classrooms; comparison group=8 classrooms). In addition, children in the intervention classrooms performed better than children in the comparison group on measures of early language and literacy skills (e.g., PPVT and Story Comprehension/Story and Print Concepts Scale).

PAPER SYMPOSIUM: Enhancing Young Children’s Development through Teacher Consultation and Curriculum: Results from Three Studies

Discussant: Stephanie M. Jones

PAPER One: Effects of a Web-Based Professional Development Intervention on Children’s Development of Literacy, Language, and Social-Emotional Skills

Presenter: Andrew J. Mashburn, University of Virginia

Authors: Andrew J. Mashburn, Jason Troy Downer, Xitao Fan, Bridget Hamre, Robert C. Pianta

A web-based professional development intervention was designed to improve teachers’ emotional, instructional, and organizational interactions with children, which, in turn, were expected to improve children’s language, literacy, and social skills. The study examined the extent to which teachers’ utilization of the three resources of MyTeachingPartner (MTP) were differentially associated with children’s language and literacy development and whether utilization of the MTP resources had stronger associations with children’s language and literacy development in classrooms with less experienced teachers. Results indicated that the intervention was positively associated with children’s development of phonological awareness, emergent literacy skills and receptive language skills; certain features of MTP were differentially associated with children outcomes. More hours of participation in MTP had stronger positive associations with children’s print awareness and emergent literacy development in classrooms with teachers who had fewer years of experience teaching pre-k. Authors report that future work should involve experimental research, to address questions of generalizability and causal effects.

PAPER Two: Feasibility of a Language and Literacy Curriculum Supplement for At-Risk Preschoolers

Presenter: Anita McGinty, University of Virginia

Authors: Anita McGinty, Sonia Cabell, Laura Marie Justice

A research-to-practice gap exists that limits improvement of educators and reduces the language and early literacy skills of preschoolers. 89% of state-funded preschool classrooms show low support for language and literacy (Early et al., 2005). Observations of Head Start classrooms in the northeast revealed that 35% did not conduct whole class book reading, and 58% of classrooms did not conduct individual or small group reading (Dickinson & Sprague, 2001; New England Quality Research Center). In the study presented in this paper,

McGinty and colleagues examined teacher participation in the Read It Again (RIA) intervention and the resulting effects on children's language and literacy skills in a quasi-experimental design. RIA utilizes a bidirectional model of research-to-practice, and is a relatively low-intensity addition to programs' core curriculum. It was developed using best available empirical evidence concerning language and literacy development. The training model was pilot tested by preschool teachers in real-life classroom conditions, and revised based on teacher input. Children who received the RIA intervention (N=52; N of teachers=11) significantly outperformed a comparison group (N=42; N of teachers=9) on measures of both language ability and literacy ability. In addition, RIA had at least an equal effect on the growth of language and emergent literacy skills of children with low language abilities as it did on the growth of skills of children with average language abilities. Important future work should involve experimental research, to support the generalizability of the intervention and the evidence of causal effects.

PAPER Three: Effectiveness of On-Site Consultation for Quality Enhancement and Children's Development

Presenters: Patricia Wesley and Donna M. Bryant, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Authors: Patricia Wesley, Donna M. Bryant, Martha Zaslow, Ivelisse M. Martinez-Beck.

These presenters discussed the effectiveness of individualized onsite consultation as a mechanism for changing child care provider behavior and improving outcomes for young children.

Conference Posters

This section includes posters related to the topic of professional development/knowledge that were presented during the poster sessions at the conference.

Emotional Labor in Early Intervention

Author and Presenter: Valeri Lane, Zero to Three

"Emotional labor" occurs when one's felt emotions are in conflict with rules about displaying those emotions. Emotional labor might typically occur during the self-management of emotions to maintain appropriately warm and caring but professional boundaries. Previous work has suggested that situations involving higher amounts of emotional labor may contribute to dissonance, emotional exhaustion and increased health issues. Emotional labor has not been examined for Early Head Start home visitors; these workers may be at high risk for emotional labor overload, which may result in less effective visits and greater turnover. Findings in this preliminary qualitative study show emotional labor is present in EHS home visitors' work, and home visitors report experiencing physical and emotional effects from managing their emotions to maintain an appropriate presence with families. Findings suggest the need for informed peer mentoring and reflective supervision to moderate the effects of emotional labor.

Partnering To Encourage Transfer of Learning: Providing Professional Development Follow-up Supports to Head Start Teachers

Presenter: Elizabeth Margaret McLaren, Morehead State University

Authors: Elizabeth Margaret McLaren and Jennifer Grisham-Brown

Maintaining gains made in professional development training can be challenging. In a small pilot study, peer and consultant coaching for Head Start teachers demonstrated positive effects when used as a follow-up to a series of professional development trainings on child social and emotional competence. As compared to teachers who attended the trainings but received no follow-up support, teachers who received follow-up peer and consultant support demonstrated a greater increase in the use of teaching strategies associated with child social and emotional competence, and greater knowledge gain across some or all training content. Conversely, the children of the teachers in the comparison group tended to report greater increases in social skills and decreases in behavior problems

Collaborative Coaching with Head Start Teachers: Dialogic Reading and Children's Language and Communication Development

Authors and Presenters: Sherri L. Oden, Gerald Freeman, Lisa Sturges, and Patricia Ann Griffin, Oakland University

This research studied the development and process of a collaborative coaching approach to teaching dialogic reading techniques to Head Start teachers (N=6) and their 3- and 4-year-old students. In this approach, teachers first collaborated with researchers to learn, reflect on, and refine the dialogic style of reading to children, and then progressed to becoming peer coaches for other teachers. The teachers (N=6) were found to increase in their use of dialogic reading techniques after five coaching sessions. However, each teacher demonstrated individual profiles of dialogic skills. Through detailed qualitative analyses of themes, the researchers highlighted the process and features of developing collaborative coaching efforts within the Head Start context.

Measuring Teachers' Knowledge of Early Mathematical Development and Their Beliefs about Mathematics and Its Teaching and Learning in Early Childhood Programs

Author and Presenter: Linda M. Platas, University of California, Berkeley

Accurate measurement of teachers' knowledge and beliefs is essential to developing effective professional development programs that build teachers' capacities to provide mathematically rich instruction and environments. This presentation described the development and pilot validation of two instruments to measure pre- and in-service early childhood teachers' knowledge of early mathematical development (Knowledge of Math Development (KMD); 40 items) and their beliefs about mathematics teaching and learning (20 items). The researcher conducted a multiphase study consisting of three parts: 1) an instrument development phase; 2) two pilot studies; and 3) a validation study with 346 teachers. The validation study showed that early childhood education courses on the

progression of children's mathematical development did influence measurement scores. For example, pre-service teachers with no mathematical development courses scored significantly lower on the KMD than in-service teachers who were in a training program that included a mathematical development course.

Mental Health Professionals in Early Childhood Centers: Impacts on Teachers

Presenters: LaTunja Sockwell and Leanne Whiteside-Mansell, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences

Authors: LaTunja Sockwell, Nicola A. Conners-Burrow, Lorraine M. McKelvey, Leanne Whiteside-Mansell

Early childcare programs, including Head Start centers, may be strengthened by effective collaboration with community mental health centers. The project examined whether teachers' interactions with children in the classroom changed as a result of receiving mental health consultation and whether the teachers receiving mental health consultation perceived the consultation as effective. Community mental health centers were paired with early childcare programs to increase the teachers' capacity to prevent and manage children's mental health problems. While specific activities varied site to site, they included teacher training, child screenings, referrals for mental health services, small and large group classroom activities, and parenting classes. Teachers in the experimental group (N=131) reported positive perceptions of collaborating with mental health consultants. Teachers in the experimental group demonstrated significant decreases in punitiveness and harshness observed from fall to spring, while those in the comparison group (N=130) did not have similar changes in these behaviors across time. Preliminary findings suggest that the collaboration between mental health consultants and early childcare programs promotes teachers' acquiring additional strategies for managing children's behaviors which may result in demonstrated reductions in punitiveness across the school year.

Assistant Teachers in Prekindergarten Programs: What Roles Do They Play in Classroom Management and Teaching?

Authors and Presenters: Laura Stout Sosinsky, Fordham University, and Walter S. Gilliam, Yale University

Using data from the National Prekindergarten Study, the authors examined a nationally representative sample of State-funded prekindergarten classrooms to determine roles that assistant teachers play in relation to characteristics of the lead teacher, classroom, and program setting. The study indicated that, when other factors are controlled, assistants take on greater roles in teaching when lead teachers have less than a B.A. or assistants have more than a high school degree (e.g., CDA or higher). Future research should examine whether assistants are being groomed to join the profession. If such grooming is occurring, there should be further exploration of the effectiveness, goals and features of such experiential training.

Roots and Wings: Portrait of Leadership in an Early Childhood Learning Organization

Author and Presenter: Teri Talan, National-Louis University

The author conducted a case study of leadership in a community-based early childhood program that thrived in a time of extraordinary change in order to determine which leadership principles and practices helped make the organization successful. The study found that the organization embraced change, encouraged and supported professional development at all levels, demonstrated shared leadership, and had an organizational culture of caring.

Formal Education, Credential, or Both: Early Childhood Program Classroom Practices

Authors and Presenters: Jennifer Anh-Thu Vu, University of California, Los Angeles, and Hyun-Joo Jeon, University of Alabama

Teacher credentials are generally expected to be directly associated with the teachers' skills and abilities. This work investigated 1) the variations in classroom quality when teachers and their supervisors hold different credentials within the California Child Development Permit (CCDP) system, and 2) whether there are differences in classroom quality when a teacher holds only a CCDP credential vs. a B.A. plus a CCDP credential. Classroom quality was assessed with the ECERS-R and the CLASS. Analyses involved two-level hierarchical linear modeling. The sample included 231 teachers across public and private pre-k, Head Start and child care settings. In private non-profit and Head Start/general childcare programs, having a B.A. degree was associated with higher quality for this sample, but in school district and State preschool programs, which often have higher credential requirements for their preschool teachers, having a B.A. did not demonstrate such an association. Overall, however, findings support the importance of lead teachers having a B.A. degree, as reflected by increases in selected ECERS and CLASS subscale scores. However, the credentials of supervisors and assistant teachers and the educational levels of program directors also played a role in classroom quality. The study pointed to the need to look more broadly at a program's context, and explore the mechanisms of personnel influence on classroom quality.

For Further Information

For more details on any of the selected presentations and posters, please contact the presenters listed directly. Presenter contact information can be found in the index of the conference program. ([Creating Connections: Head Start's Ninth National Research Conference 2008 Program Book](#))