

Child Care Research Scholars Program: 2018 Research Scholars

Jun (AJ) Ai

Project Title: Implementation and Sustainability of Positive Behavior Support in Real Early Care (InSPIRE)

Mentor: Dr. Eva Horn

Project Funding Years: 2018-2019

University Affiliation: University of Kansas

Project Abstract:

The goal of this study is to understand the use of positive behavior support (PBS) practices, as well as challenges and barriers that impact PBS practice implementation, in early care and education programs. PBS practices can promote social-emotional competence and reduce challenging behaviors in young children. As a result, evidence-based programs have encouraged the early care and education workforce to uptake PBS practices. However, there is a lack of program- and teacher-level information about real-world factors leading to PBS practice implementation and sustainability. A description of PBS practice implementation is crucial to bridge the research-to-practice gap and reap the benefits of investments in early childhood initiatives.

Three objectives guide this project: Objective 1. Develop a survey tool to examine the status of implementation and sustainability of PBS practices in Kansas Child Care and Head Start programs. Objective 2. Examine program characteristics that are associated with quality implementation and sustainability of PBS practices. Objective 3. Identify challenges and facilitators that impact implementation and sustainability of PBS practices.

These objectives will be met through two studies: Study 1 – Survey of licensed Child Care and Head Start Programs and Study 2 – A Multiple Case Study of Programs Implementing PBS. Study 1 has two research questions: 1. What is the status of PBS implementation and sustainability by Child Care and Head Start programs in the state of Kansas? 2. What are the challenges and facilitators that impact PBS implementation and sustainability? These two questions are designed to address Objectives 1 and 3.

Study 2 also has two research questions: 1. What are some program characteristics that are associated with higher levels of implementation and sustainability? 2. What challenges do programs experience and what strategies do they use to address the challenges? These two questions are designed to address Objectives 2 and 3.

This project is grounded in an implementation science framework. Mixed methods research design will be used to obtain and integrate qualitative and quantitative data to generate an in-depth understanding of the above research questions. We aim to expand the field's knowledge of real-world implementation of PBS practices. Policy and practice implications for supporting a sustainable professional development system will be addressed.

Ying-Chun Lin

Project Title: Examining Access to and Participation in Early Care and Education Among Children of Immigrants

Mentor: Dr. Katherine Magnuson

Project Funding Years: 2018-2019

University Affiliation: University of Wisconsin-Madison

Project Abstract:

Children with at least one immigrant parent are one of the fastest growing child populations in the U.S. Children of immigrants are more likely to lag behind their peers with U.S.-born parents on school readiness skills at kindergarten entry. Despite the positive effects of center-based early care and education (ECE) on children's school readiness, children of immigrants are less likely to attend center-based ECE than children of U.S.-born parents. Lower center-based ECE participation rates may be a missed opportunity for critical learning among children of immigrants. This study contributes to the CCDF program goals of understanding the needs of diverse low-income children and families.

Prior studies have largely focused on factors related to families and children to explain the gap in center-based ECE participation. Specifically, these studies suggest that lower household income, lower parental education levels, and a home language other than English are important predictors of lower enrollment in center-based ECE. However, little is known about whether the availability of different types of ECE programs (i.e., centers- vs. home-based) affects immigrant parents' child care decisions. Research shows that the supply of ECE programs varies widely across communities and immigrants tend to concentrate in under-resourced communities. Thus, there is a need to examine whether the availability of different types of ECE programs affects center-based ECE enrollment among children of immigrants.

Because immigrant families are more likely than U.S.-born families to be low-income, the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) program might improve immigrant families' access to center-based ECE by reducing the cost of care. Given that states have some flexibility in setting their CCDF policies under the federal guidelines, varying levels of generosity (e.g., income eligibility criteria) and the ease of the application process under state CCDF policies might affect center-based ECE enrollment among children of immigrants. To date, no studies have directly examined this issue.

The proposed study aims to address these gaps in the literature. The first part of the study will use data from the National Survey of Early Care and Education to examine the availability of different types of ECE programs between immigrant parents' communities and native-born parents' communities, and whether the availability of different types of ECE programs is associated with the gap in center-based ECE enrollment. The second part of the study will use data from the CCDF Policies Database and American Community Survey between 2009 and 2016 to examine the associations of state subsidy generosity and the ease of the application process with center-based ECE enrollment among children of immigrants.

This study will advance knowledge about the role ECE supply plays in immigrant parents' child care decisions as well as whether state CCDF policies related to generosity and application process affect immigrant parents' use of center-based ECE. Findings from this study have the potential to help policymakers identify ways to better support immigrant families to use center-based ECE to promote children's development.

Alexandra Lundquist

Project Title: Filling the Gap: Understanding Responsive Feeding Practices in Early Care and Education Settings

Mentor: Dr. Brent McBride

Project Funding Years: 2018-2020

University Affiliation: University of Illinois

Project Abstract:

Early childhood is a critical period in the development of eating behaviors, habits, and food preferences, all of which may have significant implications for lifelong health. Previous studies have demonstrated that parents play a key role in influencing children's eating habits. However, due to the increasingly shared feeding responsibility between parents and early childhood teachers, the influence of feeding practices of caregivers within early care and education (ECE) settings has been cited as a key avenue for childhood obesity prevention. Rates of early childhood obesity are still unacceptably high, especially in at-risk populations including low-income and ethnic minority groups. It is evident that children of today are growing up in a largely obesogenic environment. Aside from the type and amount of food children eat within ECE settings, *how* children eat is an equally important component of a healthful mealtime environment. Responsive feeding, or how children are fed, is defined broadly as the creation of a supportive nutrition environment whereby caregivers provide healthful food in a developmentally appropriate way. Responsive feeding involves attending to children's cues of hunger and satiety while giving children the responsibility to decide how much and what to eat. Though there is a robust research base detailing the determinants and consequences of responsive feeding practices of parents, little is known about early childhood teachers' use of responsive feeding practices with young children in their care, and how their feeding practices will impact children's later food intake and obesogenic nutrition behaviors. This represents a critical gap in the knowledge, as responsive feeding recommendations for ECE settings cannot evolve to effectively guide policy and program implementation until research is able to yield more precise evidence about early childhood teachers' feeding practices.

As a consequence of this need, the small body of research examining feeding practices of teachers in ECE settings has largely relied on modifying parental feeding practice tools. Parental responsive feeding constructs and measures that have been developed for use within the home environment are not automatically valid within ECE settings. Basic transference of parental responsive feeding expectations to ECE settings fails to accurately account for the unique parameters of ECE settings, resulting in findings that are inconsistent and difficult to compare and interpret. No validated instrument exists to assess the unique dimensions of responsive feeding practices in ECE settings, therefore **the overall objective** of the proposed research is to develop a valid and reliable method to assess responsive feeding practices of ECE teachers.

This study aims to: 1) Develop and validate a protocol to assess responsive feeding practices that is specific and appropriate for use in ECE settings; 2) Assess early childhood teachers' responsive feeding practices across a breadth of ECE policy contexts (Child and Adult Care Food Program and Head Start); and 3) Explore associations between responsive feeding practices and child nutrition behaviors across these ECE policy contexts. In addressing these aims, we hope to expand our understanding of the potential contributions of ECE settings to childhood obesity. Evidence from this project can inform interventions as well as feeding guidelines and recommendations for early care and education programs.

Mary Lee Porterfield

Project Title: Exploring Teacher-Family Relationships: Avenues for Increasing the Quality of Care in Infant-Toddler Classrooms

Mentor: Dr. Catherine Scott-Little

Project Funding Years: 2018-2020

University Affiliation: The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Project Abstract:

The infant-toddler period is critical to children's concurrent and subsequent outcomes and success in school and life. Acknowledging the low quality of care for infants and toddlers, North Carolina's Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Administrator is interested in exploring opportunities for increasing the quality of infant/toddler care in the state's licensed early care and education (ECE) programs. Of particular interest are partnerships between families, teachers, and programs that can facilitate coordinated, responsive care. Infant and toddler learning and development depends upon relationship-based interactions with responsive caregivers. Thus, the program- or teacher-family partnerships dimensions of family engagement are particularly salient for this age group. Infant and toddler learning and development depends upon relationship-based interactions with responsive caregivers. As a result, program- or teacher-family partnerships dimensions of family engagement are particularly salient for young children. Family engagement requirements are included in the state sponsored pre-kindergarten program for at-risk four-year-olds (NC Pre-K) and in Head Start classrooms; however, family engagement requirements for younger children in regulated child care have not been prioritized to date.

This proposal is to support data collection, analyses, and dissemination of a doctoral dissertation research study to inform policy and practice related to family engagement and partnerships for infant-toddler care. The study has three goals. The first goal is to examine the relationship-based family engagement practices currently enacted in infant-toddler ECE in North Carolina. To achieve this goal, a measure of relationship quality will be administered to a sample of infant-toddler teachers, program administrators, and families in programs that were recently assessed for the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). The second goal is to elucidate the relation between relationship-based family engagement practices and the quality of infant-toddler classrooms participating in the QRIS. To achieve this goal, the scores on the relationship measure will be compared to scores on the QRIS classroom quality measure. The final goal is to identify opportunities and barriers to incorporating more robust standards for teacher- and program-family partnerships in the system. To achieve this goal, qualitative interviews will be conducted with a sample of infant-toddler teachers and program administrators who participated in the relationship quality survey process.

The proposed 24-month study will take place in three phases. Phase 1 will include development and piloting of interviews with infant-toddler teachers and program administrators from three ECE programs. Phase 2 will include recruitment and administration of the survey with a stratified random sample of 50 teachers, 25 program administrators, and 150 families in infant-toddler classrooms recently assessed for the QRIS. Phase 3 will include interviews, data analyses, and dissemination of results. The CCDF Administrator will be consulted at each phase of the study to ensure alignment with the state's CCDF priorities and coordinated interpretation of results.