

Head Start Quality Research Centers Consortium II (QRC), Research Partners

Columbia University

Project Title:

Using Assessment to Improve School Readiness and Head Start Program Quality

Grantee:

The Center for Children and Families, Teachers College, Columbia University

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

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Head Start Partners:

Childcare Learning Centers, Inc.
New Opportunities for Waterbury, Inc.

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Project Abstract:

Calls for improved outcomes for children and program accountability reverberate throughout the nation. Not exempt, Head Start has taken prescient leadership in addressing these issues through the publication of the Head Start Outcomes Framework and the ACYF-HS-IM-00-18. But publication of the documents alone, as impressive as they are, will not guarantee the implementation of child outcomes as a means of "strengthening the quality of every Head Start Program" (Taylor, 2000) or significantly advancing the readiness of Head Start children for school. A systematic intervention designed to use sensitive assessments and provide interactive professional development via on-going support and mentoring is necessary.

Aiming to do just that, this proposal begins with the premise that observational assessment, if well-understood and well-done, can improve the school readiness of Head Start children; the quality and climate of Head Start programs; the capacity and professional satisfaction of Head Start staff; and the engagement of Head Start families in their children's education. It suggests that on-going observational assessment of children, of teaching, and of the program climate is a transcendent strategy that may be among the most potent interventions to improve children's readiness for school. Specifically, together with each program's policy council, parents, and staff, we will:

- Implement an innovative assessment system for Head Start children, classrooms, and programs;
- Provide, through interactive professional development and engagement with families, the supports and resources necessary to use data from the assessments to improve classroom and program practice, and child outcomes;
- Evaluate, through an experimental design, the intervention effort, and
- Mount an inventive and effective dissemination effort.

To accomplish this, the intervention will consist of using sensitive observational assessments that, when analyzed, will provide the basis for creating practice improvement plans. To implement the plans, staff will participate in credit-bearing training, guided by ongoing collaboration with the assessment developers and trainers, as well our intervention coordinator. In addition to the assessments used as part of the intervention, our research team will conduct a randomized, experimental evaluation in five Head Start centers in two Connecticut communities. Involving approximately 380 children over the five-year period, the design calls for cross-sectional

and time-series evaluations. The project will also be part of the Head Start Quality Research Centers Consortium's evaluation.

Dissemination efforts will be robust (conferences, web-sites, journal articles, and manuals for and by parents), with funding from a private foundation augmenting the work (provisionally approved). A significant aspect of our dissemination effort will include a large national conference and collaboration with the Connecticut Department of Education to coordinate, then disseminate, Head Start and School Readiness Program outcomes. In addition, we will link with other national associations, and local efforts. The dissemination effort will be hallmarked by the full and innovative involvement of Head Start families and staff.

Education Development Center, Inc.

Project Title:

A Systematic Approach to Fostering Language and Literacy Development

Grantee:

Education Development Center, Inc.

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

Nancy Clark-Chiarelli and David Dickinson

Head Start Partners:

Communities United, Inc.
ABCD Head Start

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Project Abstract:

Collaborating with Head Start programs in Waltham and Boston, Massachusetts, the researchers are implementing and assessing the Program-Delivered Literacy Through Inservice Training (PD-LIT) to work with Head Start programs to create systems that include in-service training, supervision, and program self-evaluation that enable programs to support children's language and literacy development. PD-LIT has three goals: (1) deepen knowledge of language and literacy among all center staff, (2) develop a center-wide shared vision of good practice; and (3) enhance children's language and literacy development significantly.

PD-LIT is a two-year intervention that includes literacy concepts and practices workshops, professional conversations and demonstration classrooms, and supervisory methods to ensure valued practices are implemented. Researchers will train Head Start staff to become PD-LIT mentors and deliver training to their own staff.

Using HLM, the researchers are examining the impact of PD-LIT on English- and Spanish-speaking children, comparing fall-to-spring change scores in children in PD-LIT classrooms to fall-to-spring change scores of comparison group children. The comparison group data were collected using the same tools and procedures as for PD-LIT. In Phase III a qualitative study will assess the stability and impact of PD-LIT. The researchers are studying PD-LIT replicability using a random assignment design, and are also conducting a process evaluation throughout the study period.

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Project Title:

Achieving Head Start Effectiveness Through Intensive Curriculum Training

Grantee:

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

Lawrence J. Schweinhart and Marijata C. Daniel-Echols

Head Start Partners:

Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency
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Project Abstract:

The research question of this project asks whether intensive training in, and confirmed practice of, a proven curriculum model enables Head Start teachers to contribute significantly to children's development, especially their development of language, literacy, and the ability to resolve social conflict. It also asks the related question of whether Head Start teachers who claim to use a proven curriculum but have little or no training in it, and have not confirmed their practice of it contribute significantly to children's development. The proposed project will use a curriculum model of proven effectiveness, the High/Scope curriculum framework, to test this hypothesis. The intervention we propose involves intensive curriculum training and curriculum implementation confirmed by systematic observation. We ask if meeting these conditions contributes significantly to children's development.

The primary intervention will involve 20 Head Start classrooms of Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency. From March to August 2001, we will plan and provide 30 days of training, observation-feedback, and discussion for the teaching staff, collecting curriculum data quite regularly. We will track their classroom program for two years, collecting observational data on children regularly throughout. We will identify a second Head Start agency for the secondary intervention, randomly assigning 20 classrooms to a comparison group and 20 classrooms to the intervention group, which will receive 30 days of training, observation-feedback, and discussion during the

2002-2003 program year. We will track their classroom programs for two years, following the same data collection schedule as before for both groups.

Today's key challenge to Head Start is to identify program practices that contribute to program effectiveness. The High/Scope curriculum model is one of the few interventions with evidence that it serves this purpose. We propose to test the effectiveness not of this proven curriculum model, but rather of intensive training in this validated curriculum model and its verified implementation in Head Start. In this way we will determine whether the tougher curriculum standards we propose - validated curriculum model, intensive curriculum training, and verified implementation - are critical to Head Start's success.

Quality Counts, Inc.

Project Title:

Supporting Children's Individualized Learning in Head Start

Grantee:

Quality Counts, Inc.

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

Martha Abbott-Shim and Richard Lambert

Head Start Partners:

Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity Head Start

Ninth District Opportunity Head Start

McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council Head Start

Coastal Georgia Area Community Action Authority Head Start

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Project Abstract:

The overall goal of the Quality Counts Head Start Quality Research Center (QRC) is to evaluate and refine the implementation of the Individualized Learning Intervention, a specific intervention approach that leads to enhanced Head Start program quality, which in turn promotes children's school readiness. The QRC proposes the evaluation, refinement, and subsequent replication of this intervention with four *Head Start Partners*: Jefferson County Committee on Economic Opportunity Head Start in Birmingham, AL; Ninth District Opportunity Head Start in Gainesville, GA; McIntosh Trail Early Childhood Development Council Head Start in Jackson, GA; and Coastal Georgia Area Community Action Authority Head Start in Brunswick, GA.

The Individualized Learning Intervention includes self-directed learning experiences, collaborative support of Head Start teachers and administrators in the mentoring process, and a focus on developmental assessments and their use for planning individualized children's learning experiences and for building local outcomes-based evaluation systems. The accompanying research agenda focuses on the impact that self-directed and collaborative learning experiences have on teachers' abilities to use developmental assessments to individualize teaching and learning for Head Start children.

The research design will be quasi-experimental with 16 treatment and 16 comparison classrooms. The treatment classrooms will include eight mentor and eight protégé teachers. The research effort includes child outcome measures, teacher questionnaires, parent questionnaires, and classroom observation measures. Child outcomes will be assessed on multiple occasions during the Head Start allowing for the use of both growth curve modeling and traditional repeated measures ANOVA. Results of the research will be disseminated through professional conferences, journal articles, and product development efforts for practitioner-oriented audiences.

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Project Title:

Evidence-based Emergent Literacy Approaches for Head Start

Grantee:

State University of New York at Stony Brook

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

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Project Abstract:

Emergent literacy consists of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are developmental precursors to reading and writing (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Children reared in conditions of poverty are at increased risk of falling short on the dimensions of emergent literacy in the preschool years, and have alarmingly high rates of poor academic achievement once in elementary school. Reading and writing are the foundations for academic achievement. Thus, attention to emergent literacy, which forms the basis for learning to read and write, is appropriate for preschool programs and has been emphasized in the most recent federal reauthorization of Head Start.

The primary objective of this project is to identify through careful comparative study, emergent literacy approaches that provide the most effective enhancement of emergent literacy for children in Head Start. We use the phrase evidence-based curriculum to denote an explicit and careful process of evaluating short- and long-term outcomes of curriculum interventions implemented in randomly assigned Head Start classrooms, thus providing the evidence for making decisions about one or more optimally effective curricula.

More specifically, the project purpose is: (1) to compare, in Head Start classrooms of four-year-old children, leading curricula that have as part of their goals the enhancement of emergent literacy and language skills; (2) to

replicate with new classrooms in the same Head Start agency, and to extend to a geographically distant and different Head Start agency, the use of the curriculum strategy or strategies comparing most favorably with the others, again in a random-assignment comparison design; and finally, (3) to follow all children in the project through early elementary school in order to obtain the broadest evidence-based support for the strengths of one or more of the curricula in terms of child outcomes in emergent literacy and early reading skills.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Project Title:

Socioemotional Interventions to Enhance School Readiness

Grantee:

North Carolina Head Start Quality Research Center

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

Donna Bryant, Janis Kupersmidt, and Ellen Peisner-Feinberg

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Chapel Hill-Carrboro Head Start

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Project Abstract:

The focus of this project is on intervention research to promote preschoolers' social behavior and emotional development, one of the five developmental domains important for children's social competence and school readiness (National Educational Goals Panel, 1999). Many early school problems children have are related to many of the same underlying risk factors noted in studies of social and emotional behavior problems among seriously disruptive children. Furthermore, the risk factors that are associated with the development of social and emotional problems are more likely to be found in families and communities that Head Start programs typically serve (i.e., low income communities with limited resources; families that may be disorganized, experiencing higher than normal rates of emotional, economic, or marital stress). The present study is designed to reduce behavior problems and improve socioemotional functioning in young children through an intervention, which enhances the provision of supportive mental health services, basic overall classroom quality, parent involvement, and specific classroom strategies.

The proposed intervention is a modification of the Preschool Behavior Project, an evidence-based intervention program for aggression requiring intensive intervention with parents and teachers by highly-trained and supervised clinical consultants (Bryant, Vizzard, Willoughby & Kupersmidt, 1999). Unlike most intervention programs, we have implemented the PBP in Head Start and have preliminary evidence supporting its effectiveness in reducing disruptive behavior and thereby improving classroom functioning. The goal of the current project is to develop and evaluate a less intensive, but still effective, self-sustaining intervention that ultimately can be implemented as a broad quality improvement strategy by the existing Head Start T/TA network.

The evaluation will address six broad categories of research questions. (1) Why do Head Start staff choose to implement specific practices, how do they get their information, and how do they form beliefs about practices? (2) Using this information, what are the best ways to intervene in Head Start programs to enhance quality, specifically for improving classroom and program practices vis a vis mental health? (3) What is the most efficacious model for changing information, beliefs, and behaviors? Specifically, what are the strategies and supports needed for teachers and parents to acquire the skills that the PBP intervention addresses and how long does the change process take? (4) Which practices should be put in place to maintain

treatment fidelity of an intervention as a self-administered program component? (5) Can a Head Start program achieve the same reduction of problem behaviors and improvement of social skills in a self-administered program as in a research study? (6) What supports are needed for programs to develop local capacity for self-evaluation so they can gather relevant outcome data more systematically as part of their program improvement process?

The results expected from this project include the development of an exportable intervention program with supporting materials, developed in collaboration with Head Start partners and training and technical assistance experts, which has been tested in terms of its effectiveness and ability to be implemented in the Head Start setting. In addition, dissemination of a variety of products to a range of audiences will be an important focus, including empirical articles on effectiveness of intervention, treatment manuals, and practitioner-oriented publications.

University of Oregon

Project Title:

Head Start Adaptation of First Step to Success: Preparing Children for Social/Emotional Success at School

Grantee:

University of Oregon

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

Hill Walker, Edward Feil, Annemieke Golly, and Herbert Severson

Head Start Partners:

Head Start Partner: Head Start of Lane County, Springfield, OR
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Project Abstract:

This proposed work is focused on social-emotional competence, which is an important determinant of school readiness. School readiness, in turn, sets the stage for school success and fosters attachment, bonding and engagement with the schooling process. There is clear longitudinal evidence that school success and engagement, as defined in this manner, serves as a powerful protective factor against a host of later health risk behaviors and negative outcomes including violent delinquent acts, school dropout, teenage pregnancy or fathering a child, heavy drinking and drug use, and multiple sex partners (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999).

This proposal outlines five years of research and development activities that will adapt the First Step to Success early intervention program for effective use with Head Start children. First Step is a collaborative home and school intervention program, delivered by a behavioral coach and lasting approximately two months, that is geared for regular kindergarten classroom settings and designed to help at risk children get off to the best start possible in their school careers. First Step is an early intervention designed to achieve secondary prevention goals and outcomes within the context of schooling. The primary outcome of the program's application is a substantial improvement in the target child's school readiness as expressed through enhancements in both teacher and peer-related forms of adjustment.

The adapted version of the First Step program would provide Head Start consumers, staff and professionals with a proven intervention option that will produce the following benefits: 1) substantially improved school readiness, 2) amelioration and/or elimination of serious behavior problems such as aggression, opposition-defiance, and other indicators of emerging antisocial behavior and externalizing behavior disorders, and 3) improvements in the target child's critically important relationships with the key social agents of parents and caregivers, teachers and peers. This proposed work addresses the rising tide of young children, having very challenging behavior problems, who have increasingly overwhelmed early childhood staff in preschool, Head Start and kindergarten classroom programs during the past decade (See FAN, 2000; Knitzer, 1998).

The First Step adaptation process will be planned during Year 01 of this proposed research and initially trial tested using single subject research methodology. In subsequent project years, a prototype of the adapted program version will be tested during a primary intervention phase, revised and retested in a secondary intervention phase, and finally replicated in another cooperating Head Start site involving the Siletz Native American Tribes of Oregon. A comprehensive dissemination and technical assistance/outreach training program of activities for the final adapted version of the First Step intervention will be planned in project year 04 and implemented during year 05.

Temple University (originally at the University of South Carolina from 2001-2004)

Project Title:

The Companion Curriculum: Connecting Head Start Parents and Teachers to Promote Early Learning and Development

Grantee:

Temple University

Project Funding Years:

2001-2006

Project Staff:

Julia Mendez and Jean Ann Linney

Head Start Partners:

GLEAMNS Human Resources Commission, Inc.
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Project Abstract:

Early childhood experts recognize that children's school readiness is nurtured and sustained within both the home and classroom environments. For children attending Head Start, parent involvement in their children's education enhances continuity across home and school contexts. To maximize children's readiness to learn, schools and families must engage in a process of mutual adjustment to synchronize their approaches to promoting development. This project seeks to strengthen home-school relationships to support children's development in three key areas: social competence, emergent literacy and emergent numeracy. The following goals are set forth in this initiative: (a) design and implement a home-based learning curriculum for parents and children, (b) refine our understanding of multiple dimensions of parent involvement, (c) analyze unique contributions of fathers and mothers to children's readiness, and (d) isolate mediators of parent involvement, including teacher attitudes, parent efficacy, and community cohesion variables. Through a monthly Parent Excellence series, an intervention called The Companion Curriculum (TCC) will be delivered to 150 parents per year. TCC involves teachers and small groups of 8-10 parents conducting educational activities together that are designed to enhance home-based learning for Head Start children. All parents will be eligible and encouraged to participate in the program, and all parents will receive the curriculum materials regardless of whether they attend the monthly meetings. Sustained efforts by the community research coordinators will maximize participation through removal of barriers, and accommodation will be granted for families with more difficult circumstances. We expect that families who participate and utilize TCC effectively (i.e. high attendance, reports of use, and communication with teachers) will show benefits in school readiness outcomes, parental involvement, and satisfaction.

Another part of this curriculum involves establishing Family Corners in children's classrooms, where parents can informally engage their children in fun, stimulating activities. Establishment of Family Corners in Head Start classrooms is a mechanism for enhancing children's privacy and attachment to family and school personnel, while also promoting parent involvement at school. The Family Corner will consist of comfortable rugs and furniture that allow parents to sit together with their children to quietly play, read, or just talk. In addition, the materials used in the home-based curriculum will be available in the Family Corner for parents to use with their children. Lastly, pictures of children with their families will be displayed in the corner as an

observable indicator of the importance of families and parent-child interaction. It is expected that Family Corners will serve to encourage parents to spend more private time with their children at Head Start, and teachers can model activities with parents if they choose. The goal of Family Corners is to provide a self-sufficient, attractive, and welcoming environment for parents to engage in readiness activities with their children at Head Start.

Implementation and dissemination of TCC will be studied in multiple sites across the five-year longitudinal project. Expected benefits over time include enhanced readiness outcomes, home learning environments, school-family partnerships, and community social cohesion.