

# Head Start Graduate Student Research Program: 1999 Research Scholars

## **Dana H. Abbott**

### *Project Title:*

Practical Application of Functional Assessment in a Preschool Setting

### *Grantee:*

Dana H. Abbott

### *Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

### *University Affiliation :*

SUNY Stony Brook

### *Project Abstract:*

The purpose of this study was to develop an assessment and intervention tool to measure and target children's emergent literacy skills. This project evaluated the use of a dynamic assessment system that Head Start teachers used to assess individual preschoolers' emergent literacy skills. Twenty classroom teaching situations were constructed that allowed teachers to emphasize emergent literacy skills while assessing individual children's performance. The dynamic assessment was designed to give Head Start teachers an understanding of which of their students have mastery of the materials and which need more work in that particular area while exposing children to literacy materials. In this way, teachers could target areas in which students need the most growth and could tailor experiences to individual students' needs and abilities.

Three major domains of emergent literacy skills were targeted: print awareness, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness. The goals of this study were to: (1) develop a measure of individual children's emergent literacy skills that will be used by Head Start teachers to track children's literacy development; (2) implement the use of the measure in Head Start classrooms; and (3) validate the new measure using standardized assessment instruments.

Children enrolled in Head Start programs for two years in Suffolk County, NY participated in this project. During the first year of the study, the emergent literacy measure was developed and pilot tested. During the second year of the study, ten Head Start classrooms participated in the evaluation and

validation of the Dynamic Assessment program. Classrooms were randomly assigned to assessment and control conditions (five in each group). Teachers in the assessment classrooms used the Dynamic Assessment program throughout the year. In order to validate the emergent literacy measure, 130 children from the 10 classrooms completed standardized assessment instruments measuring language and emergent literacy skills in the fall and spring of the second year. A Literacy Activities Checklist was also developed in order to assess teachers' use of literacy activities. Children's growth scores were analyzed in order to evaluate the extent to which project participation had an impact on teachers' use of emergent literacy activities in the classroom and on children's emergent literacy skills.

*Sample:*

n=130 children from low-income families in Suffolk County, NY

*Measures:*

*Child*

Developing Skills Checklist

NCLD Get Ready To Read Screen

*Teacher*

Literacy Activities Checklist

Teacher Background Survey

## **Jennifer E. Burke**

*Project Title:*

The Prediction of Head Start Participation and Its Effect on the Outcomes of the Children of Adolescent Mothers

*Grantee:*

Jennifer E. Burke

*Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

*University Affiliation :*

University of Notre Dame

*Project Abstract:*

This project used data from an ongoing longitudinal study that followed pregnant teen mothers from their third trimester and their children from birth to 10 years old. This project identified the factors that predict participation in Head Start for children of adolescent mothers, and identified the role of Head Start intervention on children's development. Researchers

hoped to answer four essential questions with this study: (1) Do the at-risk children that most need Head Start services receive them? (2) Can a mother's prenatal risk factors and her risk factors when her child is three years old predict Head Start participation? (3) Does Head Start participation modify the long- and short-term socio-emotional and cognitive development paths anticipated by the child's risk status? And (4) Is the impact of Head Start services affected by the amount of risk in a child's life? The research focused on risk factors such as maternal cognitive functioning, personal adjustment, cognitive readiness for parenting, and child abuse potential.

Information previously collected on approximately 80 adolescent mothers and their first-born children was used for this project. This included information collected from mothers, children, and teachers in four data collection sessions. The first assessment, which took place during the mother's third trimester, measured mothers' cognitive readiness for parenting, intelligence, and personal adjustment. The second assessment was done when the children reached 3 years old and included measures of cognitive functioning, parental adjustment, and child abuse potential. The third session, when the children were 5 years old, tested for receptive language, cognitive functioning, and academic readiness. Mothers also reported on their children's emotional adjustment at age 5. The fourth session measured these same outcomes when the children were 8 years old. Several statistical analyses were conducted to predict Head Start participation, determine the children's risk status, and see if Head Start participation was able to mediate the effect of risk on short-term and long-term child outcomes, including cognitive, socio-emotional, and academic outcomes.

*Sample:*

n=approximately 80 adolescent mothers

n=approximately 80 first-born children

*Measures:*

*Child*

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised

Stanford-Binet, Form L-M

Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised

Peabody Individual Achievement Test

Child Depression Inventory

Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised

*Mother*

Achenbach Youth Self Report

Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist

Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales

Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised or Weschler Intelligence Scale for Children  
Cognitive Readiness for Parenting Questionnaires  
Child Abuse Potential Index  
Beck Depression Inventory  
Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory  
Head Start attendance

*Teacher*

Head Start attendance records  
Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist-Teacher Report Form  
Teacher-Child Rating Scales  
School Achievement Report

**Jason T. Hustedt**

*Project Title:*

Relations Between Scaffolding in Low-Income Mother-Child Dyads and Children's Tutoring of an Unfamiliar Adult

*Grantee:*

Jason T. Hustedt

*Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

*University Affiliation :*

Cornell University

*Project Abstract:*

This study was conducted in order to further extend scaffolding research by accomplishing two goals: (1) to investigate the degree to which children can transfer what they have learned during the course of previous scaffolding interactions to later situations in which they take over the expert role, and (2) to further extend scaffolding research to children being raised in poverty. The following hypotheses were tested: (1) scaffolding by an adult would significantly improve children's performance of problem-solving tasks, (2) children would exhibit tutorial behaviors during the child-experimenter scaffolding task that were similar to those used by their parents during the previous parent-child scaffolding task, and (3) children with high social competence and greater verbal abilities would be more successful at assuming the tutoring role than children who were less socially competent or verbally skilled. During the first part of the study (Time 1), children and their mothers were assessed while playing with toys and engaging in a scaffolding episode. During the second part of the study (Time 2), instead of interacting

with their mothers, children interacted with a female undergraduate who demonstrated her unfamiliarity with the toys. The children, now having previous experience with the problem-solving tasks, served as tutors at Time 2.

*Sample:*

n=54 4-year-old Head Start participants (34 experimental and 20 control)

*Measures:*

*Child*

Social Interaction -Verbal and Nonverbal Problem-Solving Behaviors

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III

*Teacher*

Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation-Preschool Edition

*Mother*

Social Interaction - Verbal and Nonverbal Scaffolding Behaviors

## **Lisa M. Lopez**

*Project Title:*

Assessing Phonological Sensitivity in Hispanic Head Start Children as a Precursor to Literacy

*Grantee:*

Lisa M. Lopez

*Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

*University Affiliation :*

University of Miami

*Project Abstract:*

The purpose of this study was to assess pre-literacy skills of low-income Hispanic Head Start children by (1) creating a comparable measure of English and Spanish phonological sensitivity for this population, (2) assessing internal consistency among children's Spanish and English phonological skills, (3) determining the relationship between phonological awareness and oral language skills in this sample, and (4) identifying a cross-language transfer of skills.

A phonological assessment tool was developed and modified during the first year of the project with a sample of 50 Spanish-speaking Head Start

children. During the second year, the tool was used to determine the phonological sensitivity of 100 4- to 5-year-old Spanish-speaking Head Start children. These children were drawn from three selected Head Start centers in Miami-Dade County, Florida serving the Hispanic population. The tool was composed of tasks used by other researchers in English. The tasks included a rhyme-matching task, an alliteration-matching task, and a sentence-segmenting task. The children were assessed on these tasks in both English and Spanish. Additionally, the PRE-LAS 2000 was used to measure oral language proficiency in English and Spanish.

Analyses provided quantitative information of individual children's phonological awareness and language proficiency in two languages. A similar relationship was identified between oral language and phonological awareness in both languages, independently. However, the children's oral language skills were much better defined in Spanish. A cross language transfer of phonological awareness skills was also identified with phonological awareness skills in Spanish, along with English oral language skills, playing a major factor in the children's English phonological awareness abilities. Implications include the importance of assessing bilingual children in both languages, as well as the importance of strengthening the child's primary language and literacy skills prior to literacy instruction in the second language.

*Sample:*

n=50 low-income, Hispanic Head Start children, ages 3-5 (Year 1) from 2 centers

n=100 low-income, Hispanic Head Start children, ages 4-5 (Year 2) from 3 centers

*Measures:*

*Child*

Phonological Sensitivity Test (English and Spanish)

Pre-Las2000 (English and Spanish)

**Greta M. Massetti**

*Project Title:*

Assessment of Emergent Literacy in Head Start Preschool

*Grantee:*

Greta M. Massetti

*Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

*University Affiliation :*  
SUNY Stony Brook

*Project Abstract:*

The purpose of this study was to develop an assessment and intervention tool to measure and target children's emergent literacy skills. This project evaluated the use of a dynamic assessment system that Head Start teachers used to assess individual preschoolers' emergent literacy skills. Twenty classroom teaching situations were constructed that allowed teachers to emphasize emergent literacy skills while assessing individual children's performance. The dynamic assessment was designed to give Head Start teachers an understanding of which of their students have mastery of the materials and which need more work in that particular area while exposing children to literacy materials. In this way, teachers could target areas in which students need the most growth and could tailor experiences to individual students' needs and abilities.

Three major domains of emergent literacy skills were targeted: print awareness, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness. The goals of this study were to: (1) develop a measure of individual children's emergent literacy skills that will be used by Head Start teachers to track children's literacy development; (2) implement the use of the measure in Head Start classrooms; and (3) validate the new measure using standardized assessment instruments.

Children enrolled in Head Start programs for two years in Suffolk County, NY participated in this project. During the first year of the study, the emergent literacy measure was developed and pilot tested. During the second year of the study, ten Head Start classrooms participated in the evaluation and validation of the Dynamic Assessment program. Classrooms were randomly assigned to assessment and control conditions (five in each group). Teachers in the assessment classrooms used the Dynamic Assessment program throughout the year. In order to validate the emergent literacy measure, 130 children from the 10 classrooms completed standardized assessment instruments measuring language and emergent literacy skills in the fall and spring of the second year. A Literacy Activities Checklist was also developed in order to assess teachers' use of literacy activities. Children's growth scores were analyzed in order to evaluate the extent to which project participation had an impact on teachers' use of emergent literacy activities in the classroom and on children's emergent literacy skills.

*Sample:*

n=130 children from low-income families in Suffolk County, NY

*Measures:*

*Child*

Developing Skills Checklist  
NCLD Get Ready To Read Screen  
Teacher  
Literacy Activities Checklist  
Teacher Background Survey

## **Christine M. McWayne**

*Project Title:*

Assessment of Emergent Literacy in Head Start Preschool

*Grantee:*

Christine M. McWayne

*Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

*University Affiliation :*

SUNY Stony Brook

*Project Abstract:*

The purpose of this study was to develop an assessment and intervention tool to measure and target children's emergent literacy skills. This project evaluated the use of a dynamic assessment system that Head Start teachers used to assess individual preschoolers' emergent literacy skills. Twenty classroom teaching situations were constructed that allowed teachers to emphasize emergent literacy skills while assessing individual children's performance. The dynamic assessment was designed to give Head Start teachers an understanding of which of their students have mastery of the materials and which need more work in that particular area while exposing children to literacy materials. In this way, teachers could target areas in which students need the most growth and could tailor experiences to individual students' needs and abilities.

Three major domains of emergent literacy skills were targeted: print awareness, emergent writing, and linguistic awareness. The goals of this study were to: (1) develop a measure of individual children's emergent literacy skills that will be used by Head Start teachers to track children's literacy development; (2) implement the use of the measure in Head Start classrooms; and (3) validate the new measure using standardized assessment instruments.

Children enrolled in Head Start programs for two years in Suffolk County, NY participated in this project. During the first year of the study, the emergent literacy measure was developed and pilot tested. During the second year of the study, ten Head Start classrooms participated in the evaluation and

validation of the Dynamic Assessment program. Classrooms were randomly assigned to assessment and control conditions (five in each group). Teachers in the assessment classrooms used the Dynamic Assessment program throughout the year. In order to validate the emergent literacy measure, 130 children from the 10 classrooms completed standardized assessment instruments measuring language and emergent literacy skills in the fall and spring of the second year. A Literacy Activities Checklist was also developed in order to assess teachers' use of literacy activities. Children's growth scores were analyzed in order to evaluate the extent to which project participation had an impact on teachers' use of emergent literacy activities in the classroom and on children's emergent literacy skills.

*Sample:*

n=130 children from low-income families in Suffolk County, NY

*Measures:*

*Child*

Developing Skills Checklist

NCLD Get Ready To Read Screen

*Teacher*

Literacy Activities Checklist

Teacher Background Survey

## **Jane G. Querido**

*Project Title:*

Early Intervention for Child Conduct Problems in Head Start Children

*Grantee:*

Jane G. Querido

*Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

*University Affiliation :*

University of Florida

*Project Abstract:*

This study examined the effect of Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) on Head Start families whose children were at risk for later conduct disorders. The study also served as a screen for behavior problems in Head Start children. Data was collected on Head Start families receiving standard care and compared to families receiving PCIT in addition to standard care. It was hypothesized that, compared to the families receiving standard care, the study group receiving standard care and PCIT intervention would have (1)

children with fewer behavior problems, (2) children who are more compliant to parents' commands, (3) more positive and effective parent-child interactions, and (4) lower parental stress and depression levels and higher family support.

The study was comprised of three phases, using a battery of quantitative standardized assessments completed by teachers, parents and children. In Phase I parents of Head Start children in Alachua County, FL were asked to complete the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory and a Demographic Data Sheet in order to determine the prevalence of child behavior problems. There were approximately 800 children in Head Start in Alachua County at the time of the study. Phase 2 included participation by parents and teachers of 100 3-year-old and 100 4-year-old Head Start children who were randomly selected from Phase I. Head Start child and parent functioning were measured to provide normative data using standardized assessments from the parents and teachers. Phase 3 included 30 Head Start children with problem behavior in the clinical range, with at least one parent able to participate in treatment. In Phase 3, families were randomly assigned to standard care or PCIT groups (half in each) and were not informed of the assignment until after the pre-assessment protocol. Data in this phase was collected using standardized tests from parents, teachers, children, and observers before and after the PCIT intervention and at a four-month follow-up. Treatment outcomes of PCIT were determined at post-treatment, and the maintenance of PCIT gains were assessed four months later. PCIT did not end until the treatment goals were attained. Treatment effects were evaluated by comparing the standard care group and the standard care plus PCIT group on all of the dependent variables.

*Sample:*

n=parents of 800 Head Start children (Phase 1)

n=parents and teachers of 100 3-year-old and 100 4-year-old Head Start children (Phase 2)

n=30 Head Start children with behavior problems in the clinical range, at least one parent of these children, and the children's teachers (Phase 3)

*Measures:*

*Child*

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III

*Teacher*

Conners' Teacher Rating Scale- Revised: Long Version (CTRS-R:L)

Sutter-Eyberg Student Behavior-Revised (SESBI-R)

*Parent*

Dyadic Parent-Child Interaction Coding System-II (DPICS-II)  
Demographic Questionnaire  
Wonderlic Personnel Test (WPT)  
Parenting Locus of Control-Short Form (PLOC-SF)  
Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II)  
Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support  
Parenting Stress Index-Short Form  
Family Relationship Index (FRI)  
Therapy Attitude Inventory (TAI)  
Barriers to Treatment Participation Scale (BTPS)  
Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (ECBI)  
DSM-IV checklist for Disruptive Behavior Disorders (ADHD, ODD, CD)  
Child Behavior Checklist for 4 to 18 Year Olds (CBCL/4-18)  
Child Behavior Checklist for 2 to 3 Year Olds (CBCL/2-3)

## **Sharon Switzer**

### *Project Title:*

A Study of the Home Literacy Practices of Brazilian Immigrant Head Start Families

### *Grantee:*

Sharon Switzer

### *Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

### *University Affiliation :*

Lesley College

Center for Children, Families and Public Policy

### *Project Abstract:*

This study explored the in-home literacy practices of low-income Head Start families who had emigrated from Brazil and who were not proficient in English, as well as studied the effect of immigration on the families and their children. This study attempted to extend the Purcell-Gates' study of uses of print in the home. Purcell-Gates studied low-income English speaking children. Using the same techniques as Purcell-Gates, this study examined verbal interactions, as well as uses of print in the home in non-English speaking Brazilian families. Results from the Purcell-Gates study showed that for English-speaking families, in-home literacy events create an environment where children infer the functional nature of the written language.

Five Brazilian families who speak Portuguese as their primary language were

selected from a home-based Head Start program. This project was an 18-month descriptive study of in-home literacy practices, defined as reading, writing, looking at printed matter or discussion of print such as books or magazines. Qualitative data was collected through naturalistic in-home observations and interviews in Portuguese. This data described how all of the family members used language and printed materials in the home.

Phase I of the study involved learning about the amount and type of literacy practices in the home through observations and interviews. Phase II used the data gained in the first phase to create and implement an eight-week Family Literacy Program that met the families' literacy needs and goals. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, translated into English, and coded for themes relating to language experiences of the children, experiences of the family members in learning and speaking English, and the ways in which the challenges of immigration have affected the children's overall development. Observational data were coded for social domain, language (English, Portuguese, or both), participant structure, and literacy event type. Based on these findings a description of how schools may foster supportive learning environments for Brazilian children was developed.

*Sample:*

n=5 Brazilian families

*Measures:*

Observation

Interviews

## **Margery Szczepanski**

*Project Title:*

Modification of Environmental Demands in the Classroom to Improve Coping Effectiveness and Social Skills in Preschool Children Attending Head Start

*Grantee:*

Margery Szczepanski

*Project Funding Years:*

1999-2001

*University Affiliation:*

New York University

*Project Abstract:*

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher modifications of environmental demands in the classroom to improve social

skills and the effectiveness of coping in preschool children attending Head Start. The intervention program was derived from the Coping Frame of Reference, a set of theoretically based practical guidelines for improving coping effectiveness in children. Coping was facilitated by creating a goodness of fit in the classroom between environmental demands and a child's ability to manage them. This was accomplished by grading and modifying physical, social, and activity demands so that they were congruent with the child's capabilities. The intervention program was ten weeks in duration, and included the following components: (1) teacher training in modifying demands in the classroom to promote goodness of fit; (2) teacher modifications of demands on a daily basis in the classroom; and (3) weekly consultation sessions with teachers to collaborate in selecting weekly classroom interventions.

The participants were 60 to 80 predominantly Latino children and their teachers from four classrooms in two Head Start sites. Two classrooms were assigned to receive the intervention program and two classrooms served as controls. A quasi-experimental, non-equivalent group design was used with pre-test and post-test comparisons made between the intervention and control groups on measures of coping effectiveness and social skills. Process evaluation included identification of environmental modifications used in the classroom, and their frequency of application by the teachers. The results of the study: (1) provided information about the coping behaviors of the child participants and their responsiveness to changes in environmental demands; and (2) contributed knowledge about specific methods and strategies that can be used preventively to promote coping with stress and demands in the classroom, and to improve coping in children whose behaviors are ineffective in managing demands of the environment.

*Sample:*

n=60-80 Head Start children and their teachers

*Measures:*

*Child*

Coping Inventory

Social Skills Rating System-Teacher-Preschool Form (SSRS)

*Classroom*

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)

*Teacher*

Daily Documentation of Classroom Interventions