

## **Program Quality and Services Findings From the Head Start Impact Study and Family and Child Experiences Survey**

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**Woolverton:** The Congressionally mandated Head Start Impact Study is a longitudinal study of Head Start's impact on entering 3- and 4-year-old children. The applicants were randomly assigned to either a treatment group, which allowed them to enroll in Head Start, or to a control group that did not offer access to Head Start, but parents could make use of whatever services were available to them in their community or their child could stay at home.

The focus of this study is on the difference between the outcomes observed for the Head Start participants and those that did not participate. It examines an ongoing established program in a nationally representative sample using a randomized control trial design. The baseline data were collected in fall 2002 and follow children through the end of first grade.

**Resnick:** In contrast to the Head Start Impact Study, the Family and Child Experience Survey (FACES) is not supposed to illustrate Head Start's effectiveness, but focuses on program improvement. FACES 2003 used the revised Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R). It is important to note that in 1997 the original ECERS was used, but in 2000 and 2003 the ECERS-R was used. For this reason it is hard to compare the results of the original ECERS with those of the ECERS-R.

In addition to the ECERS-R, two scales were used from the Assessment Profile: scheduling and learning environment. The Arnett Caregiver Interaction Scale (ARNETT) was also used to measure teacher sensitivity, responsiveness, harshness of discipline, fostering of independence, and detachment.

In FACES, yearly fall classroom observations are being compared. The average total score for fall 2000 is about the same level as in prior cohorts, indicating good quality. The ECERS-R showed fewer inadequate classrooms in fall 2003 than in 2000. There were more classrooms that scored "excellent" in 2003 compared with fall 2000 and a slightly higher percentage that scored "minimal." There were no inadequate classrooms, but a few more in the minimal category and a significant amount more at the higher end of the distribution.

In fall 2003 individual subscales for the ECERS-R only showed an increased quality for language. In 2003 there were higher scores for those subscales pertaining to quality of the space. There were declines in quality in areas such as motor skills and personal-care routines. It is hypothesized that teachers want to do more didactically based teaching to ensure that children are getting their letters and language. Because of this, it is thought that they perhaps cut back on some of the outdoor play.

The ECERS-R places a premium on hygiene and safety. Research shows that children in classrooms that do not engage in strict hand washing have lower cognitive development

scores. In FACES, classrooms teachers are not engaged in hand washing on a regular basis in supervising it properly, making sure it is done properly, making sure that there is adequate separation between food preparation areas and toileting areas.

There was no significant change with the Assessment Profile learning environment, and the scores indicated good-to-excellent quality in learning materials and language environments. On the ARNETT there was a slight increase in the total score, primarily due to an increase in teacher sensitivity. There was no change in a child/adult from fall 2000.

In fall 2003, there were more teachers who have less years of experience and fewer teachers with 10 or more years of experience. There were more teachers who teach in Spanish and an increase in the number of Latinos enrolled in Head Start. It was also found that there were more White and Asian teachers and fewer Black teachers. This was attributed to a phasing out of the older teachers in the population, who were primarily Black. There is roughly the same number of Hispanic teachers. In fall 2003 teachers who had an AA degree or higher went from 57% to 72% in the first two cohorts; however, they were not necessarily getting a CDA. There was also an increase in the number of teachers who have a B.A. degree or higher. But that increase seemed to happen from fall 1997 to fall 2000 and then has leveled off. There were improvements in social interactions in classrooms and higher ratings for teacher sensitivity. Currently, research is trying to link those improvements together.

**Pai-Samant:** The data come from FACES and compares the FACES 2000 and 2003 data. The interview data were with 231 Head Start teachers in the fall of 2000 and 326 in fall 2003. Teachers represent national samples of 43 programs in FACES 2000 and 60 programs in FACES 2003.

The majority of teachers in both fall and spring of 2003 stated that they used a specific curriculum, as opposed to a combination of curricula, with the majority of the teachers using Creative Curriculum. That was a significant increase from fall 2000. Other curricula that the teachers mentioned in fall 2000 and fall 2003 were High Scope, decreasing from 8% to 4%, and theme units, decreasing from 6% to 2%. Montessori stayed about the same. This trend suggests that teachers in Head Start programs are more likely to use widely available and more established curricula. The percentage of teachers who use a combination of curricula increased in spring from 35% to 46%, suggesting that by spring teachers have a better sense of what the children need in the classroom and are complementing the main curriculum to make it more individualized.

In FACES 2003, 95% of the teachers reported receiving training on the curriculum. Almost all had received training in the past year. There was more ongoing support in the fall than in the spring, suggesting that teachers were more comfortable with the curriculum in spring and needed less support as the school year progressed. When asked about the types of ongoing support, teachers mentioned help in understanding the curriculum, receiving refresher training, help with implementation, and help with planning curriculum activities. In another study conducted by the Office of Head Start, the majority of trainings that teachers received in the programs were from their own program staff. The next highest percentage of teachers mentioned receiving training from curriculum developers, and the third highest from staff

from other programs. About 17% of teachers reported getting training from multiple sources. Four percent more teachers in fall 2003 compared to fall 2000 reported ongoing support in the curriculum used.

There was an increase in teaching letter naming, writing, reading, and phonics in fall 2000 to fall 2003. This trend reflects the Head Start's 2002 Early Literacy Initiative. Sixty percent of teachers assessed at least eight areas of children's development. Half or less than half of the teachers assessed artistic/musical skills of children. This indicates that there was a significant increase from fall 2000 to fall 2003 in the percentage of center-based teachers who assess children's language emersion, literacy, math, physical growth, and emotional skills. In a comparison of fall 2000 and fall 2003, there was a significant increase in the percentage of center-based teachers who used a combination of methods; that is they used both observation and an assessment tool or a test to assess the children.

**O'Brien:** For FACES, every parent was interviewed for about 45 minutes on family and child characteristics, parent's perceptions of their children's abilities, the home environments, and family's attitudes about Head Start. In FACES 2003, there were 2269 respondents. In 87% of the cases, the biological mothers were most responsible for the child's care, with 6% fathers, 3% grandmothers, 1% adoptive mothers, and the rest "other." The mean age for the mothers in the study was 28 years, with a range of 16 to 66. Forty percent were currently married, 41% reported never being married, and about 18 % reported being separated or divorced. Thirty percent of the mothers were African American. About 34% were White and 31% were Hispanic. Just under a quarter were born in another country, with over half being born in Mexico. The mothers who had been born in another country actually lived in the U.S. for an average of 10 years by the time they had done the interview. Only 11% have lived in the U.S. for less than 3 years. In terms of the mothers' education or employment, around one third did not have a high school diploma, 30% completed post high school education in FACES 97, but by 2003 that had dropped to less than a quarter. Thirty-five percent of the mothers reported full-time employment, 18% part-time employment, and 6% reported attending school. Six percent of the mothers in the study did not live in the Head Start household. Just over half of them lived in the same city, but 20% of them saw their children for less than 5 days over the past year.

The mean age of the fathers was 31, with a range of 15 to 70. Forty-two percent of the fathers were married, 34% had never been married, and 17% were separated or divorced. One-third was African American, 31% were White, and 31% were Hispanic. One-quarter of the fathers were born in another country, with just over half born in Mexico. Fathers born in another country had lived in the U.S. for an average almost 13 years, and just fewer than 9% had lived in the U.S. for 3 years or less. The information for non-household fathers is not very good because it comes from the mothers; however, 53.6% of the fathers did not live in the Head Start household. Of those, just over half lived in the same city as the child, 56% saw their child 5 days or less over the past year, but a third of them saw their children 300 or more days in a year. Fifty-seven percent provided financial support to the mothers. In 1997, 44% of fathers had less than a high school education, which dropped to 31% in FACES 2003. Correspondingly, the high school diploma or GED for fathers in the 1997 cohort was only 25% but by 2003 was up to almost 40%.

The mean number of children in the household was 2.6, ranging from 1 to 13. The mean number of adults was two, with a range of 1 to 7. The mean annual household income was \$16,800, and the median annual household income was \$13,200.

The FACES financial figures for families or households do not match what Head Start uses as its eligibility criteria. FACES 1997 looked at what kinds of resources were available in the household for the children, whether they counted towards Head Start eligibility or not. Thirty-three percent of the families spoke another language in the household. However that does not mean that was the primary language. In terms of ethnic groups served, there was no trend in the percentage of African Americans and Whites enrolled; however, there is a trend of increasing Hispanic/Latinos enrolled in Head Start.

The children were 49% boys and 51% girls. There are now just under 50% 4-year-old children, 46% 3-year-olds and 5% 5-year-olds. The average age at assessment in the 2003 year was 4.1 years. Thirty percent of the children were reported as African American, one-third as Hispanic, and just under 30% as White. Ninety-six percent of the children were born in the U.S. Just over 3% were born in another country, with half of those children from Mexico. Only 42 of the children were reported to have been in the U.S. less than 3 years.

Over 80% of the children were in very good or excellent health. Fifteen percent of the parents indicated that their children had a special need identified by a doctor or specialist. Of those parents, 31% reported that Head Start had recommended that their child be assessed. The most commonly reported problem among children with disabilities was speech impairment (60%). Language impairment was reported at just under 25%, 14% were reported with emotional disturbances, and about 10% with a learning disability.

Almost 40% of the families had an older child who was previously in Head Start, and just under 10% had another child in the family who was in Head Start at the time of the interview. About 50% of the children were in child care prior to enrolling in Head Start. At the time of the interview, 29% of the children were in child care sometime during that day. Sometimes these were provided at the Head Start center, but that was clearly not the most common arrangement for children. Usually the arrangement was care in the child's home or with a family member.

Health insurance was not asked in 1997. Between 2000 and 2002 the percent covered by health insurance, other than Medicaid, went down from 34% down to 23%. There was an increase in the number of children covered by Medicaid. TANF decreased over the three cohorts from 28% to below 20%. Unemployment insurance went up from 2.7% to just over 6%. There were one million more children in poverty in 2003 than there were in 2000.

There is a question as to whether or not families in extreme poverty are getting into Head Start. Additionally, there is concern that more families are moving to just over the poverty income eligibility line. These families still need services, but are no longer eligible for Head Start.

From FACES 1997 to FACES 2003, there is an increase in the number of “mother only” families and a decrease in the number of mothers living with someone else. There are a disproportionately high number of White households having children with disabilities or impairments, which raises the question as to whether or not something is being missed with African American or Hispanic children. The number of households receiving SSI increased over time, but the number of children without any health insurance at all dropped over time.

Aside from the increase in Hispanic families and Hispanic children, shifts in the target population were not evident. There were some shifts that occurred in terms of employment and sources of income, likely a reflection of the policy changes in the welfare system. While the percentage of households in poverty has been constant, some characteristics of these families have changed as household incomes and use of SSI have increased, and TANF has generally decreased. The percentage of “mother only” households increased across the three cohorts. It is imperative that Head Start continue to monitor these changes among its target population so that we can ensure that Head Start provides the most relevant and efficient services possible.

**Woolverton:** The demographics of the children in the Head Start Impact Study sample are similar across the treatment and control groups. However, in both age-group cohorts from 2002-2003, Head Start children who were assigned to the treatment group or received Head Start were twice as likely to have ended up in a center-based program, typically Head Start. Control group children were about five times more likely to be exclusively in parent care, and this held for both the 3-year-olds and the 4-year-olds. Head Start children were more likely to be in the same setting in both fall and spring of that year. Children in the Head Start centers tended to be in higher quality environment. Their centers had more positive ratings of teacher-child interactions and higher scores on the ECERS-R. Head Start classrooms were more likely to use a curriculum. They more frequently taught math skills through math games, music, dance, and the use of rules and measuring cups. For the 3-year-old group, Head Start classrooms more frequently had children write letters, write and spell names, discuss new words, tell and retell or make up stories, count small toys, and work with shape blocks. There were no differences for the 3- or 4-year-old groups that engaged in activities such as naming letters and learning letter sounds, reading and showing print, showing children how to read a book, teaching directional words, learning rhyming words, counting aloud, or learning calendar days of the week.

**Herren:** The Office of Head Start is moving toward a much more concerted effort to create an environment where research is a part of daily life, where it is integrated into everything we do. There is a research-to-practice work group and a work zone with technical assistance providers to introduce and integrate research findings into learning centers.

When examining the FACES data, the decline in motor skills is concerning. If the focus is on helping children become literate, then the importance of outdoor play and physical development cannot be forgotten. For Head Start to be comprehensive, it needs to include art, music, and physical activity. In another area, hiring new young teachers with credentials is terrific, but it is also important not to lose the teachers with experience or end up with the teachers who do not have cultural backgrounds similar to the children in their classrooms.

In both studies, there is a reflection of changing demographics. In the Hispanic Institute, more materials are being developed in Spanish, but perhaps Head Start should have a more global approach that takes a clearer look at all the different kinds of cultural backgrounds of children in Head Start.

Other interesting findings include the following. The fatherhood initiative has worked diligently to have fathers more involved; however, it seems as if some of them are not nearly as involved as hoped. The mean income at \$16,800 is a remarkable number, as is the fact that 98% of the children have health care, but a very low percentage of the families have health care. It was interesting that 33% of the families speak another language in the home. It is known how to build fluencies for children who are speaking one language at home and another at Head Start; however, it is unclear if the families know the implications of that.

O'Brien addressed some of the issues about measuring effectiveness of curricula. He stated that a number of initiatives look at specific curricula interventions. All of these are layering on top of the existing curriculum some other add-on or some other curricular component. Some of the studies do not carefully disentangle what the existing curricula were prior to what they added to it. They are not carefully checking baseline levels of quality in the existing curriculum, and controlling them before adding other components. That is why it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of a specific curriculum. Additionally, High Scope and Creative Curriculum require significant commitment from management and resources to install in the classroom. Without that at the program level, it is not fully installed and cannot be accurately evaluated.

An audience member commented that policy makers on both sides of the aisle are making use of FACES because it has such a good data set. O'Brien cautioned that while the data are good, it is important not to generalize. It is not possible to look at the representative sample of rural programs, for example, and say that those represent all rural programs, because the sampling was not done in a way that allows that.

Herren commented that an electronic learning center is being developed that will ultimately have a research-to-practice area where grantees and everyone else may use and share information about research-to-practice.