



Socio-Emotional Development

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, DC. This biannual conference brings together practitioners, researchers, administrators, and policymakers 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. Socio-Emotional Development 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.

Head Start has been helping young children develop social competence since its inception in 1965. Social-emotional development in young children is important because it provides a basis for life-long learning. Social competence is also related to academic success and it helps to prevent future social and behavioral difficulties.

Children demonstrating social competence show progress in expressing feelings, needs, and opinions in difficult situations without hurting themselves or others; understanding how their actions affect others; accepting consequences of their actions; being comfortable interacting with a group of familiar adults; developing friendships with peers; and expressing empathy for others.

Researchers at the ninth conference studied various methods to facilitate the development of social and emotional competence in children. Areas of research explored included testing of various interventions with parents, teachers, and children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; determining predictors of social competence; highlighting the value of play; and promoting infant mental health.

Highlights from the conference and poster sessions are outlined below. Summaries of the conference sessions and poster descriptions relevant to socio-emotional development follow the highlights. Head Start looks forward to applying this research to the continued work of helping teachers address the needs of socio-emotional development with children.

Highlights on Socio-Emotional Development: Key Points Presented at Head Start's Ninth National Research Conference

- Dr. Deborah Gross and colleagues investigated the Chicago Parent Program intervention that addressed parenting self-efficacy, parent discipline and behavior, and child behavior issues in 135 dyads. At the 1-year followup to the intervention, Chicago Parent Program, parents reported using less corporal punishment, and issued fewer commands during play and clean-up time. Children of the intervention group also exhibited fewer aversive

behaviors during play and during clean-up. ([PAPER Two: The Development, Effectiveness, and Dissemination of the Chicago Parent Program in Head Start](#))

- A study by Dr. Todd M. Wyatt and colleagues showed that Head Start children had higher levels of positive affect and behavior and productive involvement than private day school children. In addition, the children from private day school centers had higher levels of negative affect and behavior than children from Head Start classrooms. ([PAPER Three: How Children's Self-Regulation Relates to their Observed Affect, Behavior, and Social Interaction in Preschool](#))
- Dr. Brenda Jones Harden evaluated an intervention relating to infant mental health, Project HAPPI, that was delivered by Early Head Start family support staff after they received specialized training. The training consisted of an initial 9-day course, provision of an infant mental health manual, semiannual booster trainings, weekly reflective group supervision, weekly observation, and staff-nurturing activities. Post intervention, staff reported increased sensitivity to parents and children, perception of self and other staff as part of a team, and improved skills at engaging and interacting with parents. ([PAPER Two: Incorporating Infant Mental Health Services into Early Head Start](#))

Special Sessions

This section includes poster symposia and paper symposia related to the topic of socio-emotional development.

PAPER SYMPOSIUM: School Readiness from Start to Finish: Enacting Emotion Knowledge and Social-Information Processing to Achieve Competent Behavior

Discussant: Clancy Blair

PAPER One: Emotionally Competent, Self-regulated Preschoolers and "Getting Ready for School": What Matters and in What Context?

Presenters: Susanne A. Denham, George Mason University

Authors: Susanne A. Denham, Hideko Hamada Bassett, Sara Corll Kalb, Erin Way, Heather Kiernan Warren, Chavaughn Brown, George Mason University

When children can engage in sustained, positive interactions with peers in the learning environment and respond in a regulated way to the other demands of the learning environment, they are better equipped to learn. The present study (Affect Knowledge Test) examined the relations among preschoolers' emotion knowledge, self-regulation, and teacher reports of school readiness. The measures were administered to 279 3- and 4-year-olds before and after the academic year. The children attended Head Start or private child care facilities in a variety of small town, suburban, and rural areas. Teacher measures were administered at the end of the academic year.

PAPER Two: Measuring Predictors of Social Competence: Social Information Processing Assessment in Early Childhood

Presenter: Dave Schultz, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Authors: Dave Schultz, Archana Ambike, Diana Shif, University of Maryland, Baltimore County

The Schultz Test of Emotion Processing (STEP-P) Development included about 1,500 video clips of faces, pilot studies, and DVD creation. Three tests for emotion processing included 62 videos focusing on emotions, provocation, and goal acquisition. The test was given to 125 3- to 5-year-old children in 3 Baltimore City Head Start centers and 1 Howard County Head Start center. Teacher assessment was measured by the Behavior Adjustment Scale for Children Second Edition. The outcomes showed that the new test produced reliable scales (alphas ranging from .72 to .92). Subscales included Emotion Attribution, interpretation of Provocation (relational, physical, or parental), and Goal Acquisition. Children were more likely to endorse benign intent, and were less likely to have teacher-reported behavioral problems; the older children were more likely to be accurate in attributing emotions.

PAPER Three: How Children's Self-Regulation Relates to their Observed Affect, Behavior, and Social Interaction in Preschool

Presenter: Todd M. Wyatt, George Mason University

Authors: Todd M. Wyatt, Sara C. Kalb, Heather K. Warren, Hideko H. Bassett, Melissa S. Mincic, Susanne A. Denham, George Mason University

The goals of this study were to examine how self-regulation acts as a precursor for adaptive behavior; to better understand self-regulatory competence and its relation with affect, behavior, and social competence; and understand the similarities and differences between children in Head Start programs who are subjected to economic risk and children enrolled in a private day school. The Minnesota Preschool Affect Checklist-Revised (MPAC-R) was implemented as a measure of affect and behavior in 163 Head Start classrooms and 194 private day school centers. The Preschool Self-Regulation Assessment was implemented as a measure of self-regulation. Assessments were made in the fall of 2006 and in the spring of 2007. Results showed that Head Start children had higher levels of positive affect and behavior and more productive involvement than private day school children. In contrast, private day school children had higher levels of negative affect and behavior than Head Start children.

PAPER SYMPOSIUM: Head Start Evaluation of Social Emotional Curriculum

Discussant: Amanda Bryans

PAPER One: Contributions of the Head Start CARES Project to Prevention Science

Presenter and Author: Karen Bierman, Pennsylvania State University

The Head Start CARES Project provides classroom-based approaches and resources for emotion and social-skill promotion. Level one of the project included an intervention with teachers involving teacher training and coaching through classroom management training, social-emotional learning, and scaffolded play and learning activities. Level two included coached teachers implementing programs in the classroom through years of teacher training; preschool Providing Appropriate Training in Head Start (PATHS); and Tools of the Mind, an early childhood curriculum for preschool and kindergarten children, based on the ideas of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Child outcomes were an increase in emotion and social skills, behavioral control, organization/attention, and teacher-child relations; and enhanced social behavior, approaches to learning, and academic skills.

PAPER SYMPOSIUM: The Value of Play for Social and Emotional Development and Academic Learning

Discussant: Delyne Hicks

PAPER One: Play and Emotional Competence

Presenter and Author: Susanne A. Denham, George Mason University

Play is central to young children's healthy development and well-being. Head Start defines emotional competence as preschoolers' substantial abilities to understand others' emotions, to react to others' emotions, and to regulate their own emotional expressiveness. Necessary emotional milestones to emotional competence include secure attachment to at least one caregiver and a benign "internal working model" of the world. Emotion regulation is needed when internal resources are exceeded, or expectations of self/others are not met. During early development of these skills, some adult support is commonly needed, including redeploying attention, changing the situation, solving the problem, and using emotion language. Early 'instrumental' strategies included pursuit of active strategies, such as getting help or venting. Later, more cognitive, strategies included thinking about something else through focusing on other aspects of the environment, construing the situation differently, and engaging in symbolic play.

PAPER Two: The Role of Rough-and-Tumble Play in Children's Development

Author and Presenter: Anthony J. Pellegrini

Rough-and-Tumble (R&T) play is defined as play fighting where there is high energy, soft kicks and hits (with open hand), and exaggerated movements. R&T is usually segregated by gender, with males engaging in running, jumping, pushing, and playing competitive games. Female-segregated groups tend to be more sedentary and less competitive. R&T

has been found to relate to peer affiliation, cardiovascular fitness, social cognition, and self-efficacy, and does not lead to fighting among peers.

PAPER Three: Play and the New Preschool Literacy

Presenter and Author: Kathleen Roskos, John Carroll University

The preschool literacy skill domains include oral language, vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print knowledge, and print motivation. This report discussed the links between dramatic play and preschool literacy. Through imaging (dual coding theory; Paivio, 1986), representing (sign concept; Clay, 1976; Ferriero & Teberosky, 1983), and monitoring (self-regulation; Diamond, Barnett, Thomas, & Munro, 2007), dramatic play can result in strategies that foster preschool literacy through read alouds, play plans, and themed play.

PAPER SYMPOSIUM: Addressing the Social and Emotional Needs of Preschool Children in Head Start

Discussant: Nicholas S. Ialongo

PAPER One: SUCCESS Model: A Preventive-Early Intervention Model for Preschool Children at High Risk for ADHD

Presenter: Anil Chacko, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Authors: Anil Chacko, Jeffrey Newcorn, Mary McKay, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) tends to begin early in life, is chronic, and is often associated with further impairment for children. Children with high levels of ADHD symptoms from higher risk environments may be at greatest risk. However, little is known about effective interventions for ADHD in the preschool years, with few studies assessing effectiveness in high-risk populations. The SUCCESS model provided interventions for teachers and parents through Second Steps, Dialogic Reading, the Level System, and the Chicago Parent Program. These interventions were implemented in 9 Head Start classrooms with 18 teachers.

PAPER Two: The Development, Effectiveness, and Dissemination of the Chicago Parent Program in Head Start

Presenters: Deborah Gross, Rush University College of Nursing

Authors: Deborah Gross, Wrenetha Julion, Christine Garvey, Louis Fogg, Alison Ridge, Rush University College of Nursing

The Chicago Parent Program was created with a parent advisory group, its content based on social learning theory. It targeted 135 dyads of 2- to 5-year-olds and their parents, and consisted of 11 weekly group discussion sessions and 1 later 'booster' session, along with weekly "homework" assignments. Outcomes were measured with the Toddler Care and Parenting Questionnaire, Dyadic Parent-Child Interactive Coding System-Revised, and Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (parent-report). At 1-year followup, intervention parents used less corporal punishment, issued fewer commands during play, and issued fewer

commands during clean-up time than parents who did not receive treatment. Intervention children exhibited fewer aversive behaviors during play and during clean-up time.

PAPER Three: Are Classroom-Level Benefits of the Chicago School Readiness Project Sustained Across Time and Across Types of Classrooms?

Presenters: Stephanie M. Jones, Fordham/Harvard University; C. Cybele Raver, New York University

Authors: Stephanie M. Jones, Fordham/Harvard University ; Christine Li-Grining, Loyola University Chicago; Fuhua Zhai, C. Cybele Raver, New York University

The Chicago School Readiness Project sought to improve low-income preschool-aged children's school readiness through changes in children's emotional and behavioral regulation skills. Teachers were trained to respond in proactive ways to support children's regulation and to limit disruptive behavior. Teacher training was further supported with coaching and one-on-one services by a mental health consultant.

PAPER SYMPOSIUM: Prevention and Intervention to Promote Prosocial Behavior

Chair: Tammy Mann

PAPER One: Promoting Social and Emotional Learning in Early Childhood: Learning from the PATHS Curriculum

Presenter: Mark T. Greenberg, Pennsylvania State University

Authors: Mark T. Greenberg, Celene Domitrovich, Karen Bierman, Pennsylvania State University

Children who fail to gain socio-emotional competencies during preschool more often experience learning problems and academic delays, and are vulnerable to peer rejection and victimization. To measure the effectiveness of the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies Curriculum (PATHS), interventions were conducted through two randomized control trials with Head Start classrooms. Strategies employed were the PATHS curriculum and teaching strategies, including praise and warm involvement, positive classroom management, and emotion coaching. Study results showed that teaching practices that reflect sensitive-responding and instructional and emotional support fostered vocabulary growth and social competence in peer interactions. Also, emotion coaching in the classroom (teacher modeling and supporting emotion talk) uniquely predicted emotion recognition skills.

PAPER Two: Incorporating Infant Mental Health Services into Early Head Start

Presenter and Author: Brenda Jones Harden, University of Maryland, College Park

Social competence in infancy is reflected in attachment, autonomy/self-development, emotion regulation, and emotion expression and understanding; and is achieved in the context of a positive caregiving relationship. Infant mental health services have been shown to enhance parenting and parent-child relationships (Finello, 2005). An intervention relating to infant mental health, Project HAPPI, was delivered by Early Head Start family support staff after specialized training. The training consisted of an initial 9-

day course, provision of an infant mental health manual, semiannual booster trainings, weekly reflective group supervision, weekly observation, and staff-nurturing activities. The intervention produced shifts in staff behavior such as becoming more attuned to parent and child, perceiving self and other staff as part of a team, and improving skills in engaging and interacting with parents.

PAPER Three: Early Lessons Learned: Preliminary Findings from CSRP

Presenter and Author: C. Cybele Raver, New York University

The principal aim of the Chicago School Readiness Project (CSRP) was to improve low-income preschool-aged children's school readiness. Thirty-five (35) classrooms were chosen to receive an intervention of teacher training of 30 hours and mental health consultants assisting in the classroom 1 day a week. The control group received a teacher's assistant for 1 day a week. Children in treatment-assigned classrooms showed trend-level reductions in observed aggressive/disruptive behavior as compared to the control group counterparts.

Conference Posters

This section includes posters related to the topic of socio-emotional development that were presented during the poster sessions at the conference.

Early Emotional Development in Infants and Toddlers: Perspectives of Early Head Start Staff and Parents

Presenters: Holly Brophy-Herb, Erika London-Bocknek, Sara B. Dupuis, Mildred Horodynski, Hiram E. Fitzgerald, Michigan State University; Rachel F. Schiffman, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

Authors: Holly Brophy-Herb, Erika London-Bocknek, Sara B. Dupuis, Mildred Horodynski, Laurie A. Van Egeren, Rachel F. Schiffman, Hiram E. Fitzgerald, Esther Onaga, Michigan State University; Rachel F. Schiffman, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee; Mary Cunningham-DeLuca, Shelley Hawver, Jackson Community Action Agency; Madonna J. Adkins, Eightcap, Inc.

As part of a curriculum development project, focus groups were implemented with 21 Early Head Start staff and with parents of 20 infants and toddlers enrolled in Early Head Start. The focus groups were designed to identify staff's and parents' beliefs about early emotional development. Three major themes were identified that crossed the staff and parent focus groups: (a) infants' and toddlers' abilities to have emotions and to be aware of others' emotions; (b) roles of parents as advocates, teachers, and disciplinarians; and, (c) parental reflectivity about their own experiences as influences on their parenting. The findings suggest that parents participating in Early Head Start have some knowledge about basic emotions and the developmental nature of emotions, but may easily misinterpret emotional displays only as attempts at manipulation rather than as valid expressions of feelings; expectations for gender-appropriate emotional expressiveness begin early; more empowered parents may view themselves as role models and teachers for their children; and more reflective parents are better prepared to engage in the

sensitive interactions needed to guide young children's growing awareness of their own and others' emotions.

Examining the Relation of the Preschool Learning Behaviors Scale to Children's Motivation Orientation in Head Start

Authors and Presenters: Crystal Day, Kelly Carter, Ruby C. Harris, Barbara M. Burns, University of Louisville

Mastery-oriented people tend to view challenges with excitement, while performance-oriented people tend to avoid challenging situations. To change the orientation of Head Start children to one of mastery, an intervention was held with 60 Head Start children where learning focused on the following concepts: trying hard is part of learning; mistakes are important for learning; and the harder you try, the smarter you become. The concepts were taught through songs, activities, books, and lessons. Children learned the songs quickly and appeared to internalize the program lessons. For example, researchers observed the children singing the songs while working on challenging tasks. Next steps include expanding the curriculum and teacher training so that the program can be better integrated in the classroom on a regular basis.

Learning Behaviors Mediating the Relationship Between Behavior Problems and Educational Outcomes

Authors and Presenters: Ximena Dominguez, Daryl B. Greenfield, University of Miami

Behavior problems and learning behaviors have been found to be related and have both been linked to academic outcomes, but have not been studied as simultaneous predictors of achievement. As such, this study sought to study specific domains of learning, examine learning behaviors as possible mechanisms explaining the effects of behavior problems on academic achievement, and explore the effect of age and gender in these relationships. Measures were taken of 196 Head Start children from 3 to 5 years old through the Behavioral Concerns scale of the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment, the Preschool Learning Behavior Scale, and the Language and Literacy and Early Match subscales of the Galileo System for the Electronic Management of Learning. Findings showed that preschool children exhibiting behavior problems are more likely to struggle in math, language, and literacy. However, the direct effects of behavior problems on math, language, and literacy were not different for boys and girls, or 3- and 4-year-olds.

The Role of Emotional Regulation and Reactivity in Head Start Children's Academic and Social Development

*Presenters: Amy L. Halliburton, Amanda Sheffield Morris, Oklahoma State University
Authors: Amy L. Halliburton, Amanda Sheffield Morris, Mumba S. Kithakye, Aesha John, Kimberly Whitty, Brenda L. McDaniel, Oklahoma State University; Sonya S. Myers, University of Virginia*

The ability to regulate one's emotions is related to social competence and peer relationships, and research suggests a relationship between academic achievement and emotion

regulation. To examine the associations between emotional regulation and reactivity (anger and sadness) and children's social development and academic competence, parents and teachers reported on 154 Head Start children's emotion and reactivity, academic development, and social development. Measurements indicated that children's emotional regulation is associated with a wide range of academic and social development variables such as language and math skills and prosocial behavior. As such, emotional regulation can be a strong predictor of academic competence and social development.

Socioemotional Adjustment in Preschool Children Following a Natural Disaster: Going Beyond "Main Effects"

Authors and Presenters: Mumba S. Kithakye, Oklahoma State University; and Sonya Myers, University of Virginia

Undergoing natural disasters can have detrimental effects on young children. However, their ability to function post-disaster varies due to, supposedly, differing levels of disaster exposure and interactions between the child and contextual factors and the disaster experience. To examine these relationships, measures were taken of 120 children, their parents, and teachers. Parents completed the Hurricane Experience Survey and Child Behavior Questionnaire, and teachers completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Results showed that disaster severity was significantly associated with parents' reports of emotional symptoms and aggression, and parental separation was significantly associated with parent reports of emotional symptoms and aggression, in addition to teacher reports of aggression. The researchers concluded that all efforts should be made to keep children and parents together, and child emotion regulation was associated with fewer emotional symptoms when the child was separated from a parent.

Examining Relations Between Emotional Reactivity, Regulation, and the Teacher-Child Relationship in Predicting Head Start Children's Socioemotional Adjustment

Authors and Presenters: Sonya Myers, University of Virginia; Amanda Sheffield Morris, Mumba S. Kithakye, Oklahoma State University

The purpose of the study was to examine the individual and combined relations of child/teacher characteristics and teacher-child relationships to Head Start children's socioemotional adjustment, and to examine whether the association between teacher-child conflict and children's social/behavior difficulties is accentuated among children with temperamental vulnerabilities. Measures were taken of 140 4- and 5-year-old Head Start students, their parents, lead teachers, and teacher aides through the Children's Behavior Questionnaire, Student-Teacher Relationship Scale, and Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. The results from the measures showed that child temperament and teacher-child relationships were both significantly associated with Head Start students' socioemotional adjustment.

Connecting the Dots in Cleveland County: A Healthy Tomorrows Project

Presenter and Author: Joan Walsh, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Connecting the Dots is a project in Cleveland County, North Carolina, that seeks to maximize the social and emotional growth and functioning of preschool children, minimize challenging behaviors, prevent expulsion of children from child care centers, and help children be more ready to enter school. A classroom intervention was held with care providers to reduce challenging behavior by developing learning centers, organizing time and space, developing rules together with children, ignoring misbehavior, and giving positive attention. After the classroom intervention, the ABLE I Event Sampling Form (a parent and teacher-report measure designed for screening or early identification of problems of adjustment among children in pre-kindergarten programs) demonstrated improvement (or maintenance of high scores). To develop evidence to support the effectiveness of this intervention, future evaluation work should use additional established outcome measures and should incorporate a comparison control group.

An Investigation of Social Skills, Emotion Regulation, and Academic Readiness in Low-Income Preschool Children

Presenter: Laura L. White, Catholic University of America

Authors: Laura L. White, Shavaun Wall, Michaela L. Farber, Lynn Milgram Mayer, Catholic University of America

Poor social development in young children is associated with continued poor academic outcomes through school. To explore the relationships among social skills, emotion regulation, and academic readiness in low-income preschool children, and to assess whether emotion regulation would mediate the relationship between social skills and academic readiness in low-income preschool children, data from an Early Head Start study were examined. The study measured the emotion regulation, academic readiness, and social skills of 83 preschool-aged children from low-income families. The study found partial evidence that emotional regulation would mediate the relationship between social skills and academic readiness in low-income preschool children.

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](#))