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Quality Assurance in Low-Income Communities

Project Summary
This project developed and implemented targeted professional development services for four NYC-based early childhood centers leading to significant classroom and organizational quality improvement. The main focus of this work is to increase the quality of services provided in 20 four-year old classrooms residing in low-income communities across New York City. Currently, on-going professional development services are being implemented as a way to “sustain” the impact of the intervention.

Research Questions
• How can early childhood classroom and organization quality in low-income communities be increased?
• What are the critical areas of improvement in the target classrooms and organizations?
• What factors influence educator’s desire and ability to engage in professional development interventions?
• How do organizations sustain improvement generated from targeted professional development services?

Sponsors
Robin Hood Foundation.

Project Update
Based on the success of the intervention in improving overall quality in all sites who participated in this project, the Robin Hood Foundation has committed to support a year of activities aimed at creating and implementing a sustainability plan.

Findings
Classrooms who participated in this intervention showed considerable gains on various classroom-based observational measurements (i.e., ECERS-R, SELA, PRISM (revised version of the PCMI) and SSEGA). Sustainability activities are currently being developed and will begin in February 2010.

1 This document reflects project updates as of November 12, 2009
Best Practices for Supporting Children’s Social-Emotional Development in Preschool

Project Summary
This project developed and tested the feasibility of professional development tools for helping teachers strengthen supports for children’s social-emotional growth in preschool classrooms. The tools were used in an intensive professional development pilot in three programs, and the SSEGA was administered in an additional 30 classrooms along with teacher interviews that assessed their approach to supporting preschoolers’ social-emotional growth.

Research Questions
• How much improvement in classroom supports for social-emotional growth can be achieved through use of these PD tools for periods of 6 to 8 months?
• Can teachers be taught to reliably use a classroom assessment tool that identifies strengths and weaknesses in supports for preschoolers’ social-emotional growth?

Sponsors
Robin Hood Foundation.

Project Update
Funding is being sought for this research. The tools have also been incorporated into Early Reading First professional development to ensure the integration of language, literacy, and social-emotional supports.

Findings
Findings indicate that teachers can make targeted improvements when focused coaching provides them with intentional practice of social-emotional teaching methods.
Capturing Time-Use and Play Quality for Low-Income Children

Project Summary
The aim of this project is to further develop and validate a teacher-report classroom quality measure which captures how children are spending their time, the factors which drive classroom practices, and the quality of play for low-income children.

Research Questions
- Does classroom quality measurement capture quality of play for young children?
- Are low-income prekindergarten and kindergarten children engaged in language-rich, cognitively stimulating play?
- Do dimensions of the ECTUS relate to overall classroom quality?

Sponsors
NYC Department of Education

Project Update
Currently, pilot data from a regional-study in New York (N=142) are being analyzed. Funding for the expansion of this project is being pursued using the NIH RO1 mechanism.

Findings
The preliminary findings from a pilot study with a sample of kindergarten teachers working in a low-income, urban setting, illustrates the ability of the Early Childhood Time-Use Scale to capture meaningful classroom-level data. By developing a valid and reliable teacher-report measure of play quality, critical early childhood education issues can be addressed in a cost-effective way.
The Measurement of Executive Function in Young Children

Project Summary
Funded by NICHD, this study is designed to develop a measure of executive functions suitable for longitudinal use with young children (ages 3-5 years). Executive functions (EFs) are information processing abilities associated with holding information in mind in working memory, flexibly shifting the focus of attention, and inhibiting prepotent or automatized responses to stimulation. Executive functions are important for school readiness and for the self-regulation of behavior and their development is compromised in higher risk, more chaotic and stressful environments. The researchers are using their measure with a sample of approximately 1,200 children and families that vary in socioeconomic background and that they have been following from birth through early school adjustment.

Sponsors
Brooklyn elementary schools

Project Update
This project will wrap up in 2010.

Findings
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time.

The Family Life Project: Project I Temperament, Psychobiological, and Cognitive Predictors of School Readiness among Children in Poor Rural Communities

Project Summary
This project focuses on self-regulation in young children. The primary focus is in the development of cognitive abilities referred to as executive functions and the ways in which these aspects of cognition are related to stress in children's lives and important for school readiness and early school achievement.

Research Questions
• Is early rearing stress (chaos in the home and/or low parenting quality) associated with the development of high reactivity to stress and poor regulation of the stress response?
• Is high reactivity and poor regulation of stress associated with delayed development of executive functionS and poor school readiness?

Sponsors
No New York/NYC Sponsors

Project Update
Since 2007, data in the FLP study has been collected in Pennsylvania and North Carolina. This study will end in 2012.

Findings
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time.
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**Project BRIDGE: Bridging Mental Health and Education in Urban Schools**

**Project Summary**  
This NIH-funded project in NYC public elementary schools aims to integrate a teacher consultation program (MyTeachingPartner) and an urban mental health model (Links to Learning) toward the improvement of classroom processes for students with behavior difficulties.

**Research Questions**  
- What are feasible, efficient, and effective ways to integrate mental health resources with school structures to benefit high need children and support the broader learning contexts?
- Does implementation of an integrated educational and mental health model in urban schools have a positive impact on teacher emotional and instructional support to students, and students’ academic and social-emotional development?

**Sponsors**  
National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH 1P20MH078458-01A2); Society for the Study of School Psychology; Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development.

**Project Update**  
In the first year of the project (2008-2009), collaborators worked to integrate the models into existing school and mental health structures. The project is currently in its second year (2009-2010), with classroom and student level data being collected to examine initial effectiveness of the integrated model on classroom context and student learning and behavior.

**Findings**  
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time.

**Testing the Efficacy of INSIGHTS in Enhancing the Academic Learning Context**

**Project Summary**  
This project is funded by IES and headed by Sandee McClowry, a professor at NYU. It is a structured, facilitated, 10-week intervention with teachers, parents, and children to teach temperament-based strategies intended to reduce the behavior problems of school-age children, support their empathy and problem-solving skills, and enhance their ability to self-regular.

**Research Questions**  
- Does INSIGHTS, compared to Read Loud, enhance the academic achievement of urban primary grade students through improvements in the academic learning context?
- Is INSIGHTS more effective for particular groups of children, parents, classrooms, and schools?

**Sponsors**  
Institute of Education Sciences (R305A080512)

**Project Update**  
This project is completing the first year of data collection in five schools. In the following three years, 17 additional schools will receive INSIGHTS or a Read Aloud program for parents, teachers, and students.

**Findings**  
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time.
Links to Learning: Understanding Social Networks and Behaviors in Urban Classrooms

Project Summary
This NIH-funded project focuses on social processes and classroom interactions among African-American children in high poverty elementary schools, in particular, the factors that influence the development of peer social networks and behaviors in urban classrooms.

Research Questions
- How do teacher emotional support and classroom organization influence the development of children’s social networks and behaviors in urban schools?
- What predicts teacher and student ability to map the social structure of classrooms?
- What are the classroom norms for behavior and achievement, how do teachers and students contribute to the development of norms, and how do these norms influence student behavior and achievement?

Sponsors
National Institute of Human Health (NIMH R01 MH073749)

Project Update
The researchers are currently analyzing the data and writing results for publication.

Findings
Results are forthcoming.
What Does Parent Involvement in Head Start Mean for Immigrant Parents?

Project Summary
The purpose of the study is to investigate how institutional discourses about Parent Involvement (PI) facilitate or constrain the experiences of immigrant families and the potential success of immigrant children in Head Start, in a sample of working class and low-income Latino immigrants in New York City.

Research Questions
- What are the dominant discourses surrounding parent involvement at a Head Start Center in New York City serving predominantly immigrant populations?
- How, if at all, do the conflicting institutional discourses of PI in Head Start (i.e., parents as decision-makers vs. parents as advisors) intersect and/or overlap with the lived experiences of working class and low-income immigrant families?
- What are the institutional supports and barriers for working class and low-income immigrant parents' involvement in Head Start?

Sponsors
Institute of Human Development and Social Change

Project Update
Data collection has been completed. Currently in data management (transcription, cleaning, etc.) phase.
Teacher-Child Relationships and Children’s Achievement in Elementary School: A Between and Within-Child Analysis

Project Summary
This project is funded by the National Academy of Education and the Spencer Foundation. It will run from 2009 through 2010.

Research Questions
- Do high-quality teacher-child relationships offer a naturally occurring intervention for children at-risk for academic achievement difficulties due to low-level emergent literacy skills in pre-kindergarten?
- Are the effects of child and family characteristics on behavior problems in elementary school mediated through the quality of teacher-child relationships?
- Do high-quality teacher-child relationships act as protective mechanisms for children at-risk for socio-emotional difficulties in elementary school?

Sponsors
National Academy of Education and the Spencer Foundation; Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development

Project Update
Analyses are currently being completed.

Findings
Preliminary findings indicate that children with low-level emergent literacy skills, who develop high-quality relationships with teachers in elementary school, tend to evidence average or above-average levels of language skills by fifth grade. On the other hand, children with low-quality relationships tend to evidence below-average language skills by fifth grade.

Testing the Efficacy of INSIGHTS in Enhancing the Academic Learning Context

Project Summary
This project is funded by IES and headed by Sandee McClowry, a professor at NYU. It is a structured, facilitated, 10-week intervention with teachers, parents, and children to teach temperament-based strategies intended to reduce the behavior problems of school-age children, support their empathy and problem-solving skills, and enhance their ability to self-regulate.

Research Questions
- Does INSIGHTS, compared to Read Loud, enhance the academic achievement of urban primary grade students through improvements in the academic learning context?
- Is INSIGHTS more effective for particular groups of children, parents, classrooms, and schools?

Sponsors
Institute of Education Sciences (R305A080512); Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development

Project Update
This project is completing the first year of data collection in five schools. In the following three years, 17 additional schools will receive INSIGHTS or a Read Aloud program for parents, teachers, and students.

Findings
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time.
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Chicago School Readiness Project: Promoting Low-Income Preschoolers’ School Readiness  

Project Summary  
Dr. Raver is the Principal Investigator on this National Institute of Mental Health and the Inter-Agency School Readiness Consortium-funded project. Dr. Raver developed and is evaluating this comprehensive classroom-based intervention to support low-income preschoolers’ emotional, behavioral and cognitive development.

Research Questions  
• What concrete steps can programs take to improve the quality of teachers’ classroom management and children’s behavioral and emotional self-regulation?  
• Do program models such as CSRP also lead to reductions in children’s mental health problems and improvements in children’s academic skills?  
• Are children’s early gains in preschool sustained as they make the transition to elementary school?  
• Are program improvement efforts such as CSRP successful in reducing teacher burnout, teachers’ experiences of stress, and teacher turnover?

Sponsors  

Project Update  
The original grant supporting this research is ending this summer though a follow-up NIH R01 funded study of these same students is currently in-progress. The follow-up study is also being supported by funding from the Spencer Foundation.

Findings  
Findings from three recent papers suggest that this early intervention in preschool settings:  
• Substantially benefits the quality of classroom instruction and teachers’ use of warm, emotionally positive, and effective strategies for classroom management;  
• Substantially benefits young children’s mental health; and  
• Substantially reduces children’s engagement in disruptive behaviors as well as supporting children who show symptoms of sadness and withdrawal.
Foundations of Learning: Supporting the Emotional and Behavioral Development of Preschool-Aged Children

Project Summary
With Dr. Pamela Morris as Principal Investigator on this MDRC-funded study, Dr. Raver is Co-Investigator on this community-based replication of the CSRP multicomponent, classroom-based model of intervention in Abbott-funded preschools in Newark, NJ and Chicago, IL.

Research Questions
- Can multi-component classroom-based intervention work well when it is implemented by community agencies rather than by university providers? This study examines the “roll out” of the CSRP model in low-income, urban preschool settings.

Sponsors

Project Update
Data collection is currently underway.

Findings
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time.

Head Start CARES

Project Summary
The Head Start CARES Project is designed to provide information to federal policymakers that Head Start can use to increase Head Start’s capacity to improve the social-emotional skills and school readiness of preschool-age children. Dr. Raver is a member of the senior leadership team for testing the effects of evidence-based strategies designed to improve the social and emotional development of children in 100 Head Start classrooms.

Research Questions
- What packages of workforce development and classroom curricula are most effective in supporting young children’s emotional, behavioral, and social development?

Sponsors

Project Update
Data collection is currently underway.

Findings
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time.
Latino Family Involvement Project (L.F.I.P.)

Project Summary
Funded by NICHD and ACF (OPRE), the primary aim of this study is to develop a multidimensional, linguistically and culturally appropriate, English- and Spanish-language tool for assessing Latino family involvement in collaboration with Latino Head Start families in order to ascertain the relationships between home and school-based family involvement practices and children’s school readiness in the areas of language and social-emotional development.

The researchers will be using their measure with two independent samples of approximately 800 children and families each (across two years) that vary across primary language spoken in the home, recency of immigration, and national origin. This will allow us to look at family predictors of young, low-income children’s school readiness.

Research Questions
- What are Latino parents’ conceptualizations of family involvement in their children’s early educational experiences, taking into account the diversity of the Latino population within a Northeastern urban center?
- Can the above activities be used to develop a culturally relevant, multidimensional measure of family involvement?
- Can the culturally relevant, multidimensional construct of family involvement be examined in relation to important areas of school readiness?

Sponsors
ACS Head Start and collaboration programs (data are currently being collected in 15 programs in Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Manhattan)

Project Update
This project will be completed in 2011.

Findings
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time. However, preliminary findings from the qualitative data analysis are expected by the end of Summer 2009 and will be refining a measure to be employed in data collection beginning in Spring 2010.
Parents Enhancing Readiness through Lessons About Strengths (P.E.A.R.L.S.)

Project Summary
This two-year, multi-method study has a single overarching objective: to produce two culturally grounded, parent-derived measures of parenting that are relevant for research involving low-income, urban African American parents of preschool children. A community-based, partnership-directed perspective is employed in the effort to ensure that participating families will play central roles in the development of items for a paper-and-pencil measure and heuristics for an observational measure of parenting competence.

Research Questions
- What are low-income African American parents’ conceptualizations of parenting competence? A within-group (i.e., emic) approach will be employed to identify core beliefs among low-income, African American families regarding what constitutes competent parenting in an urban low-income context. Two sets of stimuli will be utilized in order to obtain a “ground-up” perspective of parenting competence: (a) open-ended focus group interviews, and (b) videotaped parent-child interactions.
- Can a culturally relevant, multidimensional measures of parenting competence informed by the above activities be developed? A within-group approach will identify relevant domains of parenting competence, and representative behaviors will be sampled to create a pool of items for a multidimensional, paper-and-pencil behavior rating scale. An observational measure of parenting competence also will be constructed using qualitative data from individual interviews and focus groups where videotaped interactions of parents with their children will inform the development of specific heuristics for the observational scale.
- Can the culturally relevant, parent-derived, multidimensional measures of parenting competence be validated? To meet this aim, the researchers will examine whether significant associations exist between dimensions of parenting competence captured by the paper-and-pencil measure and those dimensions captured by the observational measure. The researchers will also examine the concurrent validity of parenting competence dimensions from both parent-derived instruments via their associations with relevant school readiness measures. It is hypothesized that the culturally relevant parenting competence constructs will relate significantly to school readiness outcomes.

Sponsors
ACS Head Start and collaboration programs (data are currently being collected in 7 programs in Brooklyn and Queens, and 4 more are actively being recruited to participate in the Bronx and Manhattan).

Project Update
This project will be completed in 2011.

Findings
No findings are available as data are still being collected at this time. However, preliminary findings from the qualitative data analysis are expected by the end of the summer and the team will be refining two measures to be employed in data collection beginning in Spring 2010.