

conducted at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

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Georgia State University

Project Title:

Georgia State University Research Center on Head Start Quality

Grantee:

Georgia State University, Center for the Study of Adult Literacy

Project Funding Years:

1995-2000

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Project Abstract:

The purpose of the Georgia State University Research Center on Head Start Quality (GSU RCHSQ) was to support Head Start's role as a model program for providing quality child and family services. The GSU RCHSQ worked in partnership with three large Head Start grantees to: (1) define quality Head Start program practices, (2) identify effective methods of assessing and monitoring program quality, (3) disseminate information about quality program practices, and (4) work collaboratively with the Consortium of Research Centers on Head Start Quality. Site-specific and cross-site research was conducted to explore linkages between program practices, quality measures, and child and family outcomes, utilizing a contextual or ecological model of development.

The research questions for this project included: (1) What teacher characteristics, teacher beliefs, and classroom structural factors are associated with classroom quality? (2) Is the quality of classroom teaching practices associated with child outcomes? (3) What parent and family characteristics are associated with child outcomes? (4) What indicators of classroom quality are associated with child outcomes? (5) Are staff perceptions of program policies and procedures associated with program quality? and (6) Are characteristics of the family service workers associated with child and family outcomes?

In order to study varying contexts, the research design included hierarchical linear modeling to test hypotheses at child, family, classroom, site, and program levels. The methodology included focus groups and key informant interviews, correlational and quasi-experimental methods, experimental

studies with pre- and posttests, and the use of existing Head Start databases where possible.

Sample:

3 Programs
190 Classrooms
480 Children

Measures:

Child

Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory (ASBI)
Bronson Social and Task Skill
Phonemic Awareness Profile
M-Kids Preliteracy Inventory
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III (PPVT III)

Classroom

Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs: Research Edition II

Parent

Perceived Parent Competence Scale
Parent Interview
Individual Goals Assessment Questionnaire
Demographic Information Survey
K-FAST (Kaufman Functional Academic Skills Test)

Teacher

Family Involvement Survey
Teacher Beliefs Scale
Instructional Activities Scale
Job Satisfaction Scale

Program

Policy and Program Management Survey (Teacher, Administrator and Parent Council Versions) Self-Assessment Checklist for Promoting Cultural Diversity & Cultural Competency Consumer Constructed Empowerment Scale

Selected Findings:

I. What teacher characteristics, teacher beliefs, and classroom structural factors are associated with classroom quality?

1. Teacher levels of formal education tend to influence classroom quality indirectly through teachers beliefs. When education results in changes in teacher beliefs, then classroom quality tends to improve.

2. Teachers who have more developmentally appropriate beliefs and practices tend to have higher quality classrooms.
3. Classrooms that reflect lower quality tend to be staffed by teachers who have been teaching Head Start for many years.
 - a. Teachers with high quality classrooms tend to have more positive views of parents.
 - b. Classrooms that reflect lower quality tend to have larger class size and greater numbers of children per adult.

II. How is classroom quality associated with child outcomes?

1. Children tend to do better on measures of cognitive development when teachers use developmental assessments to plan learning experiences that match the skill level of the child, to communicate with parents, and to make referrals.
2. Children in classrooms with smaller numbers of children per adult tend to do better on measures of prosocial behavior.
3. Children whose mothers are depressed tend to be more disruptive in the classroom.
4. Children tend to generalize the positive social behaviors that they learn in Head Start to other settings when classrooms have balanced schedules in terms of learning contexts and opportunities.
5. The younger children in the classroom tend to perform similar to the class average when teachers use developmental assessments to plan learning experiences that match the skill level of the child, to communicate with parents, and to make referrals.
6. Children whose parents are low literate and who attend high quality classrooms tend to do better on rhyming and print concepts measures than children whose parents are low literate and who attend low quality classrooms.
7. Maternal depression is less of a predictor of disruptive behaviors in the classrooms with teachers who use developmental assessments to plan learning experiences that match the skill level of the child, to communicate with parents, and to make referrals. Through individualized attention, these teachers may be able to elicit positive social behaviors in children whose mothers are depressed.
8. Teachers who place a high value on children's compliance and obedience in classroom behavior tend to initiate fewer positive

interactions, are less responsive to the children, and are less consistent in behavior management.

9. When classrooms provide accessible materials and space that support a variety of learning experiences and child independence, parents tend to report fewer problem behaviors with their children.
10. Age is less of a predictor of children's positive social behavior in classrooms with teachers who use developmental assessments to plan learning experiences that match the skill level of the child, to communicate with parents, and to make referrals. Through individualized attention, these teachers may be able to elicit positive social behaviors in children who are younger than their peers.

III. What parent, family, and child characteristics are associated with child outcomes?

1. Teachers tend to rate older children in the classroom as more expressive and as exhibiting more positive social behaviors.
2. Mothers who report higher levels of depression tend to rate their children as exhibiting fewer positive social behaviors and more problem behaviors than do mothers who report lower levels of depression.
3. The children and parents from rural communities tend to score higher on their respective literacy measures when the child is enrolled in a high quality classroom versus a low quality classroom.
4. Teachers tend to rate children who experience home violence as more disruptive in the classroom.
5. Teachers tend to rate boys as less compliant and less expressive than girls.
6. Parents tend to rate boys as having more problem behavior than girls.

IV. How are staff perceptions of program policies and procedures associated with program quality?

1. Teachers tend to have higher job satisfaction when they believe policies are very clear, and their administrators believe more policy clarity is needed.
2. Teachers tend to have higher job satisfaction when they feel supported by their administrators.

3. Teachers tend to have higher job satisfaction when they feel that communication with administrators is good.
4. Teachers tend to have higher job satisfaction when they feel that administrators hire and retain qualified teachers and teacher aides.

V. What characteristics of families and family service workers are associated with child and family outcomes?

1. Several specific factors emerged from focus groups relating to personal characteristics of family service workers, which enable them to work effectively with Head Start families. These include: maintaining respect for the family, conveying empathy, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and avoiding judgmental attitudes.
2. The prevalence of risk and protective factors among participating Head Start families is consistent in 1997 and 1998.
3. The percentage of Head Start families with different levels of cumulative risk and protective factors is fairly consistent in 1997 and 1998.
4. The total score on the Risk Index tends to be related to a family's increased need for community services, lower parent literacy levels, lower empowerment scores, decreased number of reading materials in the home, decreased participation in Head Start, and higher parent ratings of their children's problem behaviors in the home.
5. The total score on the Protective Index tends to be related to a family's decreased need for community services, higher parent literacy levels, higher number of reading materials in the home, increased participation in Head Start, higher parent ratings of their children's positive behavior, and lower levels of maternal depression.

VI. What difference does the Head Start program make in the development of children and families in an urban southeastern city?

1. Head Start children made more statistically significant gains in receptive vocabulary than Control children.
2. Head Start children had a faster rate of growth in phonemic awareness, phonemic deletion, and rhyming recognition than Control children.
3. Head Start children made gains in story retelling while the Control children showed a decline in performance.

4. Head Start children and Control children had equivalent rates of growth in print awareness.

Publications:

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Abbott-Shim, M., Lambert, R., & McCarty, F. (2000, April). *A study of Head Start effectiveness using randomized design*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA.

Abbott-Shim, M., Lambert, R., & McCarty, F. (2000, June). *The impact of classroom quality on children's language and social development*. Paper presented at the National Head Start Research Conference, Washington, DC.

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Lambert, R., Kirksey, M., Hill-Carlson, M., & McCarthy, C. (1997, March). *The repertory grid as a qualitative interviewing technique for use in survey development*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, Chicago, IL.

McCarty, F., Abbott-Shim, M., & Lambert, R. (1998, April). *The relationship between teacher beliefs and practices and Head Start classroom quality*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Convention, San Diego, CA, and a revised paper presented at the Head Start National Research Conference (1998, July), Washington, DC.

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High/Scope Education Research Foundation

Project Title:

High/Scope Research Center on Head Start Quality

Grantee:

High/Scope Educational Research Foundation

Project Funding Years:

1995 - 2000

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