

Exploring Teacher-Family Relationships: Avenues for Increasing the Quality of Care in Infant-Toddler Classrooms

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Project Description

This study seeks to inform state efforts to improve the quality of center-based infant and toddler early care and education (ECE) in North Carolina by illuminating the nature and extent of teacher-family relationships and partnerships in those settings. This convergence mixed-methods design (Ponce & Pagan-Maldonado, 2015) includes both quantitative and qualitative components. For the quantitative component, surveys will be used to collect data about teacher- and parent-rated teacher-family relationships as well as related program level supports. Survey results will then be compared to the quality measure used in the state's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). For the qualitative component, highly ranked (by parents) teachers and their administrators will be interviewed to determine what teacher and program characteristics support high-quality partnership activities and how teacher-family partnerships might be incorporated into the QRIS.

Research Questions

- What is the nature of program-family partnerships in licensed infant-toddler classrooms in North Carolina?
- What environmental features within programs and classrooms suggest opportunities for incorporating program-family partnership requirements into North Carolina's QRIS?
- What opportunities do infant-toddler teachers and program administrators see for strengthening program-family partnerships?

Sample

The sample for the pilot phase of the study included $n = 3$ center administrators, $n = 3$ infant

teachers, and $n = 3$ toddler teachers who completed surveys, participated in interviews, and provided feedback on both.

The planned (random) sample for the survey component includes $n = 20$ infant teachers in recently-assessed (for the QRIS) classrooms, and their ($n = 20$) administrators; $n = 20$ toddler teachers in recently-assessed classrooms, and their ($n = 20$) administrators; and 4 families in each participating classroom ($n = 160$). The target sample for the interview portion of the study is $n = 5$ infant teachers, $n = 5$ toddler teachers, and their ($n = 10$) administrators.

Methods

Phase 1 Pilot Study: Phase 1 included the administration of the Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ; Kim, Forray, & Guzman, 2015) surveys and the piloting of interview protocols with infant-toddler teachers and program administrators from three ECE programs. Following survey completion, teachers were interviewed about how they build strong relationships with families; how they use the information that families share; how their relationship-building practices have evolved over time; and what supports would further strengthen such practices. Administrators were asked about program-level policies, and teacher evaluation and professional development practices that supported teacher-family relationships. Teachers and administrators were also asked for feedback on strengthening the interview protocols and survey process.

Phase 2 includes recruitment and administration of FPTRQ surveys with a random sample of 40 teachers, their 40 program administrators, and 160 families in infant-toddler classrooms

recently assessed for the QRIS. Administrative data on programs recently assessed via the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ITERS-R: Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2006) was provided by the state assessment project, and the sample was stratified by age of the majority of children in the classroom (infant vs. toddler) and randomized.

Phase 3 will include interviews, data analyses, and dissemination of results. ANOVAs will be conducted on each subscale of the teacher version of the FPTRQ to compare responses by age of children served and teacher professional development. Administrator responses to the Director FPTRQ will be analyzed to examine program-level policies and resources available to support program-family partnerships. Correlations will be computed to analyze the associations between FPTRQ subscale scores and ITERS-R total scores and subscale scores. Interviews will be conducted, transcribed, and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Progress Update

The pilot study is complete, and the interview protocol revisions are being discussed with the state CCDF administrator. Recruitment for Phase 2 is underway.

Implications for policy/practice

It is anticipated that the data collected in this study will help to inform state policymakers in terms of practitioner views on the opportunities to incorporate family engagement/partnership requirements in the QRIS and supports that would strengthen teacher and program capacity to meet such requirements; as well as how these practices relate to the current quality measure.

Implications for research

The convergence mixed-method design affords the opportunity to study multiple dimensions of the research problem, yielding data that can promote a deeper understanding of the problem or phenomena.

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