Professional Development in Early Childhood Education: Research Needs and Promising Approaches from the ISRC

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March 18, 2009
First, What Do We Mean by “Professional Development?”

- A number of experiences that promote the education, training and development opportunities for EC practitioners
  - Focus today… Practicing vs preservice educators
- Long-term goal is to facilitate learning and social-emotional competencies in young children and certain family attitudes and abilities
Immediate Objectives of ECPD

◊ Advance the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices of EC providers
  ▪ Outcomes of PD efforts that target knowledge, skills, and dispositions are expected in teachers’ interactions with children and families and a host of other specific practices

◊ Promote a culture for ongoing professional growth in individuals and systems
  ▪ The responsibility for delivering effective service is transferred from trainer/coach/consultant to individuals and groups
  ▪ An “ethic of responsibility” for sustaining quality and ongoing growth and learning is promulgated
The Scientific Context for Early Childhood Professional Development

- Need to go beyond questions that address caregiver education, credential, and experience
- Need to expand from focus on form
- Need to build a body of evidence about the processes inherent within PD and both proximal (direct) and distal (indirect) outcomes
The Scientific Context for Early Childhood Professional Development: ISRC

Interagency School Readiness Consortium:

- An initiative of federal agencies wherein 8 research teams were funded to investigate the efficacy of school readiness interventions
  - Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS): National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE); and the Department of Education (ED) Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
- Each field trial included some form of professional development in efforts to facilitate ECE’s implementation of tested interventions
Purposes of Talk

♦ To summarize several studies in the ISRC vis-à-vis their implementation and evaluation of professional development
  ▪ Studies were designed as school readiness intervention efficacy trials, not PD studies

♦ To identify contributions of the ISRC studies in relation to research needs in the field, particularly as related to processes (versus structures) associated with PD
  ▪ See special series in upcoming issue of Early Education and Development (June, 2009) for full articles
Study 1: Children’s School Success (S. Odom, PI)

- Multi-site experimental study investigating the effects of an integrated curriculum
  - Domains of development around which integrated curriculum was developed included social-emotional, science, math, language/literacy
  - An element of individualization was included
- Head Start and Pre-K classrooms (n=45) in five distinct geographic sites across the US were involved
Study 1: CSS Professional Development Focus

- Lieber, Butera, Hanson, Palmer, Horn, Czaja, Diamond, Goodman-Jansen, Daniels, Gupta, & Odom
- Two-day workshop focusing on the CSS curriculum, classroom management, child development (lecture, discussion, video, practice)
- Additional training day later in the school year
- Coaching, technical assistance, implementation help provided weekly by site supervisor
Study 1: CSS Professional Development Focus

- Qualitative study investigated differences between “high implementers” (n=22) and “low implementers” (n=11)

- Addressed questions about factors that influence implementation of the CSS curriculum

- Nine themes emerged as important to high and low levels of CSS implementation; they clustered around *teacher* themes, *content/curriculum & instruction* themes, and beyond the teacher/relationship themes
Study 1: CSS Professional Development Focus

- Teacher characteristics contributed greatly to both high and low implementation
  - Personal attributes, motivation, enthusiasm

- Content variables contributing most typically were teachers’ understanding of concepts and abilities to integrate content throughout the day

- Beyond the teacher variables were relational:
  - Adult relationships in the work setting were associated with implementation for high and low implementers
  - The coaching relationship (receptivity to, partnering with) contributed to high implementation
Study 2: My Teaching Partner (R. Pianta, PI)

- Tested the efficacy of an on-line web-mediated consultation program to improve the quality of Pre-K teachers’ interactions with students.

- Provided (a) access to video exemplars of high-quality teacher-child interactions tied to the CLASS, and (b) a consultation process providing regular, targeted feedback.

- Consultation interactions include observation of teacher videos and provision of feedback within the context of a supportive relationship.
Study 2: MTP Professional Development Focus

♦ Downer, Locasale-Crouch, Hamre, & Pianta
♦ 62 teachers in 21 school districts; state funded pre-K classrooms
♦ Two-day workshop of a language/literacy curriculum and PATHS curricula
  ▪ Overview, modeling of implementation, demonstration of web-based companion
♦ Consultancy condition included a web-based consultant who viewed self-recorded teaching sessions, edited videos, provided written feedback, and engaged in online video conference (iChat)
Study 2: MTP Professional Development Focus

- Investigated teacher factors and PD variables that served as supports or barriers to consultation
  - Teacher variables: age, experience, beliefs
  - Professional development variables: consultant, time (duration)
- Older, more experienced teachers spent more time on website
- Self-efficacious teachers watched more videos of others and themselves
- Initial quality of interactions with children/high emotional support was associated with engagement with consultation, responsivity
There were significant consultant x teacher engagement effects.

Exposure and responsiveness to PD tended to remain stable over time, but teachers became less engaged in certain components:

- Completed fewer full consultancy cycles during second year
- Spent less time viewing own videos in second year
Study 3: Head Start REDI (Research-based Developmentally Informed; K. Bierman, PI)

- Randomized trial testing the effects of an explicit curriculum with lessons, extension activities, and teaching strategies targeting social-emotional (PATHS) and language/literacy domains.

- Integrated with existing curricula and extended throughout the day.
Study 3: REDI Professional Development Focus

- Domitrovich, Gest, Gill, Jones, & DeRousie

- 3-day workshop covering theoretical and developmental model underlying the intervention, curriculum, and integration; one-day booster at mid-year

- Weekly support by coaches
  - 3 hours in each classroom observing, modeling techniques, team teaching
  - One hour weekly meetings with lead and assistant teachers using structured format
Study 3: REDI Professional Development Focus

- 22 teaching pairs (teachers, aids) assessed on participant characteristics and training processes to determine what predicts practice outcomes (uptake)

- **Teacher characteristics**: professional background, personal resources, perceptions of work environment

- **PD processes**: perceptions of intervention (acceptance, impact), engagement in consultation (openness, usefulness)

- **Practice outcomes**: language richness, behavior management, social-emotional support, sensitivity-responsiveness
Study 3: REDI Professional Development Focus

- Used HLM to assess growth in teachers behavior change over time (change in practice)
- Regression models investigated how teacher variables were related to process and content outcomes, and how the process and content outcomes of REDI professional development related to one another
- Significant increases in coaches ratings of teachers practices were noted across all content domains
Study 3: REDI Professional Development Focus

- **Teacher characteristics & practice**: years of education predicted language richness in classroom; other teacher variables (e.g., perception of administrative support) led to inconsistent findings.

- **Teacher characteristics & training process**: hours of training and perception of administrators support were positively related to perceptions of the impact of the REDI intervention on students.

- Training process and training content: Acceptability of REDI was associated with social-emotional support; openness to consultation predicted all dimensions of quality, and particularly for lead teachers.
Study 4: The Getting Ready Project (S. Sheridan, PI)

- 511 children aged 0-5 and their families participated in a relationship-based parent engagement intervention, delivered by providers in Head Start, Early Head Start, and student parent programs.

- Focus of GR intervention was to facilitate parent-child interactions that are warm, sensitive, and supportive of the child’s emerging autonomy; and to encourage meaningful parental participation and family-school collaboration in support of a child’s development and learning (blends *triadic* and *collaborative strategies*).
Study 4: Getting Ready Professional Development Focus

- Focus of PD is to support ECEs work with families in ways that support parents’ competence and confidence.
- Two-day training institute devoted to triadic/collaborative strategies & their use in home visits, socializations, incidental interactions.
- Coaching twice per month; one individual and one small group session (intervention focused; goal determined).
- In vivo observations by project coach with video recordings, selective editing, playback, discussion, goal setting.
Study 4: Getting Ready Professional Development Focus

- 28 participating teachers; 12 were interviewed across two occasions separated by one year; 16 interviewed on one occasion
- Semi-structured individual interviews assessed teachers’ perspectives of PD, the GR intervention, and attitudes/behaviors toward work with parents
- Three themes emerged as a result of qualitative case study analysis:
  - Self-perceived Changes in Confidence & Competence in Enhancing Parental Engagement
  - Relationships as Supports for Change
  - Practice: Time Pressure and Paperwork Woes
Study 4: Getting Ready Professional Development Focus

♦ Self-perceived Change/Enhancing Engagement:
  - “Spark”; change in practice related to strengthening home-school connection, improving communication, building parent skills, establishing partnerships

♦ Relationships as Contexts for Change:
  - Trust, open communication, acceptance, supportiveness, responsivity characterized individual and group coaching

♦ Practice: Time Pressures & Paperwork Woes:
  - Excessive documentation within intervention in conjunction with agency demands added stress; researcher-practitioner relationship allowed for reasonable modification
Study 5: LA ExCELS (C. Howes, PI)

- Longitudinal study of 276 low income preschool children in LA county, recruited two years prior to K entry.
- Documented the experiences of low income children who attended publicly funded Pre-K or Head Start, private centers, family child care homes, and no licensed preschool/child care.
- Examined instructional practices and philosophies, emotional climate, global quality, and caregiver-child relationships; assessed early learning across cognitive, language, and social-emotional domains.
Study 5: LA ExCELS Professional Development Focus

- 103 teachers across public, private, and family child care settings assessed to determine:
  - Patterns of professional development across groups;
  - Whether training and education predict monitoring or mentoring;
  - Differences in teacher beliefs about children and ECE by group or type of PD received; and
  - Differences in observed teaching practices as related to PD and monitoring
Study 5: LA ExCELS Professional Development Focus

- Descriptive analysis identified patterns within program
- Person-centered analysis identified groups similar in terms of education, training, and supervision
- Using clustered groups, assessed effects of different patterns of PD on teaching practices and beliefs, and interactions between PD patterns and program types
Study 5: LA ExCELS Professional Development Focus

- Public preschool had higher levels of formal education than private/family.
- Family child care providers had the most diverse set of educational backgrounds.
- Training in curriculum varied; all preschool teachers but fewer than half of family providers trained.
- Public/private preschool providers tended to receive ongoing support in curriculum use (>80%); only about one-third of family providers received similar support.
Study 5: LA ExCELS Professional Development Focus

- Low training/low monitoring group mostly family providers; they also demonstrated most variability
- Highly trained/monitored group was most diverse in relation to types of settings represented
- Highly trained/monitored group had more “modern” views about children; in family child care, PD was associated with modern views
- Differences in practice only notable for emotional climate; highest PD group demonstrated more positive and sensitive emotional climate, regardless of program type
Cross-Cutting Research Themes Identified by ISRC Researchers

- Specification of PD Approach
- Link to Practice/Fidelity of Implementation
- Participant Characteristics
- Relationships within PD
- Contexts
Specification of PD Approach

- Essentially all of the research teams used a combination of workshop/formal training and coaching/consulting
  - Specification of skills, observation, feedback, modeling, goal setting common across all
  - Amount of coaching varied from ‘as needed’ (MTP) to weekly (CSS, REDI) to twice per month (GR)
  - Duration of support varied from one year (CSS, REDI) to two (GR, MTP)
  - Most coaching was individualized; GR included group coaching in addition to individual
  - Video/self-observation used in MTP, GR

- Fidelity of PD not assessed by any ISRC researchers
**Link to Practice/Fidelity**

- Assessment of change in practice among ECEs included in CSS, REDI, MTP, GR; LA ExCELS assessed practices in authentic settings

- As investigations of PD were secondary to efficacy trials, ISRC researchers were not able to identify what PD factors contribute to/predict change in practice
  - Need experimental manipulation to test specific hypotheses and “unpack” operative elements of professional development
Contextual Characteristics

- The content/domains being targeted through PD varied somewhat
  - Integration across all domains: CSS
  - Language/literacy and social-emotional: REDI, MTP
  - Parent engagement: GR

- The settings and organizations within which one works appears important
  - Public Pre-K: MTP, REDI
  - Public, private, family Pre-K: LA ExCELS
  - Head Start, Early Head Start, Student Parent Program: GR
  - REDI pointed to positive influence of organizational support
  - GR found influence of excessive paperwork detrimental
**Participant Characteristics**

- **Teacher characteristics:**
  - Demographic characteristics explored in LA ExCELS, MTP, REDI
  - What ECEs “bring in” to PD investigated:
    - Beliefs, attitudes - CSS, LA ExCELS
    - Openness to consultation/coaching - MTP, REDI
    - Acceptability of coaching - GR, REDI
  - A “coach effect” influenced PD effects in at least one study (MTP)
  - Characteristics of coaches not systematically investigated
    - Need to explore *who coaches are* and *what they do*
The PD relationship was identified as a key aspect to PD in virtually all studies:
- CSS, REDI, GR, MTP

Given clear importance of relationship as uncovered across all studies, this seems a fruitful area for more systematic research:
- What is best fit and how is this determined?
- What characteristics of coach/caregiver influence relationship?
- How is balance between direct feedback and indirect guidance determined?
- What is the influence of trust on coaching effectiveness?
- What is the influence of relationship factors on a coach’s effectiveness, ability to shift roles, etc?
Research is needed to determine how ECEs achieve new levels of understanding

- What are the salient mechanisms to support the acquisition of new knowledge (horizontal learning) and deeper understandings of use in practice (vertical learning)?
- How is it that ECEs bridge content knowledge to skill acquisition to internalized practice? Awareness → acquisition → automatic
- What are the important elements of scaffolding? How do we help ECEs move from supported to independent practice?
More Questions on Process…

- Intrapersonal factors require more research attention
  - What is the role of self-reflection among ECEs and coaches?
  - How does the interaction between conceptual frame of practice and content being taught influence practice? (How) Can that be “coached?”
  - What is the role of ECEs preconceived self-efficacy?
More Questions on Process…

Questions regarding context and sustainability are important

- How do we help ECEs generalize their new learning/practice over time and place?
- What are the costs?
- How do agencies sustain quality practices and effective PD practices?
Please watch for upcoming special issue on professional development research in the ISRC!

Early Education and Development
June, 2009

S. Sheridan, Guest Editor
Contributions by ISRC Researchers
Discussant: Marty Zaslow
Thank You!

Please feel free to contact me with follow up discussion or questions!

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