



In this issue:

- It's the Perfect Blendship: Helping Children Make Friendships
- Understanding the Impact of the Evidence-Based Practice Movement
- Building Social Emotional and Communication Skills for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- List Service Subscription
- Carolina Curriculum Training
- Kim Page joins KITS as ECRC Coordinator
- KITS Summer Institute

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*Newsletter Staff Editor:
Robin Bayless, M.A.*

*Project Director:
David P. Lindeman, Ph.D.*

It's the Perfect Blendship: Helping Children Make Friendships

By Dr. Barbara Wolfe, 2006 KITS Summer Institute Presenter

One purpose for including children with disabilities with their typical peers is to afford more opportunities for social interactions and, ultimately, to develop friendships. However, just placing children together does not ensure that these interactions will take place. Teachers need to be aware of strategies for making positive social interactions and friendship happen. The following are a few strategies that can enhance your ability to do just that.

Environmental Supports

- Provide social toys and activities that encourage interaction among children. The block area, dramatic play and housekeeping tend to be the most social areas. Keep them dynamic by adding interesting toys and props frequently so children continue to be drawn to them. Also provide lots of toys, games, puppets, balls, construction sets, wagons and dress up clothes all tend to encourage children to play together.
- Provide a buddy area. The rule in the buddy area is that it's a center where two children play together. It could be a table with two chairs or a small rug. Put a high interest social toy in the area and watch the interactions take place. Continually replace the materials to keep the interest alive.
- Arrange small playgroups (2-4 children) involving children with and without disabilities or by pairing a child with social interaction difficulties with a child who is highly competent. Plan special activities for the playgroups to engage in together. For example, they could do a floor puzzle, make a large collage, play with dinosaurs, do a finger painted mural, have a teddy bear tea party – the choices are limitless. An adult should be there to model, encourage, extend and facilitate the interactions as needed. Bring the play-



It's the Perfect Blendship: Helping Children Make Friendships continued

group together periodically by asking the child with disabilities to “remember when he made the collage with his friends” and then go and gather them together again to do another fun activity.

- Limit the space available to children during playtime and place children with special needs in close proximity to peers during group time and play sessions.
- Have prop boxes available to promote dramatic play. A prop box is a set of materials around a play theme. For instance, a pet prop box might have stuffed animals, dog and cat toys, small leashes, pet food boxes, a grooming brush, etc. Plan prop boxes to fit the interests of the children with social interaction difficulties, in particular. Pull them off the shelves to create an instant dramatic play scenario.

Adult Supports

- Embed social interaction instruction and practice opportunities throughout the day. For example: find a buddy to walk down the hall; have children pass out props for circle time as they say each friend's name and the friend responds in kind; assign buddies to play together for the first ten minutes of choice time; watch for friendly behaviors and provide reinforcement by sending home a special “Buddy Award” that tells parents how their child was a good friend today; plan cooperative art projects and put children in charge of materials needed for the project – they must use each other's names to

request what they need; serve family style snack so children are passing food and pitchers to one another; select books with friendship themes; have children share a larger carpet square with a friend during story time; assign children to greet or say good bye to each classmate. Use your imagination and make your own specific plans and carry them through. It will make a huge difference.

- Teach children to enter on-going playgroups. Help them stop, look and listen to what the play group is doing and then figure out a way to add to the play with an idea, material, or role. This may take lots of prompts at first, but once they learn to “ask not what the playgroup can do for you, ask what you can do for the playgroup” they will likely be a more valued playmate.
- Use puppets to role play and model friendship skills. The puppet can model friendly play, and when appropriate, can model poor examples for children to identify and problem solve. Puppets in the image of children are particularly effective.
- Be a play tutor. This involves playing with children directly and modeling play sequences and desired behaviors as a play partner. It may also involve making suggestions to extend play or make it more interactive; or giving children words to use with each other.
- Observe children's play frequently. Watch to see who is playing with what and whom

for how long. You may be surprised to find how interactive and engaged some children are, and how isolated and unengaged others are. Use the observations to make a plan to increase the play and interaction opportunities for those having difficulty.

- Create a classroom environment with an ethos of friendship. This means giving time and attention to children when they engage in friendly behaviors, encouraging children to support one another's friendly behaviors, speaking to all others in the room in a positive supportive way – just to name a few ideas.

As you consider how to increase the opportunities for making friends and having positive social interactions, remember that all adults in your setting can make a big difference. Get everyone on board with planning and implementing interventions. Focus on children with social interaction difficulties, but do not single them out; involve all classmates in intervention activities. Also, support parents to get involved in the effort. It has been shown that parents who play with their children tend to have children who are better playmates and have more friends. So encourage parents to get down and play their child's games and have fun. Putting positive social interactions and friendships toward the top of your list of priorities to teach will make an enormous difference in the long term health and well being of the children in your care.



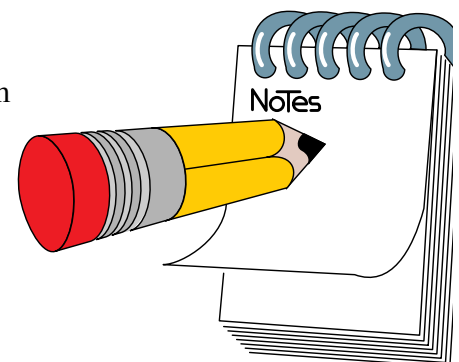
The Collaborative Calendar of Events

View at kskits.org/ktc/

DATE	EVENT	CONTACT
1/25/07	<i>Hearing Screening Course Level 2 - Initial Training & Renewal, Lawrence</i>	kuahec.kumc.edu/hearing.html
2/1-2/07	Kansas Staff Development Council Conference: <i>Strategies That Work For All, Wichita</i>	Janel Andrews , 785-460-5002, colbyadm@yahoo.com
2/9/07	<i>Vision Screening & Assessment Workshop, Wichita</i>	kuahec.kumc.edu/vision.html
2/9/07	<i>Autism Spectrum Disorders Training Series: Sensory Interventions, ITV</i>	Lee Stickle, lstickle@kumc.edu , 913-588-5940
2/17/07	<i>Together We Can Learn Inclusion Conference, KCK</i>	877-499-5369
2/22-23/07	KDEC 2007, <i>Making Beautiful Music Together, Wichita</i>	Gayle Stuber, GStuber@ksde.org
2/22-24/07	Midwest Symposium for Leadership in Behavior Disorders, <i>Work Smarter Not Harder - Do It With Data, Kansas City, Missouri</i>	information@mslbd.org 913-599-3311 www.mslbd.org/conference.htm
3/2/07	<i>Vision Screening & Assessment Workshop, Kansas City</i>	kuahec.kumc.edu/vision.html
3/2, 3/5/07	Save these dates for <i>Head Start & Services for Children with Disabilities Meeting</i> via ITV	http://kskits.org/conferences/head-start/Index.html
3/7-8/07	<i>KSDE Law Conference: KASEA Membership Meeting, Lawrence</i>	KSDE
4/12-13/07	<i>Kansas Fatherhood Summit, Kansas City</i>	Tammy Aguilar, 785-368-6450
4/17-18/07	<i>Assistive Technology Conference, Topeka</i>	Jackie Dwyer, jdwyer@ku.edu , 620-421-6550 ext. 1714
4/25-27/07	<i>KSDE Annual Conference, Wichita</i>	Gayle Stuber, GStuber@ksde.org
4/27/07	<i>Vision Screening & Assessment Workshop, Salina</i>	kuahec.kumc.edu/vision.html
4/27/07	<i>Autism Spectrum Disorders Training Series: Assistive Technology; Evaluation, Interventions and Application</i>	Lee Stickle, lstickle@kumc.edu , 913-588-5940
6/19-22/07	KITS Summer Institute 2007: <i>Evidence Based Practices for Collaborative Transitions From Birth Through Kindergarten, Wichita</i>	Robin Bayless, rbayless@ku.edu , 620-421-6550 ext. 1618

Links to Other Training Calendars

- KCCTO child care or CDA advisor trainings: www.kccto.org/training.htm
- Families Together: www.familiestogetherinc.org
- HeadsUp Network distance training for Head Start and early childhood: www.heads-up.org
- Children's Alliance Training Team: www.childally.org/training/training.html
- KACCRA: www.kaccra.org
- Capper Foundation: capper.easterseals.com
- Council for Exceptional Children: www.cec.sped.org/pd
- KSDE Student Support Services: online.ksde.org/calendar/calendar.asp



Understanding the Impact of the Evidence-Based Practice Movement



In our last newsletter, we reported that the KITS team was working on identifying a commonly accepted definition of “evidence-based practices” in early childhood special education and early intervention (ECSE/EI). We admitted we were still sorting through the various terms and definitions from recent literature, trying to anticipate how and when the emerging conceptual framework would be applied to our everyday practices with kids and families. Thankfully, others have also been at work on this, as evidenced by the growing number of federally funded projects and professional publications devoted to the challenge of defining and identifying what is meant by “evidence-based”. This is fortunate, since the long awaited IDEA 2004 regulations (2006) published earlier this fall did little to enlighten us. Having set the standard for IEPs to be based on evidence gleaned, as much as is “practicable” from “peer-reviewed research”, the feds declined to elaborate in the regulations, claiming it was beyond the scope of IDEA 04 to include such a definition.

Still, it seemed that our field was, in many ways, ahead of the game when the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 first called for the use of “scientifically based research” across educational programs receiving federal funds. Then my personal anxiety increased following the U.S. Department of Education’s publication of a “user-friendly” guide (http://www.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousvid/guide_pg3.html) intended to assist

educators in identifying the scientific rigor of a practice by ascertaining the quality and quantity of its evidence base. Were they serious?

A better guide is provided by The ACCESS Center, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs to improve outcomes for children in kindergarten through eighth grade. This project website provides a more helpful synthesis of issues surrounding the search for an official definition of “scientifically based research” (http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/researchapproach.asp) including a proposed “research evidence continuum” that includes three levels of potentially effective practices: emerging, promising, and evidence-based. Good descriptions of research designs associated with each level of evidence base are provided. A distinction is drawn between work that is “research based” vs. “scientifically based”. For too long work has been described as research based because the content or approach is based on “some type of research”.

This would appear to be the case with the first DEC Recommended Practices, published in 1993, based on input from various stakeholders, including researchers. However, five years later, DEC undertook a review of ECSE/EI research (Smith, Strain, Snyder, Sandall, McLean, Ramsey, & Sumi, 2002) published in peer-reviewed journals between 1990-98, including single-subject design research (Odom & Strain, 2002), to develop a set of recommended practices (2005) for the

field, based on more rigorous scientific methods than the original. Are these recommended practices now considered evidence-based?

Virginia Buysse and her colleagues (2006) address this question in the current issue of *Young Exceptional Children*. This article is a great place to begin your own search for understanding what evidence-based practice means for you. These respected researchers explore evidence-based practice as a “way of empowering professionals and families to integrate various sources of knowledge to make informed decisions that directly benefit young children and families” (p. 3). Doesn’t that sound like a definition we can live with? This article accompanies the publication of a new book edited by Buysse and Wesley (2006) describing the origins of the evidence-based practice movement and examining its present and future impact on early childhood research, policy, and intervention.

In the current announcement in this newsletter of the Formerly-Known-as-Recognition-of-Exemplary-Practice-Awards in Early Childhood Special Education and Early Intervention, note the replacement of “Exemplary” with “Best”. It should come as no surprise that applicants will be asked to describe the evidence supporting their practice.

Don’t let it discourage you from making an application. Sources of evidence-based practice are growing. It’s becoming easier both to identify innovative evidence-based practices and to identify the evidence base

for our existing practices. A review of the ECSE/EI literature on the topic will probably send you to the Center for Evidence Based Practice at the Puckett Institute where the Research and Training Center (RTC) on Early Childhood Development (www.researchtopractice.info) is using a systematic process for synthesizing research to identify effective practices. Since 2003 the RTC has been providing user-friendly research syntheses regarding the effectiveness of many common and emerging intervention practices. I was a little concerned when the first two articles addressed the empirical base for dolphin-assisted therapy (an intervention rarely considered in the service delivery continuum in Kansas). Now, with about 50 research briefs on a wide variety of interventions, it's at least a good start.

The What Works Clearinghouse is another federally funded project that recently added a page for early childhood research to its website www.whatworks.ed.gov. This project is reviewing the evidence base for practices designed for use in inclusive settings with three- to five-year-olds with a primary focus on school readiness skills. To date 19 studies have been sorted according to those that meet or do not meet evidence standards (i.e., "randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that do not have problems with randomization, attrition, or disruption, and regression discontinuity designs that do not have problems with attrition or disruption"). Further consideration is given to practices that may meet evidence standards "with reservations" due to problems with study design,

attrition, or disruption problems. This is another good site to monitor.

Additional websites providing guidance for ECSE/EI practitioners in search of evidence-based practice include:

- Campbell Collaboration www.campbellcollaboration.org
- Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior challengingbehavior.fmhi.usf.edu/
- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning csefel.uiuc.edu/
- Council for Exceptional Children www.cec.sped.org
- Division for Early Childhood www.dec-sped.org
- NICHY Research to Practice Database research.nichcy.org/search.asp

The list of resources is growing, as is our understanding of how this whole movement is changing the way we work with families and children. The time is coming for us to move our profession forward, from an art to a science. One day soon we will be able to identify with confidence what does and does not constitute "evidence-based" practice in our planned intervention with young children and their families.

Resources

Assistance to States for the Education of Children With

Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children With Disabilities, 71 Fed. Reg. 46,539 (August 14, 2006) (34 C.F.R. Parts 300 and 301). Retrieved November 13, 2006, from <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2006-3/081406a.pdf>

Buyse, V., & Wesley, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Evidence-based practice in the early childhood field*. Washington, D.C.: Zero to Three Press.

Buyse, V., Wesley, P., Snyder, P., & Winton, P. (2006) Evidence-Based Practice: What does it really mean for the early childhood field? *Young Exceptional Children*, 9(4), 2-11.

Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. 108-446, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq. (2004)

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, Sec. 9109 (37), (2002).

Odom, S., & Strain, P. (2002). Evidence-based practice in early intervention/early childhood special education: Single-subject design research. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 25(2), 151-160.

Sandall, S., Hemmeter, M., Smith, B., & McLean, M. (2005). *DEC recommended practices: A comprehensive guide for practical application in early intervention/early childhood special education*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West Educational Services.

Smith, B., Strain, P., Snyder, P., Sandall, S., McLean, M., Ramsey, A., et al. (2002). DEC recommended practices: A review of 9 years of EI/ECSE research literature, *Journal of Early Intervention*, 25(2), 108-119.

—submitted by Phoebe Rinkel, KITS Technical Assistance Specialist



Building Social Emotional and Communication Skills for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Northeast Kansas Education Service Center (NEKESC) serves students with disabilities ages 3-5 within a continuum of services. Within our integrated classrooms, a transdisciplinary educational team serves the children.

Recently, we implemented a new program component which focuses upon promoting children's positive social emotional and language/communication development. Our early childhood teams were trained through the LEAP Outreach Project at The University of Colorado's Professional Development in Autism (PDA) Center. The LEAP (Learning Experiences: an Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Parents) model reflects both a behavioral and developmental approach which uniquely emphasizes the enhancement of social skills of children with autism through interaction and play with peers who are typically developing. Our agency's application of the LEAP program includes developing a scope and sequence of curriculum, social skills training, visual supports, transition routines, and monitoring skills.

Social Skills training is a critical component espoused in our programs. Social skills are promoted through several strategies including (a) teacher facilitation; (b) play activities; (c) prompting and reinforcing social interactions; and (d) peer mediated strategies and social skills curriculum/training. Visual supports are emphasized as well and include a system of posters on an easel at children's eye level which serves as a visual schedule for all

children. A transition routine is also implemented with all students throughout the day. This routine includes using sensory cues, attention getting techniques and expanding these using phonemic awareness activities. Monitoring all students during large group instruction provides for high levels of engagement during group/instructional times by assisting the teachers. Paraprofessionals and other classroom staff present act as monitors by utilizing environmental arrangements, observing the large group, cueing the teacher, cueing the students, reinforcement of appropriate behavior and differential reinforcement of incompatible behaviors.

On-going planning continues to occur. This involves monthly staff meetings in which plans are reviewed and updated as well as more formal planning by follow-up visits from the PDA Center staff to our classroom. Specific ongoing planning includes the development of a scope and sequence matrix which will enable all preschool teams to be working on the same theme, book and activities each two week period. Initial lesson planning is completed with the majority of staff members present to ensure continuity between programs. Material development is done in small and large groups as time permits. We are thrilled with the results of our efforts and would be happy to discuss our program components further if there is interest.

—submitted by Janet Tust, School Psychologist, Northeast Kansas Education Service Center

Editor's note: Northeast Kansas Education Service Center is one of three preschool and one infant-toddler program to receive the 2005-06 Application of Best Practice Award (see kskits.org/html/bestpractice/ep.html)

Applications are currently being accepted for the 2006-07 award. See kskits.org/html/bestpractice/ep.html or contact Robin Bayless at rbayless@ku.edu or 620-421-6550 ext. 1618 for an application packet.



List Service Subscription

The Infant-Toddler, Preschool and Newsletter list serves are an important mechanism for KSDE, KDHE, and KITS to get information to professionals across Kansas. In the past few months we have become aware that some computer networks have filters that block messages from the list serves, resulting in names being automatically unsubscribed. We have removed the auto-delete command, but still need to address the issue of messages being blocked. One thing that you can do to help is to add the list's email address to your address book (itnetwork@ku.edu, preschoolprograms@ku.edu, kitsnewsletter@ku.edu). Also, talk to your email administrator if you think messages are being blocked.

If you have not received a message in the past two weeks, go to kskits.org/html/listserv/listservices.html to resubscribe or contact Robin Bayless at rbayless@ku.edu

New Items at the Early Childhood Resource Center

- Parenting with positive behavior support: A practical guide to resolving your child's difficult behavior
- Discovery: Pathways to better speech for children with down syndrome
- The first IEP: Parent perspectives
- Beyond the autism diagnosis: Professional's guide to helping families
- Shared storybook reading: Building young children's language & emergent literacy skills

New KITS ECRC Coordinator is on Board!

KITS is pleased to announce that Kim Page has joined the team as the Early Childhood Resource Center Coordinator, filling the position left vacant by Tammie Benham. Kim is a lifetime Kansas resident with an understanding of the sometimes difficult task of identifying and acquiring proper educational resources in rural areas.

Kim earned her B.S. in education in 1994 and M.S. in instructional technology from Pittsburg State University and still holds a valid Kansas teaching certificate. Since 1994, Kim has worked within the education system as an Instructional Technologist, Basic Skills Coordinator and Information Technologist. Her skills lie in technology with a strong interest in assistive technology.

One of the first tasks on Kim's list is increasing awareness of resources

available for checkout through the Resource Center. Also of interest is the development and coordination of an online training system in which participants do not have to travel to attend trainings and workshops.

Being a supporter of life long learning, Kim is very excited to be a part of the KITS team. You can contact her at 620-421-6550 ext. 1638 or email her at kpage@ku.edu.



Contact ECRC:

phone:
620-421-6550 ext. 1651
800-362-0390 ext. 1651

email:
resourcecenter@ku.edu

web:
kskits.org/ecrc

fax:
620-421-6550 ext. 1791

mailing address:
2601 Gabriel
Parsons, KS 67357



Carolina Curriculum Training

KITS is planning a training on the Carolina Curriculum on January 19, 2007 (tentative) in Newton, Kansas. Subscribe to the Preschool or Infant-Toddler list serv to receive notification of finalized plans.

Registration will soon be available at kskits.org/html/training.html or by contacting Robin Bayless, rbayless@ku.edu, 620-421-6550 ext. 1618. Questions regarding training content should be directed to Misty Goosen, mistyg@ku.edu, 785-864-0725.

**Training for
Early Childhood
Professionals and
Families**



Contact KITS by...

...phone:

620-421-6550 ext. 1618

800-362-0390 ext. 1618

...fax:

620-421-0671

...email: kskits@ku.edu

...web: kskits.org

**Summer Institute 2007
Evidence Based Practices for Collaborative
Transitions From Birth Through Kindergarten
June 19-22, 2007 in Wichita**

Topics and presenters include:

“A Closer Look: Examining Effective Transition Policies and Procedures” Beth Rous, University of Kentucky

“Effective Transitions: Hospital to Home” Jackie Sampers, University of Kentucky

“Stepping Ahead: Transitioning into Preschool Services” Sharon Rosenkoetter, Oregon State University

“Going to the Big School: Effective Transitions into Kindergarten”
Presenter TBA

Watch kskits.org/conferences/si/si.html for more information or contact Misty Goosen, mistyg@ku.edu, 785-864-0725, or Robin Bayless, rbayless@ku.edu, 620-421-6550 ext. 1618.

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