



Topics in Early Childhood Education: Research to Address Big Issues in Practice

Claudia Berlim de Mello

Susan Sheridan

Lisa Knoche

Topical Areas

- Early Learning
- Ecology of Development
- Program Quality
- Professional Development





EARLY LEARNING



What Do We Mean by Early Learning?

- The knowledge and experience that children acquire as they become independent learners.
- Domains of knowledge that prepare a child to function in society and acquire new and relevant information from the world around them.



Domains of Early Learning



- Mathematics and Science Knowledge
- Social-Emotional Development
- Language Development
- Early Literacy
- Approaches to Learning
- Executive Functioning
- Physical Health and Development
- Special Needs



Why Focus on the Domains of Early Learning?

School Readiness and the *Achievement Gap*

- Small gaps become large
- Early discrepancies become lasting
- Gaps in access become gaps in opportunity

*Ready Children, Ready Families, Ready Early
Care and Education, Ready Schools, Ready
Communities*



Why Focus on the Domains of Early Learning?

“Children are not innately ‘ready’ or ‘not ready’ for school. Their skills and development are strongly influenced by their families and through their interactions with other people and environments before coming to school.”

- Maxwell & Clifford 2004, p. 42





ECOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT



What Do We Mean by the Ecology of Development?

- Aspects of children's natural environments and their interactions and relationships that affect educational outcomes.
 - Experiences in the immediate settings (home, child care, preschool)
 - Connections and relationships between environments and the adults in them
 - Community influences and resources
 - Political climate
 - Economic contexts

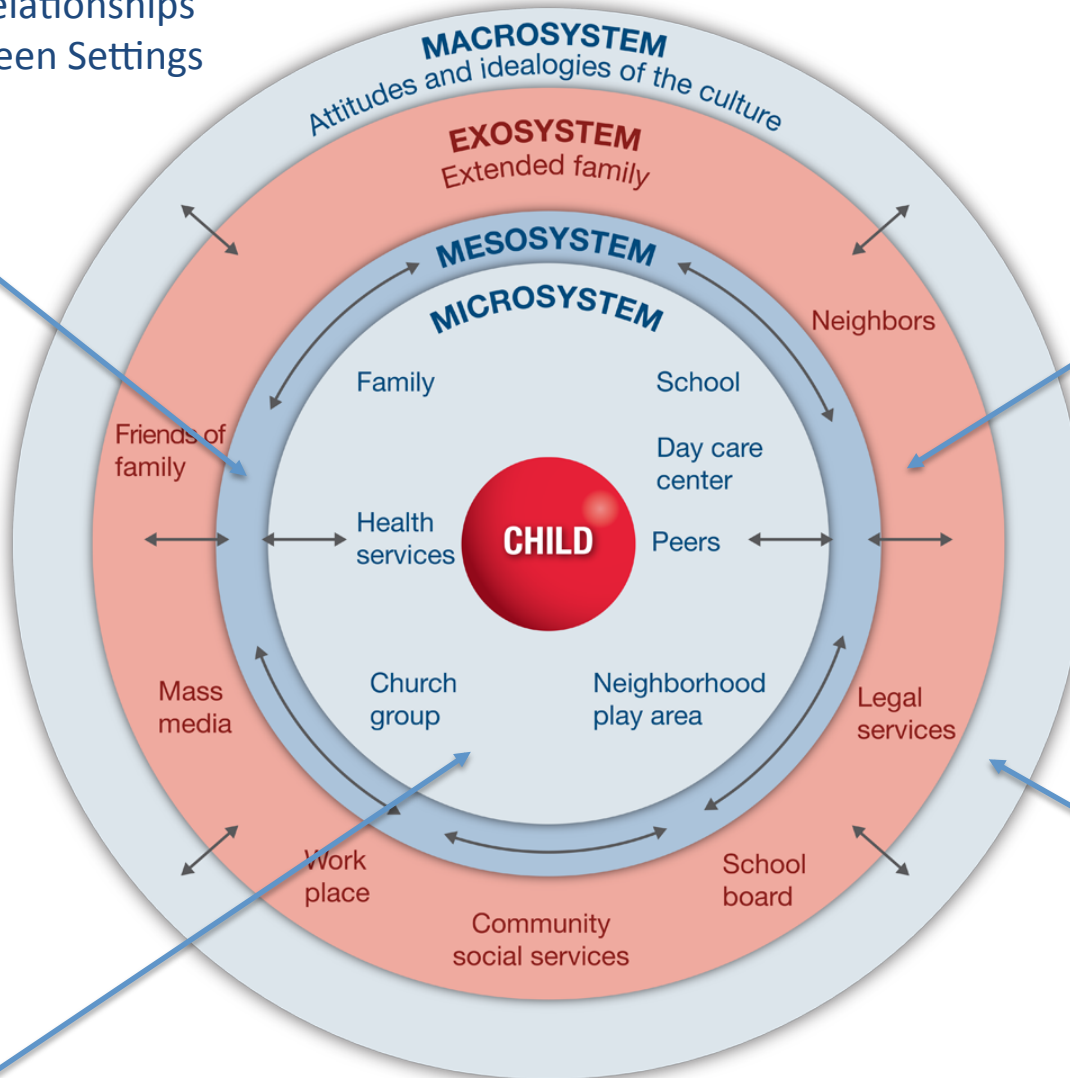


Relationships Between Settings:

- Home-School Connections
- Parent-Teacher Relationships
- Continuities between Settings

Community:

- Rural/Urban
- Nature/Environment
- Resources/Opportunities
- Community Engagement
- Social Justice



Experiences Within Settings:

- Families
- Parent Engagement
- Parent-Child Interactions
- Teacher-Child Relationships
- Food/Nutrition

Policies/Culture:

- Political Context
- Economy
- Values/Ideologies



Why Pay Attention to the Ecology of Development?

- Children live and learn in several overlapping environments across varying levels that directly and indirectly affect their development.
- In addition to isolated effects, *cumulative supports* and *continuities* across ecological levels pave the way for optimal early learning.





PROGRAM QUALITY



What Do We Mean by Program Quality?

- Early Childhood Classroom Environments
- Quality Home Visitation

Structure

- e.g. physical space, adult-child ratios, availability of authentic materials and experiences, staff training requirements

Process

- e.g. adult-child interactions, peer interactions, support for learning, parent-caregiver/home visitor relationships



What Do We Mean by Program Quality?

Warm, inviting spaces



Photo: Municipality of Pistoia



Leisurely, social mealtime



Photo: Carolyn Edwards

What Do We Mean by Program Quality?

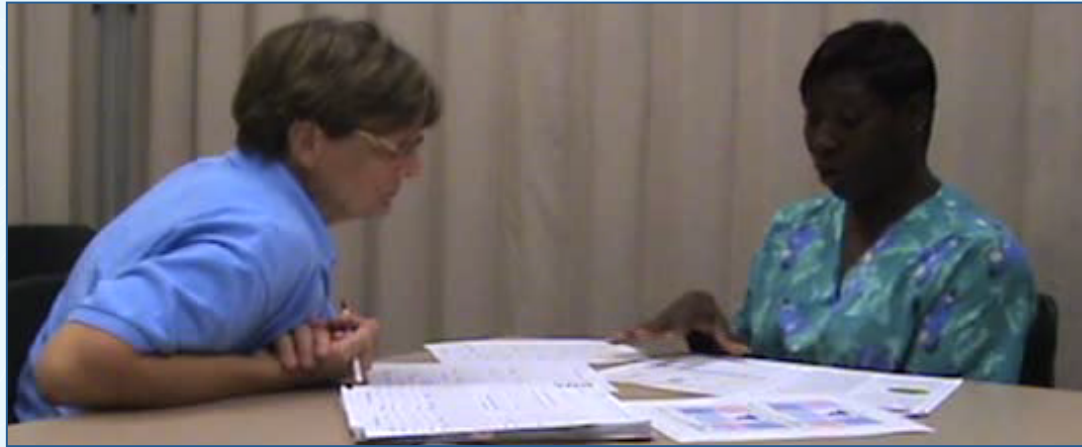
- Transitions/Transitional Programming
 - Infant/Toddler to PreK
 - PreK to Grade 3/Early Elementary
- Administrative Structures and Practices
 - Quality Rating and Improvement Systems
 - Accountability



Why Pay Attention to Program Quality?

- High quality program practices are essential for children's learning and development.
 - In classrooms and home visitation programs, this means improved outcomes for children and families.
- Retention of children and families within programs is improved when quality is high.
- Program quality can be policy lever.





PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



What Do We Mean by Professional Development?

- Experiences that promote education, training and development opportunities to advance the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices of early childhood educators.



What Do We Mean by Professional Development?

- Teacher Education (Preservice)
 - Formal Education
 - Credentialing
- Early Childhood Educator Training (Inservice)
 - Coaching/Consultation
 - Communities of Practice



Why Pay Attention to Professional Development?

- Effective professional development will:
 - improve educators' interactions with children or families;
 - enhance educators' efforts to structure meaningful learning environments in the home or classroom;
 - increase educators' use of specific curricula or evidence-based strategies.
- These changes in practice will contribute positively to children's learning and development.



Topical Areas

- Early Learning
- Ecology of Development
- Program Quality
- Professional Development





Thank You



Obrigada