

The PRIncipal Investigator

The **PRI**ncipal Investigator is the newsletter for the Peabody Research Institute (PRI). PRI's mission is to conduct research aimed at improving the effectiveness of programs for children, youth, and families.

The **PRI**ncipal Investigator is a quarterly publication. For information about this issue or PRI, email Judy Formosa at judy.d.formosa@vanderbilt.edu.

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Peabody Launches Research Institute

Peabody College at Vanderbilt launched the Peabody Research Institute in fall 2008 with the mission of conducting and promoting scientifically rigorous research on the effectiveness of programs for children and families. PRI merged faculty and staff from two Vanderbilt divisions — the Center for Evaluation and Research Methodology (CERM) and a major research program in the Department of Teaching and Learning.

Using field research, program evaluation, and meta-analysis, PRI faculty and staff help determine which programs are actually making a difference in the lives of the people they serve. PRI research addresses many aspects of child and fam-

ily programs, such as their implementation, costs, dissemination, and social or political support. But the emphasis for all of the work is on evaluating programs' effects on children and families.

Mark Lipsey, former director of CERM is the Director of PRI. Dale Farran, professor in the Departments of Teaching and Learning and Psychology and Human Development, and Sandra Wilson, former CERM manager, are the Senior Associate Director and Associate Director of PRI.

See the back page of this newsletter for overviews of PRI's current research projects and a staff and faculty listing.

PEABODY
research
institute

Conducting scientifically rigorous research on the effectiveness of programs for children and families



Dr. Mark Lipsey is the Director of the Peabody Research Institute

PRI Begins 5-Year Study of State Pre-K

Since 2005, the state of Tennessee has provided \$213 million new dollars for pre-k, creating 786 new classrooms, and serving an additional 15,000 preschoolers across the state.

With this kind of state funding commitment – not to mention the program's potential impact on thousands of children – one question remains: *is Tennessee's prekindergarten program effective at preparing students for educational success?*

To answer this question, PRI joined forces with Office of Early Learning in the Tennessee Department of Education to commence the first scientifically-rigorous statewide evaluation of the effectiveness of Ten-

nessee's Voluntary Pre-K program. The five-year, \$6 million study is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Science.

PRI and the Office of Early Learning have implemented a research design to track long-term effects of children from pre-k through 3rd grade.

The design includes randomized assignment of children to pre-k classrooms in schools that have more children who want pre-k than can be served. These children will be assessed in reading and math skills at the beginning of pre-k and each year until 3rd grade.

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Tools of the Mind Preschool Curriculum Focus of PRI Study



PRI is currently implementing a rigorous evaluation of the *Tools of the Mind* preschool curriculum. *Tools of the Mind* was first implemented in classrooms in 1993. *Tools* is both a curriculum and a professional development program for teachers. *Tools* teachers use mediators (guides such as symbols, clues, signs, etc.), language (both oral and written), and shared activity (play, buddy reading, etc.) to help preschoolers learn.

PRI's study will help define what types of prekindergarten instruction reliably promote students' future success.

The *Tools of the Mind* curriculum is centered around make-believe play. Children plan out their play time and then spend long periods of time (45-60 minutes, much longer than the average pre-k activity) following through on their plan. Make-believe play allows children to act in more mature ways (playing parents, for example). The idea is that the make-believe play

provides three types of self-regulation: regulation by others, regulation of others, and self-regulation.

Though some evaluations of *Tools* have indicated a positive impact on student abilities, these studies have had various weaknesses and highlight the need for a well-executed experimental study of the *Tools of the Mind* curriculum.

PRI's study addresses the weaknesses found in other studies of *Tools*, and will help define what types of prekindergarten instruction reliably promote students' future success.

Six schools districts in Tennessee and North Carolina have agreed to be a part of this study. The research sample will be drawn from 40 schools representing a range of urban, rural, and suburban

locations and serving demographically diverse children. Half the schools will be assigned to the *Tools* condition and half to the "practice as usual" control condition. Each year of the study, a sample of students will be assessed — on the outcome measures — direct assessments and teacher ratings for the children. The children will be individually tested by trained assessors at the beginning and end of the pre-kindergarten year.

At the conclusion of the evaluation, PRI will be able to answer whether children in *Tools of the Mind* classrooms improve more in literacy, math, social skills, and behavior problems during the pre-school year than children in "business as usual" control classrooms.

For more information, please contact Dale Farran at dale.farran@vanderbilt.edu.

PRI Meta-Analysis Work Transforms DCS Study

In 2007, the Tennessee General Assembly enacted Public Chapter 585 requiring the state to ensure that state-funded programs for the prevention, treatment, or care of juvenile delinquents were "evidence-based."

The Department of Children Services partnered with PRI to begin a multi-year process of identifying which of its current residential juvenile facility programs and/or services

meet statutory requirements for evidence based programming, and measuring program implementation to determine if the program is meeting "best practice" standards.

Mark Lipsey, Director of PRI, is regarded as one of the nation's leading experts in meta-analysis. Using his expertise, Lipsey and PRI staff developed a database of over 500 experimental and quasi-

experimental studies of juvenile delinquency interventions. The meta-analyses performed using this database identified features of effective juvenile offender intervention programs and PRI faculty and staff developed a Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP) to evaluate existing programs against this established knowledge base.

The SPEP consists of a rating
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DCS Meta-Analysis Study (continued from page 2)

scheme that assigns points for program characteristics based on their relationship to recidivism outcomes.

Each existing Tennessee program will receive a point total (the SPEP Score) indicating the closeness of the match between the DCS program's characteristics and the characteristics shown by the avail-

able research to be associated with reduced recidivism. The SPEP allows researchers to determine which programs are expected to produce better outcomes than others.

The SPEP provides important information on program implementation and other factors, such as the relationship between risk level of a child and

potential impact of an intervention. This information will allow DCS officials and others the ability to identify cost-effective programs based on evidence.

For more information, please contact Mark Lipsey at mark.lipsey@vanderbilt.edu.

PRI's approach will allow Tennessee officials to determine how closely programs for juvenile offenders match evidence-based best practice.

PRI Evaluating Metro Early Reading First Program

Peabody faculty from the Department of Teaching and Learning secured federal Early Reading First funds to implement an early literacy program in Nashville schools. The experiment, called the Enhanced Language and Literacy Success program, provides language, writing and literacy experiences to 702 low-income 4-year-olds in 13 Metro Nashville preschool classrooms. Early Reading First grantees are required by the U.S. Department of Education to conduct an independent evaluation of their programs. PRI is charged

with evaluating the Enhanced Language and Literacy Success program.

PRI's study will examine whether the Enhanced Language and Literacy Success program supports children in developing age-appropriate literacy skills. To do this, PRI is implementing child assessments twice during preschool and once at the beginning of kindergarten for all participants. Additionally, detailed classroom observations of implementation fidelity, classroom environment, and teacher instructional practices

will be collected on multiple occasions. Ongoing child data will also be collected by teachers and literacy coaches. Detailed data from coaches on their specific coaching activities will round out the data collection for the evaluation.

PRI Staff will use multi-level regression analysis to compare student achievement of participants with those students who did not participate in the program. For more information, please contact Sandra Wilson at sandra.j.wilson@vanderbilt.edu.

State Pre-K Study (continued from page 1)

Both those children who were in the pre-k program and those who did not get in will be followed and assessed. This phase of the project began in 2009 and will run through 2014.

The second phase of the evaluation looks at specific pre-k classrooms for a two year period. This part of the project examines only school

readiness for kindergarten, and not long-term effects. The research design includes data collection from pre-k classrooms taught by the same teacher two years in a row, and will follow one cohort of those children into kindergarten. Kindergarten entry skills of children completing pre-k will be compared to those of children who have not yet completed pre-k.

The goal is to determine the pre-k classroom characteristics associated with success in kindergarten. This phase will run in two-year increments between 2009 and 2014.

For more information, please contact Carol Bilbrey at carol.bilbrey@vanderbilt.edu.



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PRI Launches Colloquium Series

PRI will be holding a brown bag colloquium series on the first Monday of every month from 12-1 p.m. The goals of Peabody Research Institute's colloquium series are to 1) inform colleagues about PRI projects; and 2) encourage dialogue among Vanderbilt faculty and staff about research on the effectiveness of programs for children and families.

The colloquium series will be held in the first floor conference room of the Home Economics building on Vanderbilt's Peabody campus. The next topics are:

Monday, November 2, 2009

Focusing on Early Childhood Curricula for High Risk Children: What a Long, Interesting Journey it Has Been, Dale Farran, Ph.D., Senior Associate Director, Peabody Research Institute

Monday, December 7, 2009

Longitudinal Risk and Protective Factors for School Success and Failure, Sandra Wilson, Ph.D., Associate Director, Peabody Research Institute



Dr. Dale Farran will be presenting at PRI's colloquium series on November 2.

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PRI's Current Projects

- Tennessee State Pre-K Evaluation
- Learning-Related Cognitive Self-Regulation School Readiness Measures for Preschool Children
- Experimental Validation of the Tools of the Mind Prekindergarten Curriculum
- Evaluating the Effectiveness of Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment
- Understanding the Antecedents of Antisocial Behavior, School Outcomes, and Substance Use
- Enhanced Language and Literacy Success Project (MNPS Early Reading First Project)
- Evaluation of Ohio's School Conflict Management Program
- Evaluation of Programs and Services in Department of Children's Services' Residential Juvenile Facilities
- Improving Language and Literacy Outcomes for Preschool Children at Highest Risk for Reading Problems
- Scaling up TRIAD: Teaching Early Mathematics for Understanding with Trajectories and Technologies



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