

# Professional development programs improve pre-K teacher-child interactions

January 14 2015

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Two professional development programs for pre-kindergarten teachers have improved their interactions with children, according to a new report for [Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning \(DECAL\)](#). Scientists from UNC's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (FPG) and Child Trends found benefits from both approaches in increased emotional support that children received from their teachers.

FPG scientist Diane Early, lead author of the report, explained high-quality teacher-child [interactions](#) are essential for beneficial child outcomes.

"We already know from a 2014 evaluation by FPG that the school readiness skills of children who attend Georgia's Pre-K significantly improve across a wide range of language, literacy, math, and other measures," Early said. "Improved teacher-child interactions could further increase those benefits."

The research team wanted to determine the effectiveness of two professional development models for Georgia's Pre-K teachers: Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (MMCI) and MyTeachingPartner (MTP). Each was designed to improve teacher-child interactions in classrooms. MMCI is a face-to-face group training model, and MTP primarily uses one-to-one remote coaching.

Previous research had indicated that both of these professional development approaches could improve teacher-child interactions. The research team and DECAL wanted to learn how they would work when tested under real-world conditions.

For this study, 486 lead teachers were randomly selected to participate and randomly assigned to MMCI, MTP, or a control group that received typical professional development. Georgia's Pre-K consultants served as

MMCI instructors and MTP coaches.

"This design is particularly strong because it allows the researchers to understand how these programs operate when teachers vary in their initial commitment to change and when a state agency, rather than the program developers, provide the supports," Early explained.

The research team measured teacher-child interactions at the start and end of the program using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), an observation tool with three components: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. For the past several years, DECAL has used the CLASS to understand the instructional practices and teacher-child interactions in Georgia's pre-k classrooms and to provide a framework for its pre-k teachers' professional development.

The research team found that the MMCI face-to-face training and the MTP remote coaching models each resulted in improvements in the [emotional support](#) pre-k teachers provided children in their interactions. Additionally, MMCI resulted in improved instructional support, one of the strongest predictors of children's learning.

"MMCI significantly increased a teacher's odds of attaining the level of quality interactions needed for pre-k programs to most meaningfully contribute to children's social and academic outcomes," said Kelly Maxwell, senior program area co-director for early childhood at Child Trends and co-author of the report. Maxwell added that feedback from participating teachers, instructors, and coaches showed they valued both approaches.

"We have worked hard to implement professional development that is meaningful to teachers and children," said Susan Adams, assistant commissioner for Georgia's Pre-K and Instructional Supports. "I am

especially excited to know that teachers both benefited from and liked the interventions. We look forward to applying these findings to our other early education initiatives."

Georgia Department of Early Care and Education commissioner Amy Jacobs noted that the findings have implications beyond the state's nationally renowned Pre-K program. "This project demonstrates the impact that purposeful, well-designed professional development initiatives can have on children's classroom experiences. I look forward to sharing these findings with other education leaders across Georgia and the nation."

According to Early, further study will help to understand the range of supports for [teachers](#) and coaches that would maximize the benefits of these [professional development](#) models.

"More work is needed, but this project is an important step because it demonstrates a way to improve teacher-child interactions, which are critical to maximizing children's learning," Early said.

**More information:** Read the Pre-K Professional Development Evaluation Report : [dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/EvaluationGAPreKProfdev.aspx](https://dec.al.ga.gov/BftS/EvaluationGAPreKProfdev.aspx)

Provided by Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

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