Overview of the Organization

The vision of the Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) is to advance quality in early childhood through research, evaluation, and community collaboration. The ECEI at OU-Tulsa strives to advance and support early childhood programming and policies by generating, disseminating, and applying meaningful research.

Several features define the work of the ECEI. Although the ECEI is dedicated to enhancing the knowledge base concerning all children birth through age 8, the ECEI places special focus on the under-studied issues related to the care and education of our youngest children—infants, toddlers, twos, and threes. In addition to this focus on group care and education of young children birth through age 3, the ECEI evaluates early childhood models and programs such as Head Start and we conduct policy-oriented research including investigating characteristics of the early childhood workforce. Another hallmark of the ECEI is our community collaborative approach—in designing and conducting research and evaluation, and in designing and delivering research-based professional development. This partnership approach drives ECEI’s focus on applied research, dedication to usable program evaluations, and commitment to policy-relevant topics.

Recent Highlights

In 2011, OU designated the ECEI as a University Strategic Organization (USO) for the successful proposal entitled, IT³: Research on the Early Care and Education of Infants, Toddlers, Twos, and Threes. This was a major step in positioning the ECEI and its Infants, Toddlers, Twos, and Threes (IT³) Research Center to be at the forefront of research and academic programs in the U.S.

During 2012–13, the ECEI and the IT³ Research Center completed strategic planning. Our goals for the IT³ Research Center, supported by USO funds, include the Center being a:

• Catalyst to launch and use interdisciplinary approaches to address questions regarding infants, toddlers, twos, and threes—especially within the realm of group care.
• Incubator for and contributor to cutting-edge research on the experiences of children, families, and staff at the intersection of practice, policy, and programs.
• Conduit to promote the dissemination of research-based knowledge to various audiences.
• Forum to engage partners in a bi-directional, dynamic exchange of research questions, findings, and interpretations in applied settings.
• Partner to OU-Tulsa academic programs in the preparation of the next generation of scholars with IT³ knowledge and research skills.
• Successful steward of fiscal and human capital necessary to achieve the vision, mission, and goals of the IT³ Center.

Activities Planned for 2014

The ECEI plans the following activities for 2014:

• Successfully implement our 5 funded evaluation research projects
• Expand our research collaborations, partnerships, and funding
• Host the 8th Early Childhood Leadership Institute
• Disseminate our findings through publications and presentations
• Implement and refine our 2013–2016 ECEI Strategic Plan

During 2014, the IT³ Research Center plans to:

4502 E. 41st St.  Director - Diane M. Horm, Ph.D.  dhorm@ou.edu  Tulsa, OK 74135  http://education.ou.edu/ecei
• Recruit a second group of IT³ Research Fellows who are researchers from allied fields
• Award Mini-Grants to foster multidisciplinary IT³ research
• Host IT³ Advisory Board Meeting in May 2014
• Implement and refine our IT³ Strategic Plan for 2012–2017

Linkages and Partnerships
The ECEI has active research partnerships with the following agencies:
• Tulsa Educare Inc.
• Educare Learning Network
• Community Action Project-Tulsa
• George Kaiser Family Foundation
• Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
• Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University
• Mathematica Policy Research, Washington, DC
• Human Development and Family Studies Department, Oklahoma State University
• 21 Tulsa-based early childhood programs who participate in the ECEI’s Research Partnership Program

ECEI staff members also serve on many community boards, task forces, and committees. Listed below are some of the organizations/efforts our staff members participate in currently:
• Oklahoma Partnership for School Readiness
• Smart Start Oklahoma
• International Infant/Toddler Conference Planning Committee
• Oklahoma Infant Mental Health Association
• Child Care Resource Center of Tulsa
• National Network of Infant/Toddler Researchers
• National Association for the Education of Young Children’s Commission on Early Childhood Associate Degree Accreditation
• Educare Learning Network’s National Research and Evaluation Advisory Committee

Recent Publications and Presentations

Impacts and Outcomes of ECEI
The ECEI has grown dramatically over its 8-year history—from one staff member at its 2006 founding to a current roster of 44 full- and part-time research staff. With professional development and strategic hiring, the research capacity of the ECEI has increased making it competitive for larger contracts and research grants. The submission of federal grant applications in 2013 is evidence of this growing capacity.

The IT³ Research Center, with USO designation and funding, has increased the visibility of ECEI’s expertise with this unique age group. Since the 2011 USO designation, ECEI staff with birth through age 3 expertise have:
• Been invited to join the National Network of Infant Toddler Researchers and present at their annual meetings
• Been recruited to be among the first researchers to learn a new measure of Infant/Toddler Group Care Quality developed by a federal contractor
• Traveled to DC to present comments to the Committee on the Science of Children Birth to Age 8 convened by the National Academy of Sciences to inform a synthesis study
• Been commissioned by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), to write a paper on Establishing the Foundations of School Readiness with Infants and Toddlers.

As can be seen from these examples, the ECEI / IT³ Research Center is developing a national reputation as an early childhood research group.