RESEARCH Brief

national early childhood
transition
center

NECTC Literature Review Process and Guide

Ann Hains

A major focus of the National Early Childhood Transition Center (NECTC) is to provide information to families and professionals about transition research, policy, and practice in a format that is usable and accessible. In order to determine the current status of research, policy, and practice in early childhood transition, NECTC conducted a comprehensive review of research, state and national policies, and field practices. Two major activities included assembling a database and a systematic review of the research literature.

The literature review process was designed to identify evidence related to early childhood (birth to age 5) transitions that support positive outcomes for children with disabilities and/or their families. The overall goal was to review published research studies and synthesize the results in order to inform the field on the status of evidence-based practices (Buysse & Wesley, 2006; Snyder, 2006; Winton, 2006). The definition of evidence-based practice (EBP) used was "a decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values" (Buysse, Winton, Snyder, & Rous, 2006; Buysse & Wesley, 2006; Snyder, 2006; Winton, 2006).

DATABASE

In order to provide a comprehensive, searchable database of transition literature in the areas of policy, practice, and research, we implemented a multi-level approach for the identification of materials and documents, such as EBSCO and PsychInfo searches, direct recruitment of materials via an acquisitions brochure, presentations and poster sessions, contacts with states and programs, and Web-based recruitment activities.

Acquisitions. Research studies were identified through several activities. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education conducted a search in June 2003 which identified 208 resources from 1992-2003 in which "transitional programs" appeared as a major descriptor or the word "transition(s)" appeared in the indexing field as a major descriptor.

In addition, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) conducted an ERIC search with the words "transitional programs" as a descriptor paired with the following words: "professional development," "practices," and "policy." The two ERIC search results were cross-referenced and duplicates were eliminated.

The priorities for the literature search included: (1) young children with disabilities (birth to age five) and their families, (2) young children without disabilities (birth to age five) and their families, (3) young children with disabilities (outside birth-to-five age range) and their families, (4) young children without disabilities (outside birth-to-five age range) and their families. The literature search was conducted using the following major and minor descriptors to capture the population of interest: "early intervention," "preschool," "early childhood," "infants," "young children," and "kindergarten." Those descriptors were used with the following major and minor descriptors to

capture the literature of interest: "transitions," "preschool readiness," "kindergarten readiness," "school readiness," "preschool entry," and "kindergarten entry." We also used the descriptors of "policy," "practices," and "professional development" with the previous descriptors to ensure that literature applicable to policy and administration was identified. Information searches covered January 1990 to March 2006.

In addition to a traditional process of identifying literature through databases, NECTC networked with colleagues, organizations, agencies, and NECTC advisory groups (Advisory Council, Expert Review Panel, and Diversity Work Group) to ensure that the database included research reports, consensus documents, evaluation reports, and recommendations to the field. Document acquisitions were solicited via direct contact, dissemination of an acquisitions brochure, and through the NECTC Website.

Internet searches on the World Wide Web were used to locate relevant documents by using the same descriptors used in the database search and "visiting" home pages of national organizations and federal agencies concerned with early childhood transitions. Organizations and agencies included: the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC), Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL), National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC), National Head Start Association (NHSA), National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and ZERO TO THREE.

Database Development. The development of the searchable database included feedback from NECTC Advisory Council members, Research Team members, and consumers. The NECTC Transition Alert: *Online Transition Database* was sent out electronically announcing the database in September 2004. (http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/nectc/Documents/September%202004%20Transition%20Database.pdf)

To date, 786 documents have been acquired and entered into the database, 26% (N= 203) of which are research based and were reviewed according to our acquisition process (see Table 1).

Table 1   **June 2006 NECTC Database Documents**

Document Review Process. The Document Review Process (Figure 1) provides a detailed overview of the steps used by the NECTC staff for acquiring, reviewing, and coding the transition research literature. The process for identification of the current literature in the field was built upon and modeled after the approach used by the Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) research institute [http://clas.uiuc.edu]. Staff from the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education provided consultation to NECTC staff who then triaged the

| Type of Document	Number	Percentage
Non-Research	573	73% of total articles
Research	203	26% of total articles
Qualitative	40	20% of total research articles
Quantitative	188	58% of total research articles
Qualitative & Quantitative	44	22% of total research articles
Other	10	1% of total articles
Total	786	100%

documents so that the research articles published in refereed journals for in-depth review were

sorted from other information. Once research articles were identified, two NECTC reviewers were assigned to each research article.

Figure 1   **Document Review Process**

Reviewer's Guide. NECTC is using a Reviewer's Guide tool for the review of the research literature to determine the research evidence available (e.g., "with this intervention, these outcomes occur, for this population [age range, gender, SES, race/ethnicity, disability], in this setting"). To minimize duplication of effort, the NECTC guide was developed collaboratively with two other organizations involved in large-scale research studies in similar areas of interest. First, the Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development (2003) *Practice Based Research Synthesis Coding Form,* from the Center for Evidence-Based Practices, includes the work of Dunst, Trivette, & Cutspec (2002), which uses an evidence-based approach to document the characteristics and consequences of early intervention practices. Second, the What Works in Transition Research Synthesis Project (2003, August), located in Ft. Collins, Colorado, at Colorado State University School of Education, uses a *Data Extraction Protocol, version .3* to identify research in the area of secondary transition. Once developed, the
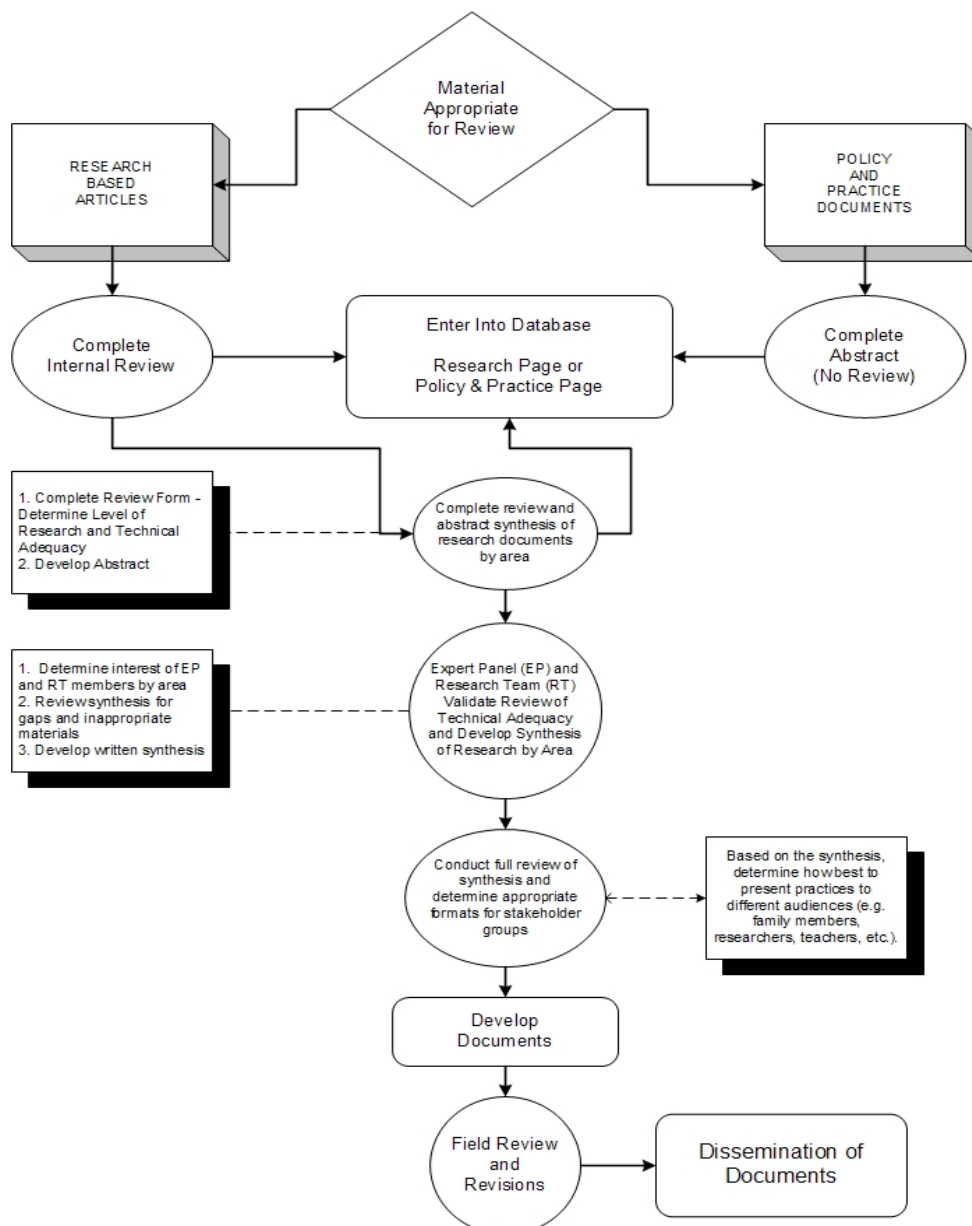
NECTC Research Reviewer Guide was sent to NECTC Expert Panel members for use in conducting reviews focusing on research related to families and children during early childhood transitions.

References

Dunst, C. J., Trivette, C. M., & Cutspec, P. A. (2002). An evidence-based approach to documenting the characteristics and consequences of early intervention practices. *Centerscope*, 1(2), 1- 6. Asheville, NC: Orlena Hawks Puckett Institute.

Buysse, V., & Wesley, P.W. (2006). Making sense of evidence-based practice: Reflections and recommendations. In V. Buysse & P. W. Wesley (Eds.), *Evidence-based practice in the early childhood field* (pp. 225-244). Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

Buysse, V., Winton, P., Snyder, P., & Rous, B. (June, 2006). *Evidence-based practice: What are the implications for professional development?* Presentation at National Association for the Education of Young Children's 15th National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, San Antonio, TX.

Snyder, P. (2006). Best available research evidence: Impact on research in early childhood. In V. Buysse & P. W. Wesley (Eds.), *Evidence-based practice in the early childhood field* (pp. 35-70). Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

Research and Training Center on Early Childhood Development (2003). *Practice based research synthesis coding form.* Center for Evidence-Based Practices. Asheville, NC: Orlena Hawks Puckett Institute.

What Works in Transition Research Synthesis Project (2003, August). *Data extraction protocol, version .3.* Ft. Collins, CO: Colorado State University, School of Education.

Winton, P. (2006). The evidence-based practice movement and its effect on knowledge utilization. In V. Buysse & P. W. Wesley (Eds.), *Evidence-based practice in the early childhood field* (PP. 71-115). Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.