

## Ginnie Graham: OU-Tulsa researcher part of Educare study published in top academic journal



Diane Horm has been the director of the Early Childhood Education Institute since it was established in 2006. MATT BARNARD/Tulsa World

Posted: Thursday, February 23, 2017 12:01 am | Updated: 12:36 am, Thu Feb 23, 2017.

By Ginnie Graham News Columnist

Tulsa's Educare and the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa have helped break ground on early childhood research with a study published this month in a top academic journal.

Sometimes, Tulsans forget that the city is fortunate in its leadership in early childhood education.

It's not just about offering high-quality options for low-income families and support of publicly funded pre-kindergarten programs. It's also about the university-level investment in researching the outcomes of those programs.

Diane Horm, founding director of OU-Tulsa's Early Childhood Education Institute, is among the researchers on findings published in "Child Development," considered the premier journal in its field for a strict and rigorous vetting process.

"I finished graduate school in 1985 and have been trying to get published in this journal since then," Horm said.

Unique aspects of the research include the young ages of the children – infants and toddlers – and the ability to have a control group.

Part of the difficulty in studying outcomes for early learning programs is finding a sample group for comparison.

Educare programs are designed for infants to 5-year-olds in low-income families to provide university-educated teachers and community supports for helping parents become self-sufficient. Tulsa has three centers.

Because space is limited, not all families are accepted.

This provided the opportunity for researchers to obtain a randomized control trial for evaluating Educare outcomes. For families not able to enroll, they were approached about participating in the study.

The centers in Tulsa, Chicago, Omaha and Milwaukee were part of the study. It was coordinated by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The study included 239 children younger than 18-months-old. Of those, 118 were randomly assigned to Educare and 121 were in the control group. It followed the children for a year.

Horm said the children in the control group were in different settings, including at home with a family member or enrolled in another child-care program.

The key findings among the children, who would be about 2 years old:

- Significantly higher English language skills.
- Fewer reports from parents about problem behaviors.
- More positive parent-child interactions.

“There is a growing body of research showing high-quality early childhood programs are good for children,” Horm said. “This is a really robust study done with younger children. As the field is studying children at younger and younger ages, we are showing how efforts of early education have positive outcomes.

“Educare is leading the way in focusing on services for infants and toddlers.”

The purpose of such research projects is to get at age-old questions of what is best for school readiness.

For families who need or prefer a child-care program for infants and young children, the programs can be designed based on data rather than anecdotes.

“With infants, there is a worry about being in group care,” Horm said. “The study shows that a high-quality program cannot only meet the needs but also boost development if there is any vulnerability present.”

What isn’t examined in the study is what part of the Educare structure leads to these outcomes.

The programs are comprehensive, offering education to children and their parents. It includes services for adults such as GED, job training, health and nutrition, parenting and partnerships to provide a college education. Child care is provided by teachers with bachelor’s degrees.

It could be some aspects of Educare are more effective than others. Or, perhaps it’s the combination of the whole package.

“Right now, it’s the bundle of those services showing good results,” Horm said.

The research will be continued with the group through age 5.

“These types of studies are important, particularly as the fiscal environment gets tighter and people look to cut programs,” Horm said. “The ones that stick around have good evidence-based data to back them up.”

Click [here](#) to view the full article of Child Trends: Supporting Community Based Early Childhood Initiatives.