The Blame Game:
The Media “Explains” the Preschool Expulsion Study

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“Toddlers of Terror”
“Tossing the Terror Tots”
“LittleTroublemakersLand in BigTrouble”
“Pint Size Terrors…”
“When Toddlers Get Fired”
Overview...

• Pre-Kindergarteners Left Behind: a look at the study
• 3 major trends in media coverage
• Effects of Media-Spinning: What does it all mean, and where do we go from here?
• Questions & Discussion
A bit about the study...

- Part of National Prekindergarten Survey - 4,000 preschool teachers were asked how many children they had expelled in the previous year.
- Gilliam then compared these numbers with K-12 expulsion data collected in Elementary and Secondary School Survey: 2000 (NCES).
- Nationally: 6.67 per 1,000 preschoolers expelled, 2.09 per 1,000 K-12 students expelled.
Some stats on the states

- At the top:
  - New Mexico (24.31 per 1,000)
  - Maine (14.73 per 1,000)
  - Alabama (14.12 per 1,000)

- At the bottom:
  - Kentucky (0 per 1,000)
  - South Carolina (2.04 per 1,000)
  - Kansas (2.13 per 1,000)

- California: 16th with 7.49 per 1,000
Demographic findings

- **Gender:**
  - Boys: 10.46
  - Girls: 2.26

- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - African-American: 10.04
  - White: 5.77
  - Latino: 4.22
  - Asian-American: 1.82

- **Classroom Setting:**
  - School: 9.19
  - Head Start: 11.71
  - For-Profit Child Care: 14.55
  - Faith-Affiliated: 18.06

- **Mental Health Consultation Access**
  - On-site or regular visit: 7.97
  - On-call: 10.29
  - No access: 14.34
Effects of expulsions/conclusions

- Gilliam’s conclusion: teachers need more ECMH consultation, support, and resources available on consistent basis

- Gilliam:
  “When we fail to provide these supports, we place children and their families in a very difficult situation – where some children are bounced from one program to the next and parents may end up viewing their child as an educational failure well before kindergarten.”
Next Steps...

• Kentucky, SC, Michigan, Illinois programs
  - All include increased teacher training and availability of mental health resources

• Preschool for All Initiative -
  “Sec. 141117. (a) Within six months of the effective date of this Act, the Superintendent of Public Instruction shall adopt initial regulations to:
  (10) Limit the expulsion of children from Preschool for All programs;”
3 trends of the media:

1. Just the facts, ma’am
2. Spreading the blame
3. Anecdotes & appeals to emotion
Round 1: The Facts

• Focus on summarizing the facts and findings of the Yale study
• Main conclusion: access to mental health consultation decreases preschool expulsion, creating better environment for both children and teachers
Round 2: Who to Blame?

- Articles begin to place blame on:
  - Teachers - lack of adequate training and qualifications for teaching preschoolers
  - Preschools - too much emphasis on academics and standards, inappropriate developmental expectations (NCLB)
  - Parents - too selfish and permissive, not taking responsibility for raising children
Round 3: Anecdotal Appeals

• “My teachers hate me, they don’t want me.”
• “Elijah needs a spanking, and quite frankly so do his parents.”
What does it all mean?

• Media co-opted story, in favor of sensationalizing data and introducing more controversies

• Child care field must fight the media taking control of story - it’s your story, make sure you’re heard! Write letters, hold discussions, talk to the community.
Local reactions…

• Grace Manning-Orenstein gave an interview on TV and was quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (“Preschool expulsions explained” - link on handout)

• Other child care advocates submitted letters to the editor
In the end, we looked at...

- Prekindergarteners Left Behind
- 3 waves of media spinning
- Effects on parents, teachers, preschools, child care field
What do you think?

• What was your personal experience with this story?
• What should we do to act?
• How do you feel the media has covered early care and education issues in the long term?