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Introduction to the Guttman Articles

Virginia Casper
Bank Street College of Education

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The Guttman Center for Early Care & Education came about through a 2016 grant from the Guttman Foundation to provide a quality professional development and support system to child care providers and practitioners in East New York, Brooklyn. The program paired coaching with Saturday workshops delivered in the community to address local community needs. Following participants' graduation, the program initiated a learning network to promote continued peer learning (see the articles in this issue by Robin Hancock and Marjorie Brickley). Although the project has ended, the learning network—and thousands of interactions from the many relationships that were formed—remain and continue to evolve. Children, practitioners, parents, and Guttman program staff have changed for the better as a result of the work in which we all were deeply engaged.

The Guttman Center worked, first and foremost, to acknowledge that the body of infant-toddler research reverberates with a resounding and consistent message about how cultivation of relationships across the board—babies, parents, practitioners, staff developers, and community members—is the basis for positive growth and development for all involved. The center also supports continuity of care for very young children (WestEd, 2017; Recchia, 2012; Zero to Three, 2010). Doing this work takes time and care and our youngest children need highly skilled adults who have looked inward, can be present, and can communicate well with both children and adults. While all this may also be true for older children and their teachers, the youngest are in a foundational period, and foundations must be strong and true. Behavior patterns from our own education die hard and it takes time and an understanding of local needs for a high-quality and truly mutual professional development project to succeed. The kind of relationships we want practitioners to have with young children and parents must be present in a mutuality of learning between and among everyone.

The story of the Guttman Center is about its attempts to address early caregiving as a local undertaking, yet the issues it worked to address and the problems it faced tell a much larger story. How is a program deemed a success? How is success measured? Scalability, a concept borrowed from industry, is de rigueur these days. Taking a quality program to scale is a desirable goal. Understandably, funders, whether public or private, want programs to serve more families in effective ways and often build in steps of funding that depend on whether a "pilot" seems promising. What does going to scale mean? Tsing (2012) describes scale as having precision and "going to scale" as an ability to grow something "without changing its component parts and pieces."

It may be that some parts of a program are more scalable than others, but little research has been done to learn more about the viewpoints that communities, providers, and education and training institutions have about the nature of scale. Is going to scale desirable for any given program? Do our philosophies about context and the power of the local jibe with large-scale projects? "Best practices," a term that connotes a research-based universal designation, does not always make sense across communities and

needs. In the Casper and Newman essay, for example, a mentor coach helps a coach interrogate the meaning of "outdoor time" in an environment with poor air quality and multiple children in care who have asthma-related illnesses. As another example, after much discussion and consultation with the community, Guttman Center program designers decided to enroll family child care practitioners and center-based practitioners in the same cohorts, an uncommon practice but one that was important for bringing practitioners together in the particular community of East New York. At the end of our work, we cannot imagine how it could have been otherwise. Local differences lie at the heart of this field, and resolving or adapting visions to be responsive to conditions determine how many young children will be meaningfully served in the future.

What follows are three articles that each offer a different vantage point on the Guttman Center's three years of practice.

The first article, by Dr. Robin Hancock, provides an overview and description of the community-based learning approach that allowed us to work so closely with the wider community of East New York as well as family child care and center-based programs. Starting with the knowledge and experience of the caregivers, Dr. Hancock describes how we, a predominantly white staff, worked with community members and caregivers in a diverse community of color with a history of colonization by institutions and individuals.

The second article, by Margie Brickley, curriculum lead for the project, describes the strengths-based philosophy of the developmental-interaction approach behind the curriculum. Brickley offers examples of *how* the curriculum developed over time with input from child care practitioners themselves. Her article emphasizes the how of the teaching and learning, calling up the wealth of knowledge caregivers had at the program's outset and acknowledging the emotional nature of the work.

And finally, the last article is an outgrowth of a yearlong relationship between Guttman coach Rebecca Newman and her mentor coach, Virginia Casper. The coach's enquiry, "I want to know why," helped her learn to wonder and ask questions to make sense of some of the practices that she observed. The mentor maintained a non-judgmental approach and allowed time for various theories to brew while together they thought about the context of East New York. In this narrative, the coach was able to break through to examine her own biases as well as open up to new modes of thinking about practice.

The quilt pictured below was made by the first Guttman cohort and illustrates the curriculum's multi-modal approach. Each square represents the life story or wish of a participant, instructor, or coach. The squares were sewn together with a backing of the participants' choosing and was displayed at each session as a reminder of the growing learning community. The Guttman Center did not in the end go to scale, but the quilt reminds us that many early childhood—and especially infant-toddler professional development initiatives—fit the community they serve like a glove. Community-based learning models and the nature of the community and its particular needs can tell educators a lot about how to work *with* a given group of people to mutually determine their learning needs.

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About the Author

Virginia Casper is a developmental psychologist and teacher educator. She served in instructional, administrative, and clinical roles in the Bank Street Graduate School of Education for over 30 years. As an early childhood educator, she has specialized in infant, toddler, and family development and published widely in ZERO TO THREE and other related publications. Virginia also spent 10 years working internationally in education doing capacity-building work in China, Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Liberia, and South Africa, specializing in community-based research and learning. She is also a co-author of *Gay-Parents/Straight Schools: Building Communication and Trust* (with Steven Schultz), and a textbook on early childhood education (with Rachel Theilheimer) entitled *Early Childhood Education: Learning Together.*