

Dr. Matthew A. Timm by Lisa Koperek



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Matthew A. Timm, Ph.D.

- Director, Early Childhood Programs
[Tennessee Voices for Children](#)
Nashville, Tennessee
- Senior Faculty
National Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning II
[Vanderbilt University](#)

Matt Timm is internationally recognized for his life-long work in improving and expanding services related to the emotional and behavioral well-being of young children and their families. Dr. Timm is an ardent advocate of parent-implemented models of support, championing families as key collaborators rather than recipient clients. His dedication and leadership in the [Regional Intervention Program](#) (RIP) network have contributed to its sustained operation since 1969.

Education

- B.A. Political Science
[University of Arkansas at Little Rock](#)

M.A. Special Education
[George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University](#)

Ph.D. Developmental Psychology and Special Education
[George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University](#)

Early Influences and Experiences

The eldest son of six children, Matt Timm grew up in a sharecropper's house in rural Arkansas surrounded by music and learning to read the Bible aloud at the age of three. The family's fundamentalist religious background meant that Matt Timm and his siblings did not have permission to view a movie, watch television, or read comics before the age of 14. Dr. Timm recalls that his world "exploded in Technicolor" when he rode the school bus on his first day of school. He loved being with the other children, couldn't get enough of the books in the small school library, and vividly recalls his kind, encouraging teacher Ms. McGinnis. A responsible eldest son - working two paper routes, making pharmacy deliveries, mowing lawns and taking responsibility for supervising two younger brothers - Matt Timm bought his first car with his own money at the age of 14. He was elected president of his junior high school as well as his sophomore and junior classes in high school and later as vice-president of his undergraduate university. He also was the only one of the six Timm children to openly rebel against the stifling rules of his upbringing!

Matt Timm studied under Calvin Ledbetter, Jr., Chair of the Political Science Department at Little Rock University (now [University of Arkansas at Little Rock](#)). He credits the political progressive who also served five terms in the [Arkansas House of Representatives](#) as his first mentor. Of greatest significance to Dr. Timm was Ledbetter's ability to "challenge deeply embedded institutional and individual racist beliefs in a low-key, respectful and ultimately effective manner."

With an undergraduate degree in political science, Dr. Timm fully intended to go straight into law school on the way to a career in electoral politics. However, keen involvement in civil rights, organizing non-violent political activities, and membership in Vietnam War peace groups eventually led to Dr. Timm being granted conscientious objector status from the Little Rock, Arkansas draft board. Convinced that achieving elected office in the South was now highly unlikely, Matt Timm instead began working with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the [Southern Christian Leadership Conference \(SCLC\)](#) and trained [VISTA \(Volunteers In Service To America\)](#) volunteers for projects in Alabama, Georgia and Florida.

While training VISTA volunteers, Dr. Timm met his second mentor, clinical psychologist Marion O'Neill. Under O'Neill (who was the model for Dr. Susan Lowenstein, later played by Barbara Streisand in the film *The Prince of Tides* based on the novel by Pat Conroy), Matt Timm learned to value and practice a disciplined, objective approach to the examination of past and current behavior. This precept continues to fuel Dr. Timm's belief in reappraising individual values, beliefs, and practices. He quotes Descartes "We should examine most closely those things we hold most dear" when discussing the collaborative partnerships between parents and programs, which are at the heart of Timm's unique and distinctive work in the fields of early learning and challenging behavior.

Dr. Timm's next appointment was at the [Southern Education Foundation](#) *Interns in Education* program, where he became director of a Ford Foundation-funded project in the recently desegregated Chapel Hill-Carrboro, North Carolina school system. The primary focus of this community-based schools program was to promote parental influence and help students, families, teachers, staff and the community at large overcome the effects of rapid desegregation after decades of separation. It was during

this time that Matt Timm observed students with developmental and behavioral challenges facing fear, ridicule, and rejection at least equal to those faced by African-American families. The lack of acceptance and support for these students and their families became the catalyst for Dr. Timm's life-long and active exploration in the innovative and emerging fields of Special Education, Early Education, and Applied Behavior Analysis.

Crediting good fortune and being in the right place at the right time, Matt Timm enrolled as a graduate student in the Special Education department of the [George Peabody College](#) at [Vanderbilt University](#). At that time, Special Education services were not yet mandated under PL 94-142, the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP) was only in its second year of implementation, and applied behavior analysis was just becoming part of the mix. What George Peabody College offered was the chance for Dr. Timm to be involved in the earliest days of the [Regional Intervention Program](#) (RIP) for Preschoolers and Parents. The RIP model combines behaviorally-based parent skills development, peer therapeutic support, and daily program operations implemented by the clients themselves.

Also at this time, Vanderbilt University's [Peabody Kennedy Center](#) was becoming a recognized and innovative program, now internationally acclaimed, in special education leadership and research in intellectual disability. [Dr. Nicholas Hobbs](#) (1915-1983), an exceptional pioneer in the fields of special education, school psychology, and community-based treatment of children with behavioral disorders, was the Peabody Center's Founding Director. Fascinated by the RIP, Dr. Hobbs became Matt Timm's third mentor as well as generous friend and colleague whose "gentle brilliance" continues to inspire Dr. Timm today. Matt Timm has been collaboratively involved in sustaining and operating the Regional Intervention Program since 1969.

Career Highlights

- [Regional Intervention Program](#)
Nashville, Tennessee

The Regional Intervention Program (RIP) was the location of virtually all of Dr. Timm's practicum, teaching, and research activities throughout his master's and doctoral years (1971 – 1974). As soon as he completed his doctoral coursework in May of 1974, the RIP Advisory Committee and the Middle Tennessee Mental Health Institute appointed Matt Timm to direct the early intervention and RIP expansion projects. Now an internationally recognized program of parent-implemented treatment in families of young children with serious behavioral disorders, the RIP has been established in 24 communities in America, Canada, Brazil, and Venezuela.

As Director Emeritus from 1979 to 1997, Dr. Timm authored and co-authored grant application proposals producing over \$12 million in supplementary program support funds. He held numerous special appointments on national, state and local government children's mental health task forces and was a featured presenter at key annual national and international conferences. Under his leadership, the RIP informed and validated best practice for the social and emotional development of young children and their families throughout the United States and abroad.

The Regional Intervention Program was named the "2001 Innovative Program of the Year" by Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD). Matt Timm and his colleagues accepted the award at the 13th international conference of CHADD in California. Dr. Timm has been a member of the RIP Advisory Committee Board from 1999 to the present.

- [Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning \(CSEFEL\)](#)
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Vanderbilt University

The National Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) is a consortium of organizations mandated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to validate best practices for the social and emotional development of young children and their families. The project was designed to strengthen the capacity of Head Start and child care programs throughout the United States, and also serve as a national resource center for early childhood programs across the country. Matt Timm served as a CSEFEL Senior Faculty member, as well as a National Advisory Board member during the project's initial five years at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2001 to 2006), promoting social and emotional competence and school readiness of young children birth to age 5. CSEFEL is now in the second five year phase of its funding (2006-2011), and Dr. Timm continues to serve as a Senior Faculty member to the project, which is currently based at Vanderbilt University.

- [Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior](#)
University of South Florida

A national collaboration funded by the [U.S. Department of Education](#), the Center for Evidence-Based Practice was committed to developing, disseminating, and utilizing practical knowledge of effective intervention and prevention of the challenging behaviors of young children. From 2002 through 2007, Matt Timm served as a Senior Faculty member at the [University of South Florida](#) during the project's grant. The Center's work has been continued and expanded through the [Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children](#) (TACSEI). It is currently supported by a new five year grant for 2008-2013, awarded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

- [Tennessee Voices for Children](#)
Nashville, Tennessee

Tennessee Voices for Children (TVC) is a statewide non-profit organization of parents, professionals, business and community leaders, and government representatives committed to improving and expanding services for the emotional and behavioral well-being of children. Matt Timm has served as Director of Early Childhood Programs at [Tennessee Voices for Children](#) since 1997, sponsoring an extensive array of advocacy, family support, public awareness, training and technical assistance, and research activities.

TVC's Early Childhood Consulting Program provides consultation, training, and other support to teachers and families of children with serious emotional and behavioral challenges through association with child care and Head Start centers in Tennessee. TVC also runs the [Tennessee Parent Information and Resource Center](#) (TPIRC), which provides training to parents of pre-school and school-aged children who are economically and/or educationally disadvantaged so that they can effectively help their children achieve developmental goals and meet established educational standards. TPIRC also supports schools state-wide, particularly Title I schools, to effectively involve parents in programs and activities that lead to improving student academic achievement.

Tennessee Voices for Children, in collaboration with the Regional Intervention Program Advisory Committee, sponsored a three-year project (1997 – 2000) to evaluate treatment outcomes for 500 children and families who had participated in the RIP network since 1969. A second three-year phase (2000 – 2003) replicated the original study with 250 children and families who had participated in three Regional Intervention Program sites in Tennessee. The third three-year phase used a case study format across 15 RIP sites to examine how the programs were able to sustain themselves.

Personal Goals and Standards

The measurable effects of his work efforts on children and families are key values in Matt Timm's personal life. He has continued to examine his own personal beliefs regarding the extent to which he views parents as the cause, parents as the victims, or parents as the answer to young child developmental and/or behavioral problems. He invites colleagues to remember "However noble we may consider our efforts to be, we're very often *junk mail in the lives of others.*" Dr. Timm credits *collaborative involvement with parents, children and professionals* as his most meaningful accomplishment to date.

Dr. Timm admits that one of his biggest struggles has been to remain positively challenged rather than frustrated when public attention and funding dollars flow in much greater quantities towards interventions for older children and adults than to younger children and their families. He asserts that the ability to see a program or a problem as it actually is, rather than as he wishes or assumes it to be, is the skill that has most contributed to his career success. Data-based decision making and practice lie beneath Matt Timm's advocacy in word and deed for the families of young children with challenging behaviors.

Complete retirement from the early childhood intervention field as of October 2011 is Dr. Timm's next goal. He intends to continue his life-long love of music by "lots more music-making with friends and songwriting with collaborators" and by launching a successful, full-scale career for Cora Rose, the final artist on his company's music publishing label. Matt Timm, despite plenty of hours spent practicing the saxophone and piano, is now learning to play the 6-string bass dulcimer.

Selected Publications

Strain, P.S., Steele, P., Ellis, T. & Timm, M.A. (1982). Long-term effects of oppositional child treatment with mothers as therapists and therapists as trainers. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Analysis, 15:1*, 163-169.

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Timm, M. A. (1993). The Regional Intervention Program: family treatment by family members. *Behavioral Disorders, 19:1*, 34-43.

Additional References

Dunlap, G. & Fox, L. (2003). *Positive behavior support for young children with challenging behavior* (Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior research synthesis). Retrieved from the Welcome to the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children (TACSEI) website:

http://www.challengingbehavior.org/explore/presentation_docs/403_positive_behavior.pdf

Timm, M.A. (2005, January 26). Creating home/program partnerships that work: supporting children with problem behavior [online live interactive chat].

Retrieved from: <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/chat/timm-trans.html>