

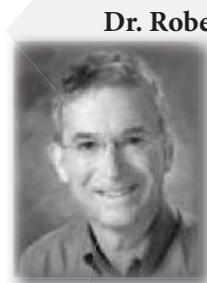


## Creating Connections

The *CYFS Creating Connections Series* helps create an opportunity for faculty and community members together to learn about research concerned with interventions, services, and supports for creating healthy connections for children.

In February, **Dr. Sandra Christenson**, Birkmaier Professor of Educational Leadership and Professor of Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Minnesota, presented **"The Relevance of Family-School Connections for Positive Student Outcomes: Lessons**

**Learned from Research and What It Means for Practice."** Dr. Christenson provided a strong rationale and practical strategies for creating and sustaining strong family-school relationships and connections to achieve optimal academic, social, behavioral, and emotional learning outcomes for all students.



**Dr. Robert Pianta** is Dean of the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia, and the Novartis U.S. Foundation Professor of Education and a Professor in the Department of Psychology. Dr. Pianta's work has focused on the predictors of child outcomes and school readiness, particularly adult-child relationships, and the transition to kindergarten. Recent work has focused on understanding the nature of teacher-child interactions, classroom quality, and child competence through standardized observational assessment. On **April 29, from 7:00-8:30 pm in the UNL City Campus Union**, Dr. Pianta will present, **"Opportunity in Early Education: Improving the Quality of Teacher-Child Interactions through Classroom Observation and Professional Development."**

Feedback for the *Creating Connection Series* has been overwhelmingly positive. We look forward to seeing you at presentations to be scheduled for Fall 2008 and Spring 2009.



## Director's Note

We are pleased to share with you our first issue of *CYFS Reflections*, which serves as a mechanism to both reflect on and celebrate recent accomplishments of faculty affiliates, graduate and undergraduate student affiliates, and CYFS Center faculty and staff. Along with the opportunity to "reflect" in retrospect, we hope and expect that the exciting things that you see happening at CYFS spark interest, curiosity, and ideas for new and innovative directions.

The concentration of research skills, talents and resources that define the Center for CYFS is illustrated in these pages, in hopes that new connections will be established and existing relationships renewed. The synergy that occurs in the context of interdisciplinary science -- particularly science establishing conditions for optimal growth and development -- is unparalleled.

We invite you to share in the successes of CYFS researchers, join with CYFS stakeholders, and work together with CYFS staff to create original reflections in support of children, youth, families and schools.

*Susan M. Sheridan, PhD, Director,  
Nebraska Center for Research on  
Children, Youth, Families and  
Schools*

# The Cutting Edge

**R**ural Language and Literacy Connections is a \$2.74-million, 3-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's "Early Reading First" program. **Drs. Lisa Knoche and Helen Raikes** are the Principal Investigators for this project that will support an intensive, literacy-based early learning program for approximately 200 children annually from the Grand Island area, as well as 50 teachers and assistants.

Partnering with Head Start Child and Family Development Inc. and Grand Island Public School's early childhood programs, the focus will be on language and reading skills for rural, low-income children ages 3 to 5. The goal is to prepare preschool-age children to enter kindergarten with skills to assure success in reading.

I am pleased with the mentoring activities relative to graduate students, faculty, and others across campus interested in cutting edge methodologies.

*Dr. Marjorie Kostelnik, Dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences*

**T**raining in cutting edge research methodologies for graduate students has become a reality at CYFS. **Drs. Sue Sheridan, Todd Glover and James Bovaird** received a 4-year grant from the Department of Education's Institute of Educational Sciences entitled, "Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research on Consultation-Based Interventions for Students with Social and Behavioral Concerns."

There remains a pressing need to train researchers to conduct rigorous experimental investigations of consultation-based, social-emotional interventions designed to ameliorate problems that interfere with student learning and/or development.

Through systematic and intensive methodological training, this post-doc fellowship will provide a means for improving the quality of consultation and intervention research with causal implications. As a result of their experience, participating fellows will acquire the skills and knowledge required for a strong research career and for advancing rigorous applied research on practices designed to improve students' social, behavioral, and academic outcomes.

## Research Digest

### Youth Risk and Resilience

Buhs, E., Herald, L. S., & Ladd, W. G. (2006). Peer exclusion and victimization: Processes that mediate the relation between group rejection and children's classroom engagement and achievement? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98, 1-13.

**R**esearch on peer relationships indicates a relationship between peer maltreatment and school adjustment. However, the establishment of and change in this relationship over time has not been investigated. This study examines the direct and indirect relationship between different forms of peer maltreatment and school adjustment. Of primary interest are the

effects of peer abuse and peer exclusion on classroom engagement, school avoidance, and achievement.

Over a 5-year period, 380 students from age 5 - 11 years old were followed and assessed on measures of peer group acceptance/rejection, peer exclusion, peer abuse, classroom participation, school avoidance, and achievement. Data gathered from students created an acceptance, chronic exclusion, and chronic abuse score for each student. Scores were also gathered for changes in classroom participation, school avoidance, and achievement. Results indicated that (a) children less well accepted in kindergarten were at greater risk for peer maltreatment in subsequent grades, (b) chronic peer maltreatment

in primary grades forecast later school disengagement, and (c) children's low achievement during the middle-grade years was primarily determined by their exposure to chronic peer exclusion and decreased classroom participation.

Although peer exclusion is not a highly visible form of peer maltreatment, it may present academic challenges for students. Peer exclusion appears to decrease classroom participation and foster disengagement from learning activities, thereby decreasing academic progress. This relationship, and a more complete understanding of the various forms of peer maltreatment, merit further study and are essential for the development of effective intervention programs.

# CYFS Celebrations

Anyone who has ever compiled and submitted a grant knows it is no small feat! **Within the past 6 months 15 grants were submitted through the Center.** We extend huge congratulations to all of you who have participated in grant submissions, and we would like to extend special congratulations to teams that have recently submitted grants through the Center. Best wishes to you all. We look forward to sharing good news of funding in future *CYFS Reflections!*

Join us in congratulating the following faculty affiliates, recognized nationally and within the University, for their continued excellence!

**Dawn Braithwaite**, Willa Cather Professor and Professor of Communication Studies, has been elected second vice president of the National Communication Association. She will be the primary planner for the association's national convention in Chicago in 2009 and in 2010 she will become President. Dr. Braithwaite will be the first NCA president in the history of the Communication Studies Department at UNL.

**Brian Wilcox**, Director, Center on Children, Families, and the Law, recently received the 2007 Nicholas Hobbs Award. This award, presented annually by the American Psychological Association's Society for Child and Family Policy and Practice, is given to a psychologist who exemplifies the ideals and devotion to child advocacy and policy characterized by Nicholas Hobbs, a pioneer in the field of child psychology.

**Dean Marjorie Kostelnik**, College of Education and Human Sciences, UNOPA Boss of the Year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Congratulations to the following CYFS Faculty Affiliates from the College of Education and Human Sciences, recognized in 2008 for their research, mentoring and teaching:

**Jim Bovaird**, Early Career Research/Creative Activity Award

**Carolyn Pope Edwards**, Distinguished Research/Creative Activity Award

**Oksana Yakushko**, CEHS Faculty Student Mentoring Award

**Cody Hollist**, College Distinguished Teaching Award

**Ted Hamann**, College Distinguished Teaching Award

**Margaret Macintyre Latta**, CEHS Donald & Mary Lee Swanson Distinguished Teaching Award

Congratulations to CYFS Faculty Affiliates recently tenured and promoted to Associate Professor.

**Eric Buhs**, Educational Psychology, College of Education and Human Sciences

**Merilee McCurdy**, Educational Psychology, College of Education and Human Sciences

**Guy Trainin**, Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education, College of Education and Human Sciences

**Kathleen Wilson**, Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education, College of Education and Human Sciences

## Research Spotlight

**Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy**, Professor in the Department of Psychology, is the Associate Vice Chancellor for Research at UNL. Dr. Espy serves as Director of the Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory (DCN). Trained as a clinical neuroscientist, Dr. Espy's current work focuses on the development of executive control in young children and infants, and how these processes go awry in different medical conditions.

With a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health awarded to Dr. Espy, a large ongoing study investigating the development of cognitive skills in the preschool years is being conducted through the DCN. The focus is aimed at understanding how executive control is organized, how this organization changes across time, and how these

complex skills relate to genetic and environmental influences. In a recent publication in *Developmental Psychology*, Dr. Espy and colleagues investigated the nature of executive control. Consistent with neuroscience models, their findings suggest that executive control is a unitary process in this developmental period (despite different task requirements), rather than composed of discrete cognitive components.

Dr. Espy also conducts research with infants and newborns, investigating the effects of prenatal exposure to substances of abuse (such as tobacco), environmental toxicants, and premature birth on cognitive functioning. This research in early childhood is also funded by a grant awarded to Dr. Espy by the National Institutes on Drug Abuse.

## CYFS Calendar

**Tuesday, April 29, 7:00-8:30pm**

UNL City Campus Union:

Dr. Robert Pianta's presentation:  
*Opportunity in Early Education:  
Improving Quality of Teacher-Child  
Interactions through Classroom  
Observation and Professional  
Development*

**Friday, May 2, 11:30am-1:00pm**

242 Mabel Lee Hall:

Statistics and Research Methodology  
Unit (SRM) Series: *Moderation and  
Mediation with SEM* presented by Dr.  
James Bovaird.

# Bridging the Gap: Community Partnerships

## ENGINEERING EDUCATION EXCELLENCE DAY INSTITUTE *for* Middle and High School Students in Nebraska

For the past two summers, education and engineering faculty at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) have conducted the *Professional Development Science and Math Summer Technology Institute* for middle and high school math and science *teachers* in Nebraska. Support for this Summer Institute is provided, in part, by the Nebraska *Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education* and the *U.S. Department of Transportation*.



UNL engineering faculty have video files and expertise in cutting-edge research. However, they often lack information that middle and high school teachers possess in terms of content correlated with Nebraska state standards and district curriculum. Understanding what excites middle and high school students relative to math and science, and what appeals to them in the classroom and laboratory settings, is the expertise of educators outside of engineering, per se. This collaborative



project between UNL engineering and education faculty, and middle and high school educators, provides a unique opportunity to increase academic achievement of middle and high school students in math and science, two content areas that are often viewed by students as dull and remote to real life.

During the Summer Institute,



teachers interact with engineers and develop lessons incorporating cutting-edge materials and using multi-media technology. The lessons use real-world applications and are designed to increase students' math and science skills and to teach students about several different disciplines of engineering.

This project has proven to be very successful, and we expect this summer to be even better! As part of this year's Summer Institute, 50 *students* from our partner middle and high schools will participate in an *Engineering Education Excellence Day Institute*. Students will come to the UNL campus and enjoy a day of interaction with world renowned engineers, executives in industry, and leaders in government; tour on and off-campus sites; and experience and review lessons from a student perspective, presented by middle and high school teachers and related to several aspects of engineering.

Please contact Dr. Gina Kunz (gkunz2@unl.edu) or Ms. Valerie Lefler (vlefler2@unl.edu) for additional information on this highly innovative, interdisciplinary endeavor!

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Lincoln | HUMAN SCIENCES

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