

CREATING CONNECTIONS...

for Families and Teachers in Rural Communities

Parents and teachers often struggle to find the best way to work together when students demonstrate problematic behaviors that place them at risk for academic underachievement or failure. This may be particularly challenging for families and teachers in rural communities where few supports are available. Many teachers in schools in rural communities indicate that supporting children's behavioral needs is part of their job, but they feel unprepared to meet the needs of students with behavioral problems. One approach, Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC), has been shown to help families and schools in urban/suburban settings unite in their efforts to assist struggling elementary students. CBC is an educational approach that creates opportunities for parents and teachers to work collaboratively to address concerns and achieve goals they share for students. In CBC, educational consultants help establish positive relationships between families and schools. Students are supported through the development of individualized plans used by parents and teachers in their home and classroom settings. Thus, a logical question arises: "Is CBC effective for addressing concerns for students in the



rural context?" This is the very question that will be examined in a recently funded, \$3 million, 4 year grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES) awarded in March 2010. This grant entitled "CBC in Rural Communities" will be housed jointly in the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS) and the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed). Under the direction of Drs. Susan M. Sheridan, Todd A.

Glover, Gina M. Kunz, and Jim Bovaird, the use of CBC in rural elementary schools will be tested with approximately 270 students who exhibit disruptive classroom behaviors in Kindergarten through 3rd grade. This large-scale project aims to improve educational outcomes for students in schools in rural communities whose behaviors place them at risk of academic underachievement and more serious behavior problems. There is potential for dramatic results as schools in rural settings struggle to access specialized services, including consultation and parent involvement programs. Enhancing the availability of and access to supports for both teachers and parents in rural schools through CBC provides one means of augmenting the quality of education in rural communities.

CYFS Reflections

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The important thing is not to stop questioning. – Albert Einstein

This issue of CYFS Reflections illustrates the committed pursuit of faculty in and affiliated with the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools. Faculty and graduate students affiliated with the Center continue to pose critical and meaningful questions related to education of all students. Often, answers to one set of questions give rise to numerous related questions. At CYFS, and in conjunction with the National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed), researchers are continuing to develop and refine clearly defined lines of questions such as "What are the most effective ways for families and schools to collaborate in helping struggling students succeed in rural communities?" "How can we build bridges to meaningful relationships with high school students at high risk of dropping out to provide them with the encouragement and support they need to succeed through graduation and beyond?" and "How can researchers take advantage of cutting-edge research methods as they pose questions of 'what works, for whom, and under what conditions?'" These and many other questions constitute high quality work being pursued through CYFS. We are excited about the questions being posed, and we are even more eager to learn the answers. As always, we are appreciative of the collaborative opportunities afforded through the pursuit of these questions. Indeed, our fellow researchers, students, schools and community partners do not stop asking important questions, and we value the experiences associated with finding answers together.

Susan M. Sheridan, PhD
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THE CUTTING EDGE

In Research Methodology and Statistics

In an effort for researchers to have the utmost confidence that their efficacy results are objective and unbiased, randomized trials are considered the “gold standard” in intervention research in the social, behavioral, and education sciences. They are the cornerstone of research aimed at identifying evidence-based interventions, and they are essential to generating a knowledge base about the efficacy of programs, services, and practices within educational and social systems alike. Furthermore, federal funding agencies are increasingly requiring the use of randomized experiments as a design element for grant support.

Many practical and statistical issues are apparent in the design, implementation, and analysis of findings yielded by randomized trials, and researchers require a sufficient knowledge base to inform their work. In response to the pressing need for researchers to possess these competencies, the *Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS)*, together with the *National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)* and the *Survey, Statistics, and Psychometrics Core Facility (SSP)*, are co-sponsoring a professional development series for researchers.

The *Randomized Trials in the Social and Behavioral Sciences* series of presentations and workshops is aimed at providing researchers with basic knowledge about aspects of randomized trials essential to their success. Nationally renowned experts will present issues around design, implementation, evaluation, and funding. The series will take place during the spring and fall 2010 semesters. All series events will take place on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

We are honored to have Dr. Larry Hedges and Dr. David Cordray share their knowledge and expertise regarding randomized clinical trials. **Larry Hedges, PhD**, is a Board of Trustees Professor of Statistics at Northwestern University. Dr. Hedges’ research interests are in the development and application of statistical methods for the social, medical, and biological sciences. One major area of research is the design and analysis of social experiments. Another major interest is the combination of results across studies to draw general conclusions (meta-analysis).

David Cordray, PhD, is a Professor of Quantitative Methods and Evaluation at Vanderbilt University. Dr. Cordray’s research focus is estimating the numerical effects of

social interventions directed at at-risk populations (e.g., the homeless, substance abusers). In addition to conducting multi-site evaluations of intervention programs, he has contributed to the development of methodological refinements of quasi-experimental designs, meta-analysis, and non-traditional forms of causal inquiry.

Faculty and staff in the *Statistics and Research Methodology (SRM) Support Unit at CYFS* are also conducting several presentations in support of this series. Upcoming presentations (see *SRM calendar of events*) will enlighten researchers on cutting-edge methodologies specifically related to the advantages and disadvantages of using matching procedures in participant assignment (March 26) and distinguishing between causal mechanisms and contextual determinants of intervention efficacy (April 23).

SRM CALENDAR

Larry Hedges, PhD

April 1, 2010, 3:00-4:30 pm
UNL City Campus Union

David Cordray, PhD

April 19, 2010, 3:00-4:30 pm
UNL City Campus Union

Kyongboon Kwon, PhD

April 23, 2010, 3:00-4:30 pm
265 Mabel Lee Hall

Research Digest Evaluation of Father-Child Reading Practices

Duursma, E., Pan, B. A., & Raikes, H.* (2008). Predictors and outcomes of low-income fathers’ reading with their toddlers. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 351-365.

Recently there has been growing interest in research on fathers and their involvement in their children’s lives. Positive paternal involvement has been shown to benefit children’s school performance, self-esteem, empathy, and social competence. Though the importance of fathers in children’s lives is well-known, little is known about how often fathers read with their children, what characteristics predict paternal book reading, or whether frequency of paternal book reading is related to children’s language and cognitive development. This study examined how often low-income fathers report reading to their 24- and 36-month-old children, how frequency of fathers’ book reading differs from mothers, what paternal and child characteristics predict frequency of father-child book reading, and whether frequency of father-child book

reading is related to cognitive and language development at 36 months.

Fathers enrolled in the Early Head Start (EHS) Research and Evaluation Project, an experimental study of the impact of EHS. Fathers were interviewed to gather demographics and information describing the frequency with which they read to their child. Cognitive development was measured at 24 and 36 months, language development at 36 months. Results indicate that fathers read less frequently to their children than mothers. High school educated fathers who spoke English and were enrolled in the EHS program read more frequently to their children than fathers without a high school education who spoke a language other than English at home. Girls and firstborn children were the most likely to be read to. Frequency of father-child book reading related to children’s cognitive skills at 36 months, particularly for children with Spanish-speaking fathers who read to them daily or weekly. For fathers with a high school education, book reading frequency

predicted higher child receptive language skills at 36 months.

Although low-income fathers did not report reading to their children as frequently as mothers, almost half of the fathers read to their children on a regular basis. It may be that when mothers are encouraged to read to their children through involvement in early intervention programs, they support fathers in reading to their children. This study suggested that targeted interventions need to encourage father-child book reading to facilitate child cognitive and language development.

* **Helen Raikes, PhD**, Professor, Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies, College of Education and Human Sciences, UNL; Faculty Affiliate, CYFS. For more information on Dr. Raikes’ research in early childhood, visit <http://cyfs.unl.edu/faculty/faraikes.shtml>

Study reviewed and summarized by Katie Woods, CYFS graduate student affiliate.

CYFS CELEBRATIONS

Congratulations to the following Faculty Affiliates:

Juan Casas, Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska at Omaha, named Co-Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Latino - Latin American Studies*.

Cynthia Cress, Associate Professor of the Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, for her award from the Parents Association and Teacher Council, 2009-2010.

Carolyn Pope Edwards, Professor of Psychology and Child, Youth, and Family Studies, on receipt of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance and an award for Professor with Great Contribution to Chinese Culture and Education from the UNL Chinese Student and Scholar Association.

Ted Hamann, Associate Professor, Teaching, Learning, and Teacher Education, for his receipt of the Donald R. and Mary Lee Swanson Award for Teaching Excellence from the College of Education and Human Sciences and for his appointment to the Nebraska Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Suzanne Kemp, Associate Professor of Practice, Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, for her Certificate of Recognition for Contributions to Students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Susan Swearer, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, for being elected Secretary of Division 16, American Psychological Association.

Congratulations to Faculty Affiliates who have published books since our last newsletter, including:

Barker, B. (2009). *Efficiency of adult distributed training: A comparison research model*. Saarbrücken, Germany: Verlag Muller Publishers.

Doll, B., & Brehm, K. (2010). *Resilient playgrounds*. New York: Routledge.

Doll, B., Pfohl, W., & Yoon, J. (2010). *Handbook of youth prevention science*. New York: Routledge.

Glover, T. A., & Vaughn, S. (Eds.). (2010). *The promise of Response to Intervention: Evaluating the current science and practice*. New York: Guildford Press.

Nangle, D. W., **Hansen, D. J.**, Erdley, C. A., & Norton, P. J. (Eds.). (2010). *Practitioner's guide to empirically based measures of social skills*. New York: Springer.

Congratulations to Faculty and Student Affiliates who have been awarded funding or have submitted grants since our last newsletter, including:

Grants Funded

Susan Sheridan, Todd Glover, Gina Kunz, & James Bovaird, *A Randomized Trial of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) in Rural Educational Settings: Efficacy for Elementary Students with Disruptive Behavior* (CBC in Rural Communities), U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences

Grants Submitted

Kyongboon Kwon, *Cliques and Children's Academic Functioning: Clique Norms and Clique Identification*, National Academy of Education

Christine Marvin & Lisa Knoche, *Connection of Services for Early Childhood Home Visitation*, Pew Charitable Trusts

Stephanie Wessels, *Developing Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children's Vocabulary through Parental Storytelling with Wordless Picture Books*, Foundation for Child Development

Lisa Knoche, *Phase II: Coaching Support Evaluation*, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Stephanie Wessels, *Storybuilding with Wordless Picture Books on Vocabulary for Children who are CLD*, National Institutes of Health

Eunju Jung (Dissertation Chair: **Dr. Carolyn Pope Edwards**), *Longitudinal Trajectories of Financial Retirement Planning of Baby-Boomer Women: The Role of Socio-Economic Status and Attitudes Toward Retirement*, American Educational Research Association Grants Program: Dissertation Grant Proposal

CYFS CALENDAR

Early Childhood Summit
April 14, 2010

Creating Rural Connections Series
Carlyon Denton, PhD

Using Student-Focused Coaching to Support the Process of Scaling Up Effective Reading Interventions in Rural, Suburban, and Urban Schools

April 12, 2010, 3:30-5:00 pm
UNL City Campus, 141 Morrill Hall

2010 RtI Summer Institute
Beyond Awareness: Implementation of RtI in Nebraska to Meet the Needs of All Children
June 14 & 15, 2010
rtinebraska.unl.edu

UNL Middle & High School Science and Mathematics Teacher Professional Development Summer Institute
June & July 2010

Teachers please visit our informational website or to submit an application
matc.unl.edu/summer_institute/teacher.php

UNL Excellence in Engineering Education Experience for Middle & High School Students
July 2010
Parents of students in 6th - 12th grades are invited to visit our informational website at
matc.unl.edu/summer_institute/student.php

Research Spotlight **Mike Scheel**



Dr. Michael Scheel, Faculty Affiliate of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools, is Associate Professor with tenure in the Department of Educational Psychology and

licensed psychologist whose interest in schools and students at risk of dropping out began during his years as a high school counselor. He realized then the importance of finding ways to connect with students who seem to find school meaningless and frustrating. He returned to UNL for his doctoral work to gain more knowledge and skills to apply toward working with high school students and their families who may lack the educational background or motivation to help their students be academically successful. Dr. Scheel has a passion for designing intervention models to address critical issues in the lives of adolescents and their families. He has three interrelated research directions: high school dropout prevention, positive family interventions and counseling, and strength-oriented counseling processes and outcomes. Dr. Scheel and his wife Joan Bangert Scheel, a marketing consultant for the USDA, are the parents of two undergraduate students at UNL.

the Director of the Counseling Psychology graduate program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Dr. Scheel is the current Chair of the Council of Counseling Psychology Training Programs and the past Chair of the APA Division 17 Section for the Promotion of Psychotherapy Science. Dr. Scheel completed his undergraduate coursework at UNL with a major in mathematics education. Continuing with his education at UNL, he received his doctorate in counseling psychology. Dr. Scheel is a

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE...

in the Lives of High School Students at Risk of Dropping Out

Student self-efficacy is the backbone of high school completion. The dropout rate in Lincoln, Nebraska, is approximately 25%. One program, the *Building Bridges Through Relationships: A School Dropout Prevention Program*, is offering hope for students at risk to drop out when they enter high school. Through this program, high-risk students entering 9th grade are given an opportunity to be assigned a counselor who helps ensure academic success in the short term and offers hope for future life success. Students who participate in this program are given a fresh start when they enter the 9th grade, and they are given the tools they need to feel confident that they can succeed in school. Over the past four years, “this program has harmonized well with our overarching emphasis on raising graduation rates and finding success for all students,” said Kurt Glathar, Principal of Lincoln Northeast High School.

With a \$100,000 grant from the Woods

Charitable Fund, recently awarded to **Drs. Mike Scheel and Gina Kunz** through CYFS at UNL, the Building Bridges Program will have the additional support needed for the next two years to maintain its presence at Lincoln Northeast and begin a similar service at Lincoln North Star.

Through the Building Bridges Program,

This program keeps the academic focus of Northeast High School.
Kurt Glathar, Principal of Lincoln Northeast High School

graduate students in the Counseling Psychology Program at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln provide support related to academic motivation and student engagement directly to the students identified as at risk. Participating high school students gain a sense of support and feeling of belonging to the school through the work with their UNL counselor. The model consists of fostering caring

relationships, identifying and enhancing personal strengths, developing purpose for school, monitoring progress, and connecting with home and the classroom. Glathar added, “The counseling/mentor design of the Building Bridges program keeps the academic focus of Northeast High School while assisting students with individual issues and counseling needs.” “The grant will allow us to refine the model that we have developed and extend our services to students at Lincoln North Star,” said Scheel, “doubling the number of students impacted and increasing the quantity of useful information we collect to refine the program.”

The far-reaching impact of this program has prompted area schools to see the importance of intervention during critical transition points. One main priority for schools is addressing the issue of dropout rates. Through this award, the Woods Charitable Fund has demonstrated their commitment to transforming potential dropouts into successful high school graduates.