

CYFS/NCLC Collaborations: Creating Connections Around After-School Programs

How children and youth spend their time outside of school is increasingly recognized as a critical factor contributing to school success. Out-of-school time poses opportunities for both positive and negative outcomes in the lives of children, families and communities. The value of intentional, well-organized and carefully implemented after-school programs is being touted by many stakeholders at the federal, state, and local levels. Community Learning Centers (CLCs) are one example of a system that delivers integrated, intentional extended learning opportunities for children and youth. The **Nebraska Community Learning Center Network**, a public private partnership housed at the **Nebraska Children and Families Foundation** spearheaded by **Jeff Cole**, is a statewide advocate for policies and partnerships that will allow Nebraska communities to develop and implement sustainable CLCs that meet the needs of children and families.

Despite the increased desire for high quality after-school programs, there is currently no commonly agreed upon definition of “quality” and no standard set of research-based guidelines regarding elements of quality, indicators of quality, or how to accomplish them. A team of researchers at the **Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools** (Drs. Susan M. Sheridan and Gina M. Kunz, Co-PIs; and Frances Chumney and Mariel Sparr, graduate students in the College of Education and Human Sciences) have entered into an exciting partnership with the **Nebraska Community Learning Center Network** (N CLC N) to research after-school programs. CYFS researchers bring their experience and expertise in researching evidence-based programs, and N CLC N partners share their expertise related to CLC implementation and programming. We are completing a comprehensive, critical review of the literature on after-school programs to identify critical quality indicators related to positive outcomes for children and youth. We will co-produce empirically-based document(s) that shed light on the research findings, identify factors related to delivery (e.g., family involvement, continuities in educational programming, professional support, staff competencies), and discern evidence-based quality indicators in after-school services. Results from this highly anticipated study will assist organizations in developing high quality after-school programs, and inform decision-makers about key elements associated with quality and outcomes.

Director's Note

This fall marks the fifth year that the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools has been an established Center in the College of Education and Human Sciences at UNL. New directions and connections continue to define the work of CYFS. On this and the pages that follow, you will see many exciting directions such as additions to our research teams and center family; new collaborations with community partners; grant projects that are current and pending; and recognitions of important research by students and faculty.

Our aspirations for the next five years are simple: in a nutshell, we hope to make a significant positive difference in the lives of Nebraska's children, families, schools, and communities. To do this, we will continue to engage in activities that allow us to build capacity for excellence in meaningful research, create and disseminate a scientific knowledge base with applied relevance, and enhance interdisciplinary research that informs and is informed by Nebraska stakeholders. We embrace new opportunities and partners as we forge ahead.

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

The Cutting Edge: CYFS Builds Capacity



We are pleased to welcome **Dr. Tanya Ihlo** who joined the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools in the fall of 2007. With a Doctorate of Philosophy in School Psychology from the University of Cincinnati and extensive professional development experience as a Reading First director and an Educational Consultant for a regional educational agency in Ohio, Dr. Ihlo brings with her a strong understanding of a systems approach to school reform and academic and behavioral student interventions.

Dr. Ihlo is currently the *Project Manager* for the *Nebraska Response-to-Intervention (RtI) Consortium*, housed in CYFS and funded by the Nebraska Department of Education (Co-PIs: T. Glover, L. Kelly-Vance, E. Daly, & M. McCurdy). As Project Manager, she provides leadership working with the Nebraska Department of Education and Educational Service Units (ESUs) across Nebraska to implement a statewide training and evaluation plan for the delivery of multi-tiered services that address students' academic and behavior needs. Dr. Ihlo has already made a significant impact on Nebraska, expanding professional development in RtI through regional training activities with ESUs and collaborating schools. She will continue to advance these efforts in the upcoming school year.



We enthusiastically welcome **Mr. Jerry Harrenstein, EdS**, to the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools (CYFS). Mr. Harrenstein has more than 30 years experience working in schools, including 17 years as a School Psychologist for Lincoln Public Schools. As *Associate Project Manager* for the Nebraska Response-to-Intervention (RtI) Consortium, housed in CYFS, Mr. Harrenstein will work with Dr. Tanya

Ihlo (CYFS) in developing and advancing professional development opportunities for school personnel throughout Nebraska. Given his wealth of knowledge, we are happy to have him join us.

We are pleased to welcome **Ms. Melissa Money-Beecher, MPA**, as a *Research Coordinator* in the Center. Ms. Money-Beecher has accumulated a wealth of experiences related to providing assistance in conducting research, managing grants, and coordinating service programs, including a diversion program for troubled youth and their families. Ms. Money-Beecher will contribute her skills and expertise in the Center in a variety of ways, including becoming familiar with the research interests of the Faculty and Student Affiliates of CYFS. She will function in multiple, vital capacities scouting funding opportunities; assisting investigators with their research, including on-line surveys and data entry; and maintaining the Center website. Ms. Money-Beecher is a wonderful addition to our Center infrastructure.



Small cohorts of promising, young faculty in the College of Education and Human Sciences (CEHS) are given a unique opportunity to enhance their professional development skills during a two-year *Scholarly Enhancement* program funded through CEHS. CYFS participates in the Scholarly Enhancement program in multiple ways. The Center provides an infrastructure that promotes intellectual capital, builds the capacity for researchers to conduct high-quality research, and supports grant-development endeavors that are vital to these emerging leaders in research and related scholarly activities.

This spring, **Dr. Gina M. Kunz (CYFS)** and **Dr. Nancy Miller, Research Liaison for CEHS**, traveled with **Drs. James Bovaird, Maria De Guzman, Ji-Young Lee, and Richard Torracco**, four faculty in their second year of Scholarly Enhancement, to Washington, DC, to interact with program officers at federal agencies to learn about available funding opportunities and to discuss their specific

areas of research. Visits with several program officers from the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education highlighted the trip.



Picture taken at NSF by Dr. Nancy Miller
Left to right: Drs. R. Torracco, J. Lee, M. De Guzman, G. Kunz, & J. Bovaird

Research Digest

Family Resilience

Dalla, R., MoulikGupta, P., Lopez, W., & Jones, V. (2006). "It's a balancing act!": Exploring school/work/family interface issues among bilingual, rural Nebraska, paraprofessional educators. *Family Relations*, 55, 390-402.

The number of English language learners in Nebraska has increased dramatically; however, less than 1% of Nebraska's educators hold English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching endorsements. A grant-funded, multi-career-ladder (CL) program at UNL provides teachers from similar socio-cultural backgrounds with ESL endorsements, helping rural Nebraska schools serve their diverse student body. Rural,

bilingual paraeducators earn Bachelor of Science degrees in elementary education with an ESL teaching endorsement.

This article explores factors that promote and challenge CL program completion. Twenty-six of the original 30 CL participants completed questionnaires and open-ended interviews regarding marital support and strain, division of labor, parenting concerns, and CL program involvement. Expansionist theory (ET), the theoretical background for these phenomena, suggests that multiple roles (e.g., worker, parent, spouse, student) are beneficial for men and women; however, role quality is critical to mental, physical, and relationship health. Many CL participants assumed multiple roles.

Findings showed that financial burdens and

decreased levels of communication between spouses led to increased levels of marital stress and diminished role quality; participants whose spouses accepted more responsibility in household and childcare labor were less overwhelmed by the multiple demands; and former CL participants indicated that lack of spousal support largely contributed to their exiting the program. Positively, CL participants indicated that their children began viewing them as role models, which encouraged their children's school efforts and educational goals. The researchers suggest that the stress of CL participation on marital relationships can be decreased by offering additional financial assistance, exposing spouses to the CL program, and offering quality child care.

CYFS Celebrations

UNL

Congratulations to the following:

Dr. Susan Sheridan was recently elected to serve as President-elect of the Society for the Study of School Psychology (SSSP).

Dr. Brandy Clarke, CYFS post-doctoral fellow, received the 2008 Outstanding Dissertation Award from Division 16 of the American Psychological Association for her study, "Parental self-efficacy: Examination of a protective factor for parents of low-income with young children."

Andy Garbacz, CYFS Student Affiliate and doctoral student in the UNL School Psychology program, was honored by the Nebraska Psychological Association in their Spring 2008 Graduate Student Research Poster Competition. Andy received second place and a cash award for his study, "International perspectives of family-school partnerships: An examination across three countries."

CYFS welcomes new postdoctoral fellow **Dr. Kyongboon Kwon**! Dr. Kwon's position is funded through a 4-year post-doctoral training grant, "Postdoctoral Fellowship for Research on Consultation-Based Interventions for Students with Social and Behavioral Concerns" (PIs: Sheridan, Glover, and Bovaird), through the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education.

UNMC

Congratulations to **Dr. Rachel Valelley** (Pediatric Psychology) on her promotion to Associate Professor at the Munroe-Meyer Institute for Genetics and Rehabilitation at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Community

Congratulations to **Jerel Welker**, math

teacher at Southwest High School in Lincoln, NE, recipient of the 2007 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Mr. Welker incorporated information from the 2006 UNL Professional Development Science and Math Summer Technology Institute, co-sponsored by CYFS and the Nebraska Transportation Center at UNL, for this competition.

Center Grant Submissions & New Awards

Since January 2008, 16 grants have been submitted through the Center, and 5 new grants have been funded. Our hats go off to the Principal Investigators of the following awards:

Dr. Lisa Knoche, "Technology Enhanced Spanish Program," Nebraska's Educational Service Unit #16

Drs. Christine Marvin and Malinda Eccarius, "Nebraska Early Childhood Deaf Education Professional Upgrade Partnership (NE-PUP) Continuation," Nebraska Department of Education

Drs. Lawrence Rilett and Gina M. Kunz, "Continuation and Expansion of UNL's Comprehensive and High Quality Professional Development Math and Science Summer Technology Institute," Nebraska's Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

Dr. Susan M. Sheridan, "The Future of School Psychology: Family-School Partnerships Dissemination Project," Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

Drs. Susan M. Sheridan and Gina M. Kunz, "Elements of Quality in After-School Care," Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

CYFS: Welcome Back!

We are excited to welcome faculty affiliates, student affiliates, and community partners, to another exciting year of research and outreach activities. To reacquaint long-term colleagues and to acclimate new collaborators, please accept this opportunity to reintroduce CYFS' mission and goals.

The mission of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools is "to advance the conduct of high quality interdisciplinary research to promote the intellectual, behavioral, and social-emotional development and functioning of individuals across educational, familial, and community contexts." To fulfill our mission, the Center is committed to three goals.

First, we aim to build intellectual capital by contributing to the development, dissemination, and integration of the scientific knowledge base across research and applied settings. Activities supporting this goal include intellectual dialogue centered around our thematic research areas (Early Childhood Education and Intervention; Youth Risk, Resilience, and Health Promotion; Academic Intervention, Instruction, and Learning); and publications and presentations of the CYFS Faculty Affiliates and Student Affiliates.

Our second goal is to create, nurture, and develop an environment that will build capacity to conduct research. Professional and community development endeavors such as the Creating Connections Speaker Series and the Statistics and Research Methodology (SRM) Unit's Research Methodology Series, as well as new hires within the Center, support this goal.

Finally, we aim to enhance the scope, quality, and impact of UNL's grant-supported interdisciplinary research by supporting Faculty and Student Affiliates and community partners in identifying viable funding opportunities, developing and submitting competitive applications, and managing funded grants housed in the Center.

Research Spotlight

The CYFS **Statistics and Research Methodology Unit** is pleased to welcome new Research Assistant Professor, **Dr. Greg Welch**! Dr. Welch completed his doctoral

work at the University of Pittsburgh and comes to us from the University of Kansas where he was a faculty member in the Department of Psychology and Research in Education. He has accumulated considerable teaching, consulting, and evaluation experience, most recently working with the Center for Research on Learning and the School Program Evaluation and Research (SPEaR) Team at KU, and the Kansas Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems program. Dr. Welch's research interests include structural equation modeling, latent growth curve analysis, measurement of anxiety and depression, and educational policy. Dr. Welch will provide critical statistical, methodological, and design support for Faculty and Student Affiliates of the Center.



CYFS Calendar

The 2008-2009 *Creating Connections Speaker Series* will focus on "Evidence Based Practice for Child and Adolescent Mental Health" (TBA)

Statistics and Research Methodology (SRM) Series will continue with seminars in the Fall 2008 (TBA)

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Bridging the Gap: CYFS Undergraduate Researchers Participate in the 2008 UNL Research Fair

Three CYFS UCARE students presented in the undergraduate poster session at the 2008 Research Fair, sponsored by the UNL Office of Research. UCARE, a program at UNL designed to provide undergraduate students the opportunity to become involved in research under faculty supervision, provides an excellent opportunity to connect young, aspiring researchers with established research programs and faculty.



Elizabeth Sexton (left), CYFS second year UCARE student; Heidi Dostal (right), CYFS first year UCARE student

Elizabeth Sexton completed her second year as a UCARE student under the direction of Dr. Gwen Nugent, Research Associate Professor in CYFS. Ms. Sexton's poster featured her research study, "Gender-Differentiated Responses in Inquiry-Based Science Classes." Previous studies have shown that males typically are more engaged in science classes compared to

females. Ms. Sexton's study found that with an undergraduate class composition of mostly females, student engagement was not gender differentiated. In other words, with enough females in a science class, male and female students interacted about the same with the material, the instructors, and their peers.

Heidi Dostal completed her first year as a UCARE student under the direction of Dr. Lisa Knoche, Research Assistant Professor in CYFS. Ms. Dostal presented her poster, "Understanding Preschool Children and Their Families: Parent Engagement Intervention and School Readiness." In her study, she found that there were small to moderate changes in the dimensions of learning provided by parents at home across one academic year for Head Start families involved in the Getting Ready intervention, a family-centered, intervention to promote children's learning and social-emotional development birth to age five. In addition, the overall environment of the home improved slightly, as did the variety of enrichment experiences available to the child and active attempts by parents to promote learning. Ms. Dostal will continue to participate as a second year UCARE student, and will investigate long-term effects of the Getting Ready intervention on parenting behaviors.



Tristan Weinmaster (above) completed her first year as a UCARE student under the direction of Dr. Gina M. Kunz, Research Assistant Professor in CYFS. Ms. Weinmaster presented her poster, "Students' Attitudes towards Science, Math and Engineering in Relation to Gender." In her examination of 234 student-completed surveys, she found that while gender did not influence students' ratings of the importance of STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), there was a huge difference in students' desire to develop a career in these fields. Specifically, females were much less likely to indicate a desire to have a career in STEM fields, and the difference between the males and females became more pronounced for students in higher grade levels.

Congratulations to all of our UCARE students!