

CREATING CONNECTIONS...

Between Research and Practice: CYFS Summit on Research in Early Childhood

CYFS recently held its inaugural Summit on Research in Early Childhood, providing researchers, practitioners and policymakers across Nebraska with unique opportunities to network and discuss the current and future directions of CYFS early childhood researchers.



Keynote speaker **Dr. Karen Bierman** (left), Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Pennsylvania State University, summarized research on the widening school achievement gap between children in impoverished conditions and their peers. Bierman focused specifically on how early

disadvantages hinder the development of attention, language, memory, literacy and mathematics skills essential for student learning. Moreover, Bierman noted that early adversity can contribute to students displaying more impulsive, irritable and disruptive behaviors.

Bierman also cited encouraging research showing that organized, focused curricula help close the gap in language, literacy and mathematics skill development. She further emphasized that teacher practices which provide emotional support and actively engage students significantly improve those students' motivation and socialization. Many of these themes were reflected in the work subsequently presented by CYFS faculty affiliates and their community partners.

UNL President J. B. Milliken and CYFS Director Susan M. Sheridan provided the summit's opening remarks. They emphasized the importance of integrating research with practice to support young students throughout Nebraska's schools, particularly those most susceptible to the barriers of poverty and poor learning environments.



To view and download presentations from the Summit on Research in Early Childhood, please visit http://cyfs.unl.edu/summit_ec.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"There is nothing so practical as a good theory." – Kurt Lewin

Transforming good theories into meaningful practice has long been a hallmark of the Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools – a hallmark illustrated in this issue of *CYFS Reflections*. Whether increasing the public's consumption of heart-healthy foods, bolstering literacy among young children, or advancing career opportunities for women, CYFS-based research continues to produce a positive impact on communities and schools throughout our state, our region and our country. As always, we are grateful for the collaborative support that makes this impact possible – and will remain committed to striving for perfection through practice.

Susan M. Sheridan, PhD
George Holmes University Professor of Educational Psychology
Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
Director, National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)

THE CUTTING EDGE

Understanding Reading: Coming Together to Help Students Comprehend What They Read



Tiffany Hogan, PhD, Assistant Professor of Special Education and Communication Disorders

As any reading teacher can attest, literacy involves much more than just learning the alphabet and memorizing vocabulary. To become astute readers, children must develop effective strategies for comprehending the messages being conveyed on a page.

In a project titled “Language Bases of Skilled Reading Comprehension,” a UNL research team will collaborate with four partner universities to identify and instill the skills essential for reading comprehension among prekindergarten through third grade students. Led by Dr. Laura Justice of The Ohio State University,

this consortium is part of the larger, \$100 million Reading for Understanding Research Initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences. The consortium’s other partners are Arizona State University, the University of Kansas and Lancaster University (United Kingdom). Each team received a portion of the project’s \$20 million funding.

CYFS faculty affiliate Dr. Tiffany Hogan, Assistant Professor of Special Education and Communication Disorders, will lead the UNL-based team composed of Dr. J. Ron Nelson, Professor of Special Education and Communication Disorders, and Dr. James Bovaird, Director of the CYFS Statistics and Research Methodology Unit and Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology.

Together, the consortium will attempt to achieve two primary goals. The first is to identify which basic and higher-level language skills most directly contribute to reading success and can be most easily shaped during prekindergarten through elementary school. Additionally, the project seeks to determine the viability and effectiveness of instructional strategies aimed at improving students’ reading comprehension.

With these outcomes in mind, Dr. Hogan’s team will administer a battery of reading comprehension tests to approximately 300 students – 100 in prekindergarten and 50 each in kindergarten through third grade – at the end of each school year. Next, it will collaborate with other teams to develop educational materials and programs designed to improve comprehension, which will be implemented in first through third grade classrooms during the second and third years of the project. Lastly, the UNL team will evaluate the effectiveness of those teaching materials and approaches, conducting pretests and posttests of participating students in the project’s final two years.

We congratulate Dr. Hogan’s team for securing this exciting grant and await their research results with great interest. For an overview of Dr. Hogan’s research, please visit <http://cyfs.unl.edu/faculty/fahogan.shtml>.



Dr. Hogan (front row center) with faculty and student members of her Link N Literacy Lab

Research Digest

Meghan Davidson, PhD

ACCESS to Financial Independence for Survivors of Domestic Violence

Chronister, K. M. & Davidson, M. M. (2010). Promoting distributive justice for intimate partner violence survivors with group intervention. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 35(2), 115-123.

Intimate partner violence has a profound negative effect on women’s economic development. However, research shows that a focus on career development for women can prevent future partner violence and serve as an effective intervention, as it provides women with skills and opportunities that can lead to economic resources and financial independence. The Advancing Career Counseling and Employment Support for Survivors (ACCESS) program is intended

to be implemented in community settings, and is designed to increase equity and distributive justice by increasing educational and vocational opportunities for survivors of partner violence. This article describes the ACCESS program and the group processes used to achieve desired outcomes.

ACCESS provides career counseling to female survivors of partner violence through use of a group format intended to be completed relatively quickly (five, two-hour sessions). Career intervention components including written exercises, career skills assessment, and role modeling are incorporated into ACCESS program sessions.

Critical consciousness, or learning about and taking action against oppressive conditions, is promoted through the use of six group processes: dialogue, group identification, posing problems, identifying contradictions, power analysis, and critical self-reflection. In this article, these six processes are described in detail, and implications of each are discussed. Preliminary research has shown that ACCESS significantly increases participants’ self-efficacy and critical consciousness, while also providing greater vocational knowledge, self-esteem and motivation.

CYFS CELEBRATIONS

Congratulations to the following Faculty Affiliates:

John DeFrain, 2010 Distinguished Educational Service Award, *University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

Kim Espy, 2010 Charles Bessey Professorship, named on the basis of a demonstrated record of distinguished scholarship or creative activity

Lisa Knoche, State Champion Award, *Region VII Head Start Association*

Nancy Lewis, Nebraska Dietetic Association 2010 Outstanding Dietitian of the Year Award

Susan Sheridan, 2010 George Holmes Professorship, named on the basis of an extraordinary level of scholarly or creative achievement and clear potential for continuing accomplishments

Susan Sheridan, Outstanding Postdoctoral Fellow Mentor Award, *University of Nebraska*

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

Grants Funded

Drs. Tiffany Hogan, J. Ron Nelson and **James Bovaird**, *Language Bases of Skilled Reading Comprehension*, U.S. DOE / IES.

Dr. Soo-Young Hong, *Approaches to Teaching Young Children Science Concepts / Vocabulary and Scientific Problem-Solving Skills*, Layman Award.

Dr. Julia Torquati, *Fresh Air and Sunshine: The Science Underpinning the Benefits of Nature for Children's Development*, UNL Seed.

Grants Submitted

Dr. Tanya Ihlo and Andrea Boden, *NIFDI i3 Proposal for Enhancing Teacher Effectiveness*, NIFDI.

Drs. J. Ron Nelson, **Tiffany Hogan** and Ockjean Kim, *Early Vocabulary Connections, Plus: A Tier II Intervention for Students with ASD*, U.S. DOE / IES.

Dr. Greg Welch, *Nebraska's All About Time: Expanding Learning Opportunities in Nebraska's Highest Need Schools*, U.S. DOE.

Dr. Yan Xia and Maureen Todd (doctoral student affiliate), *Roy Scrivner Memorial Research Grant*, APA.

Congratulations to Faculty Affiliates who have had books published this year, including:

Braithwaite, D. O., & Wood, J. T. (2011). *Casing interpersonal communication: Case studies in personal and social relationships*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt.

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

Jimerson, S. R., **Swearer, S. M.**, & Espelage, D. L. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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, NY: Springer.

Shell, D.F., Brooks, D.W., Trainin, G., Wilson, K.M., Kauffman, D.F., & Herr, L.M. (2009). *The unified learning model: How motivational, cognitive, and neurobiological sciences inform best teaching practices*. New York, NY: Springer.

The Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools is pleased to welcome new staff members **Jake Sjuts** (right) and **Scott Schrage** (below) to its team.



Sjuts will serve as the CYFS Computer Technology and Web

Support Associate, helping to ensure that its network and website run smoothly while also providing CYFS faculty and staff with technology-related assistance. Schrage fills the position of Media / Communications Specialist. His primary responsibilities will include interviewing faculty affiliates about their research and writing articles for CYFS websites, newsletters and annual reports.

Research Spotlight

Nancy Lewis, PhD

Congratulations to **Dr. Nancy Lewis** (left) on receiving the Nebraska Dietetic Association 2010 Outstanding Dietitian of the Year Award.



Lewis, a 20-year professor in the Department of Nutritional and Health Sciences and CYFS faculty affiliate, was selected as the winner from among 630 members of the Nebraska Dietetic Association. She was also recently appointed to the American Dietetic Association Board of Directors.

Lewis' recent research has focused primarily on omega-3 fatty acids. Her studies have helped demonstrate that omega-3 fatty acids reduce the incidence of heart disease, and

external research suggests they may also lower the risk of mental disorders and birth defects. Lewis has conducted surveys on cardiac patients' and pregnant women's intake of omega-3-rich foods such as fish, eggs and certain oils, finding that these groups consume fewer than is recommended.

Such findings have spurred Lewis to translate scientific research on omega-3 fatty acids into regular practice, which includes disseminating knowledge about their benefits and presence in foods to both health educators and the public. Lewis has thus developed and rigorously tested the benefits of intervention programs, websites, educational booklets and cookbooks that have led to increased knowledge and consumption of omega-3.

In addition to omega-3, Lewis' research has investigated the dietary perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of various demographic groups; the validity and reliability of methodologies commonly used in the nutritional field; advanced educational opportunities for health professionals; and the benefits of applying technology to disseminate dietary information.

Lewis has also received numerous teaching and service awards from UNL and the American Dietetic Association.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Effective Coaching Strategies for Rural Teachers: Carolyn Denton, PhD

The CYFS-housed **National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)** recently highlighted the work of **Dr. Carolyn Denton**,



Associate Professor with the Children's Learning Institute at the University of Texas Health Science Center. Denton's presentation,

"Using Student-Focused Coaching to Support the Process of Scaling Up Reading Interventions in Rural, Suburban, and Urban Schools," was given on the UNL campus through R²Ed's "Creating Rural Connections" series. Denton shared her insights into school reading programs and instructional coaching – a form of teacher development that she described as "personalized, individualized and sustained over time."

Denton's research on the Student-Focused Coaching model has shown that using student data to inform classroom reading instruction significantly improves students' reading skills. Her work with Dr. Jan Hasbrouck specifically promotes systematic problem-solving, coaches' observations of teacher-student interactions, and teachers' self-reflections regarding how their decisions influence students. Denton's work emphasizes the importance of ensuring that coaches have requisite training and foundational knowledge in the academic areas

for which they provide support. She is also conducting research regarding the influence of technology-based and on-site coaching on reading interventions and students' results.

CYFS CALENDAR

**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](http://matc.unl.edu/summer_institute/student.php)

**Research on Family-School
Partnerships: An Interdisciplinary
Working Meeting**
September 20-21, 2010