

## RAISING AWARENESS...

### About Bullying in America's Schools



A decade of studying the psychology behind bullying earned CYFS faculty affiliate Dr. Susan Swearer an invitation to participate in the inaugural *White House Conference on Bullying Prevention* held March 10.

Swearer, an Associate Professor of Educational Psychology in the College of Education and Human

Sciences, was one of four national bullying experts to join President and First Lady Obama, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius to discuss the causes, consequences and prevention of bullying. Students, teachers and parents from across the United States were also among the approximately 130 people to attend the daylong conference.

After providing an overview of her research on the psychological influences and impacts of bullying, Swearer took part in a 30-minute question-and-answer session and presided over a breakout discussion of bullying-related issues. She also authored the conference's lead research paper, which addressed the risk factors and outcomes associated with bullying and victimization.

"A lot of our research at Nebraska is [on] the kids who are both involved in bullying as a bully and as a victim," Swearer said. "We have found that often kids who are bullied at home or in the neighborhood then go to school and also bully other kids. So it's a very complex dynamic, and ... what I hope will come out of this conference is an understanding of the complexity and the social ecology in which bullying unfolds. We have to understand that complexity in order to develop effective intervention and prevention strategies."

Visit [cyfs.unl.edu](http://cyfs.unl.edu) for links to Swearer's paper and a video of the conference's question-and-answer session, which was streamed live by the White House.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"If you have knowledge, let others light their candles with it." **Margaret Fuller**

CYFS continually strives to kindle knowledge and spark ideas that possess the power to transform lives. Yet no matter how rigorous, insightful or comprehensive it may be, knowledge acquires its illuminative power only when we share it with those who can utilize and benefit from it. This philosophy underlies our efforts to spread the word about bullying, communicate the finer points of statistical tools, and disseminate instructional coaching strategies. Indeed, it's the essence of our latest newsletter – one inspired by researchers who know that spreading knowledge is the key to enlightenment.

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 (R<sup>2</sup>Ed)

# BRIDGING THE GAP...

## ...Between Formulas and Applications

The CYFS Statistics and Research Methodology (SRM) Unit recently concluded its 2010-2011 *Research Methodology Series*, a five-speaker run that featured monthly presentations from December through April.



CYFS Postdoctoral Fellow Ji Hoon Ryoo kicked off the series with “Measurement Invariance in Longitudinal Data.” Dr. Ryoo addressed the properties that should be considered for achieving measurement invariance, in which an assessment tool measures the same construct when used over time or across groups. He then explored the use of Item Response Theory for making inferences and constructing measurement invariance in longitudinal data.



Dr. Kevin Kupzyk, a Statistics and Measurement Consultant with the SRM Unit, resumed the series in January with his “Introduction to Mixture Modeling.” He demonstrated how mixture models, specifically Latent Class Analysis and Latent Profile Analysis, can be used to identify groups and reveal patterns in large amounts of data – making them especially valuable for recognizing the types of families and children most receptive to interventions.

In February, CYFS Research Assistant Professor Dr. Greg Welch presented “A Primer on Evaluation.” Welch defined evaluation, distinguished it from common research, and enumerated the reasons for conducting assessments. He also described the general areas of evaluation: needs, theory, implementation,

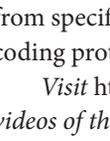


impact and costs vs. benefits. Welch concluded with an overview of three popular evaluation models and a discussion of the politics and limitations inherent to assessment.



Dr. Matthew Grady, Visiting Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology, gave a March presentation titled “Multilevel Models for Complex Clustering: Cross-Classification and Multiple Memberships.” He illustrated how multilevel models can isolate the influence of important variables even when subjects are clustered into multiple contexts – as when comparing high school students who attended different middle schools or analyzing the academic performance of students taught by multiple teachers.

The annual series closed with “Meta-Analysis: An Introduction,” a presentation from CYFS Postdoctoral Fellow Elizabeth Moorman Kim. After defining meta-analysis and explaining its rationale, Dr. Moorman Kim described several scenarios suitable for meta-analyses and described conditions necessary for successfully conducting them. She then delved into the steps of the meta-analytic process, from specifying a problem and searching literature to developing coding protocols, analyzing data and presenting results.



Visit [http://r2ed.unl.edu/resources\\_presentations.shtml](http://r2ed.unl.edu/resources_presentations.shtml) to view videos of the presentations and download PDFs of the corresponding PowerPoints.

## Research Digest Dawn Braithwaite

**Braithwaite, D.O., Toller, P.W., Daas, K.L., Durham, W.T., & Jones, A.C. (2008).** Centered but not caught in the middle: Stepchildren’s perceptions of dialectical contradictions in the communication of co-parents. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36, 33-55. doi:10.1080/00909880701799337

Much of the research on stepfamilies has focused on parental roles and perspectives, rather than examining the role of the child. A frequently used metaphor to describe stepfamilies is that children are “caught in the middle.” The researchers examined the interactions between children and their parents in stepfamilies. They used a relational dialectics perspective to determine the contradictions perceived by stepchildren in interactions with their divorced parents and to elicit communication advice from young adult stepchildren.

The researchers interviewed 28 young adult stepchildren in eight focus groups. Participants were an average of 20 years old

and had been a member of a stepfamily for an average of 9.8 years. Co-facilitators of the focus groups asked participants how adults in separate households *should* communicate and how they *do* communicate. Participants then worked as a group to create a brochure featuring communication advice for adults who are co-parenting. All groups were video- and audio-recorded and transcribed. The data analyzed for the study included the focus group transcripts and the brochures created by the participants. An interpretive analytic technique was used to analyze the data. This required constructing categories of major dialectical themes and finding connections among categories. The results of the discourse analysis showed that although children want to be *centered* in the family, they do not want to be caught in the middle and feel as though they are being pulled both directions. The dialectic of freedom-constraint – wanting the freedom to negotiate relationships with their parents but feeling constrained by parental communication

– characterized this desire. The dialectical contradictions that were voiced during these groups included negotiating openness-closedness – requiring parents to monitor the type and appropriateness of information shared with the child – and managing control-restraint – using communication difficulties between parents to gain control.

The present study provides an alternative to the metaphor of being “caught in the middle” and advocates that children be centered in stepfamilies and their parents’ attention. Children want to interact with their parents in such a way that they will be centered in the family. Too much or too little openness contributes to children feeling caught, as does parents’ failure to set clear boundaries for their children. Future researchers should incorporate communication among multiple members of stepfamilies and examine the effects on children at various developmental stages.

*Study reviewed and summarized by Lynne Clure, CYFS graduate student affiliate.*

# CYFS CELEBRATIONS

## Grants Submitted (Jan.-April 2011)

**M. Meghan Davidson:** *An Empowered Community: Using Participatory Action Research with Intimate Partner Violence Survivors*, Woods Charitable Fund

**M. Meghan Davidson:** *An Intervention Evaluation of the Strategic Team Treatment for Attachment Trauma in Children*, EMDRIA Foundation

**Margaret Macintyre Latta:** *Application of Philosophy to Educational Practice & Policy: Aesthetic Play is the (Missing) Thing*, Spencer Foundation

**Leslie Shaw & James Bovaird:** *Doctoral Dissertation Research: Incorporating Latent Variable Outcomes in Value-Added Models*, AERA

**Yan Xia, Tonia Durden, John DeFrain & Nancy Lewis:** *Enhancing Learning in Agricultural and Family Sciences through Reciprocal International and Local Rural Field Experiences*, National Institute of Food and Agriculture / ISE

**Yan Xia, John DeFrain, Tonia Durden, Julie Johnson, Marjorie Kostelnik, Nancy Lewis & Duane Shell:** *Enhancing the Well Being of Rural Children and Families through Innovative Teaching and Global Partnership*, NIFA/ HEC

**Michael Scheel & Gina Kunz:** *LPS Building Bridges*, Lincoln Public Schools

## Grants Funded (Jan.-April 2011)

**Sue Ellen DeChenne, Gina Kunz, Gwen Nugent, Jon Pedersen & Laurence Rilett:** *Coaching Science Inquiry Professional Development*, Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education

## Congratulations to the following CYFS Affiliates:

### Promotions / Degrees

**Beth Doll** (Educational Psychology) was named CEHS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

**Jon Pedersen** (Teaching, Learning & Teacher Education) was named CEHS Associate Dean for Research.

**Susan Swearer** (Educational Psychology) was promoted to full Professor.

**James Bovaird** (Educational Psychology; CYFS) was promoted to Associate Professor.

**Kevin Kupzyk** (CYFS) earned his doctorate in Quantitative, Qualitative, and Psychometric Methods (Educational Psychology).

### Books

**Margaret Macintyre Latta & Elaine Chan:** "Teaching the Arts to Engage English Language Learners"

## Awards

**Helen Raikes** (Child, Youth and Family Studies), Willa Cather / Charles Bessey Professorship

**Michelle Rupiper** (Child, Youth and Family Studies), Donald R. and Mary Lee Swanson Award for Teaching Excellence

**Carolyn Pope Edwards** (Child, Youth and Family Studies), Dean's Award for Excellence in Graduate Education

**Tonia Durden** (Child, Youth and Family Studies), Pre-Professorial Research / Creative Award

**Stephanie Wessels** (Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education), Distinguished Teaching Award

**Amanda Bleck** (Educational Psychology), Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Assistant Award

The following CYFS Faculty Affiliates received awards from the UNL Teaching Council and UNL Parents Association: **Cody Hollist** (Children, Youth and Family Studies); **Georgia Jones** (Nutrition and Health Sciences); **Cynthia Cress Nipper** (Special Education and Communication Disorders); **Tiffany Hogan** (Special Education and Communication Disorders); **Jim Lewis** (Mathematics); **Dan Hoyt** (Sociology)

## Research Spotlight **Jody Isernhagen**



From 1970 to 1988, Dr. Jody Isernhagen worked as a teacher, principal and superintendent in four U.S. states and South Korea. These wide-ranging experiences

have served as the bedrock of a research career dedicated to improving schools in Nebraska and beyond.

An Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Administration, Isernhagen has conducted assessments of numerous school programs developed and implemented in the Cornhusker State. Last year, Isernhagen published an evaluation of the Nebraska Department of Education's Statewide Title I School Improvement Plans, which aim to bolster academic performance among schools with a substantial proportion of disadvantaged students. The mixed-methods study examined administrator,

teacher, parent and program coordinator perceptions of the plans and their implementation. Isernhagen is currently directing part two of the assessment, which evaluates principal and faculty involvement, school climate, and the program's impact on student performance.

Isernhagen has performed a similar role with the Nebraska School-based Teacher-led Assessment and Reporting System (STARS). The groundbreaking initiative, conceived in 2000, eschews the high-stakes testing of statewide educational standards in favor of locally developed, individualized assessments in each of Nebraska's roughly 250 school districts. Isernhagen has helped demonstrate the system's capacity to improve students' reading and math performance – and caused educators, administrators and legislators around the country to consider similar alternatives to the status quo of "teaching to the test."

During the past decade, Isernhagen

has also served as an external evaluator of the Tom and Nancy Osborne-founded TeamMates Mentoring Program. She recently published a mixed-methods study of the program that analyzed mentors' influence on students' social-emotional well-being, academic performance and future plans. The study, conducted in a rural Nebraska school district, was her latest in a long line of articles on mentoring and the related issue of bullying.

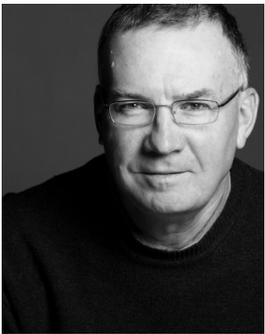
In addition to these assessments of statewide initiatives and programs, Isernhagen's research has examined numerous issues of consequence to rural, suburban and urban school districts. Chief among these issues are school administration, Web-based instruction, writing models and student mobility.

For more information on Isernhagen's research and background, visit [cyfs.unl.edu/faculty/faisernhagen.shtml](http://cyfs.unl.edu/faculty/faisernhagen.shtml) and [r2ed.unl.edu/resources\\_digests.shtml](http://r2ed.unl.edu/resources_digests.shtml).

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# THE CUTTING EDGE...

## ...Of Improving Classroom Instruction



The National Center for Research on Rural Education commenced its 2011 *Creating Rural Connections Speaker Series* with an April visit from Dr. Jim Knight, Research Associate with the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

The presentation, "Leveraging Coaching for School Improvement: Theory and Practice of Instructional Coaching," focused on the form of teacher professional development

that Knight has dedicated more than a decade to studying. Approximately 60 teachers, coaches and researchers attended.

Knight opened the presentation by discussing the difficulties and potential pitfalls of professional development efforts. Having interviewed many teachers over the years, he shared quotes from those who expressed frustration with the limitations and impracticality of traditional professional development workshops.

"What we see, again and again, is that a workshop, by itself, doesn't do much in terms of changing teaching practices," Knight said.

Knight then explained the process of developing a response to these frustrations – a response that would eventually become Instructional Coaching. That process began with the advent of

the Partnership Learning Approach, a forerunner of Instructional Coaching that emphasized principles such as equality, choice, dialogue and reciprocity.

"It's my belief that we will never get the kind of schools we want unless the professional learning we [implement] creates this opportunity for a mutually humanizing conversation," said Knight, "[in which] all parties feel like they've been heard."

Though Partnership Learning improved teachers' comprehension of and engagement with professional development, Knight said participants often failed to implement the strategies they gleaned from it. This realization led him to develop Instructional Coaching, which emphasizes modeling, observation and teacher-directed goals to encourage buy-in from participants.

"For us, Instructional Coaching is a way of helping people learn proven practices," Knight said. "We're all about learning a practice to change beliefs [about teaching]."

After reviewing the essential components and demonstrated impacts of Instructional Coaching, Knight summarized efforts to continually refine and modify the approach according to feedback from coaches, teachers and students. He concluded by outlining plans for future publications and studies that will further evaluate and augment Instructional Coaching. A 20-minute question-and-answer session followed the presentation.

*A video of Knight's entire presentation, along with a copy of his PowerPoint, can be viewed at <http://r2ed.unl.edu>.*