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.

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. As 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
Willa Cather Professor and Professor of Educational Psychology
Director, Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools
Director, National Center for Research on Rural Education (R²Ed)
Research Digest

Evaluation of Father-Child Reading Practices


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 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. 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/hrailkes.shtml

Study reviewed and summarized by Katie Woods, CYFS graduate student affiliate.
Dr. Michael Scheel is a 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 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.

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.

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


Research Spotlight

Mike Scheel

Counseling Psychology

Dr. 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 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 member of the Washington State Board of Psychologist Examiners.

Educational Settings: Efficacy for Elementary Schools

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation (CBC) in Rural Educational Settings: Efficacy for Elementary Schools

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

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 8th - 12th grades are invited to visit our informational website at matc.unl.edu/summer_institute/student.php
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, 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 drop-outs into successful high school graduates.