

# Head Start Graduate Student Research Program: 2008 Research Scholars

## Keely Cline

### *Project Title:*

Instructional and Emotional Quality of Parent-Child Book Reading and Early Head Start Children's Learning Outcomes

### *Mentor:*

Carolyn Pope Edwards, Ed.D.

### *Project Funding Years:*

2008-2010

### *University Affiliation:*

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

### *Project Abstract:*

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln will address the need to better understand how early literacy practices relate to young children's learning by examining how the instructional and emotional qualities of parent-child book reading interactions relate to Early Head Start (EHS) children's cognitive and language learning. The specific aims of the study are: (a) to examine the concurrent relation between instructional and emotional quality of book reading, and child cognitive and language scores, at baseline, and to examine if instructional and emotional quality of book-reading interact as they relate to child cognitive and language scores, at baseline; (b) to examine if parents participating in EHS demonstrate changes in emotional and instructional quality of book reading over an 8-month period; and (c) to examine how initial instructional and emotional quality of book reading (at baseline) and changes in instructional and emotional quality of book reading (after 8 months of participation in EHS) relate to changes in children's cognitive and language outcomes. The study will utilize child assessment data and videotaped parent-child interactions collected from a sub-sample of a larger study. Results are expected to help inform EHS practitioners as they design and implement strategies targeted at helping parents support their children's learning through high quality book reading interactions.

### *Sample:*

80 Early Head Start Parents and their Children

*Measures:*

*Child:*

The Preschool Language Assessment-Fourth Edition (PLS-IV)

Preschool Language Assessment – Fourth Edition Spanish (PLS-IV Spanish)

The Bayley Scales of Infant Development-Second Edition (BSID-II)

## **Marie-Celeste Condon**

*Project Title:*

Parallel Processes in a Residential Parenting Program for Incarcerated Mothers and their Babies: An Early Head Start, Department of Corrections, University of Washington Research Partnership

*Mentor:*

Susan Spieker, Ph.D.

*Project Funding Years:*

2008-2010

*University Affiliation:*

University of Washington

*Project Abstract:*

The University of Washington, along with Early Head Start (EHS) and the Department of Corrections (DOC), will develop a partnership and use a Participatory Action Research approach to study similarities and differences in professionals' and incarcerated mothers' discourse; the infants' experiences; factors that hinder desired outcomes; and parallel processes of change from both bottom-up and top-down perspectives. The study will seek to answer the following questions: (a) Will Puget Sound Education Service District EHS (PSESD-EHS), DOC, incarcerated caregivers, incarcerated and released mothers and their infants join the study and remain engaged in a participatory action research approach throughout the course of the study? (b) What kinds of beliefs and experiences surround the infants, incarcerated mothers, incarcerated caregivers, PSESD-EHS staff, and DOC staff in the Residential Parenting Program (RPP)? (c) How do these beliefs and experiences impact RPP, and the lives and interactions of the infants, incarcerated mothers, incarcerated caregivers, PSESD-EHS staff, and DOC staff? (d) What are the similarities and differences in situated meanings manifested in the stories, discussions, and/or interactions of incarcerated women who are mothers and caregivers for the infants in RPP, PSESD-EHS and DOC staff who work with them? and, (e) What lessons, from both

bottom-up and top-down perspectives in the RPP, will be learned about processes of growth and change in the RPP? Study participants will include infants living in the RPP, their incarcerated mothers and caregivers, DOC personnel, and PSESD-EHS staff. This project will be the first step towards engaging additional collaborators and launching a longitudinal, prospective, mixed methods study of the effects of reflective, relationship-focused, residential services for incarcerated woman and their young children.

*Sample:*

No more than 30 participants total, including 10-12 incarcerated women and their children, 2-4 formerly incarcerated mothers and their children, 4-6 incarcerated caregivers, 5-6 DOC personnel, and 4-5 PSESD-EHS personnel who work in the RPP

*Measures:*

Individual interviews, focus group discussions, participant observation, and audit trail will be used to collect data. No tests or measures per se will be administered because of the small, unique sample of people participating in the study. Content and critical discourse analyses will be used to analyze and interpret data *with* informants.

## **Nicole Denmark**

*Project Title:*

Socialization for Learning: Examining Pathways from Mothers' Socialization Goals to Children's Classroom Competencies in Central American Immigrant Families

*Mentor:*

Brenda Jones Harden, Ph.D.

*Project Funding Years:*

2008-2010

*University Affiliation:*

University of Maryland at College Park

*Project Abstract:*

The University of Maryland will examine the school readiness concepts of classroom social competence and approaches to learning in Head Start children from Central American immigrant families. The project has several objectives, which include: (a) to examine how mothers' relatedness and autonomous socialization goals are associated with their relatedness-oriented and autonomy-oriented parenting behaviors in Central American immigrant families; (b) to examine the association between mothers'

relatedness-oriented and autonomy-oriented behaviors and children's social competence and approaches to learning in Central American immigrant families; and (c) to examine the relation between parents' socialization goals, parenting behaviors, and children's social competence and approaches to learning in Central American families by developing and testing a theory-based structural equation model predicting children's social competence and approaches to learning. Participants will be mothers who emigrated from Central America whose children attend Head Start. Mothers, recruited in the second phase of the two phase study, will be interviewed with regard to their socialization goals and will participate in a videotaped free play session with their children.

*Sample:*

100 Central American mothers of Head Start children

*Measures:*

*Mothers:*

Background Characteristics

Bidimensional Acculturation Scale for Hispanics

Keller's list of 10 statements concerning the traits or qualities that children should learn or develop during the first six years

*Children:*

Social Skills Rating Scale-Preschool Edition (SSRS)

*Teachers:*

Social Skills Rating Scale-Preschool Edition Teacher's Form

Preschool Learning Behaviors Scale (PLBS)

## **Jennifer DiBara**

*Project Title:*

Look at the facts: Investigating the relationship between book genre (information book or storybook) and preschoolers' development of vocabulary and pretend reading skills

*Mentor:*

Catherine Snow, Ph.D.

*Project Funding Years:*

2008-2009

*University Affiliation:*

Harvard Graduate School of Education

*Project Abstract:*

Harvard Graduate School of Education will investigate the use and effects of information book read alouds, in comparison to storybook read alouds, in Head Start classrooms. Specifically, the study seeks to answer three research questions: (a) What is the availability and use of information books, in comparison to storybooks and books of other genres, in Head Start preschool libraries and Head Start teacher read alouds? (b) Do information book and storybook read alouds have the same effect on preschool children's learning of vocabulary introduced in the books or does the effect differ by genre? (c) Do children who participate in information book and storybook read alouds differentiate their pretend reading by genre? Study participants will include the teachers and students in thirty Head Start preschool classrooms. Children will participate in read alouds, and a sub-sample of children will be randomly selected to participate in vocabulary assessments and pretend readings of books in each genre. Results of the study are expected to support the appropriateness and importance of reading aloud to young children in the information book genre, as well as the more commonly studied storybook genre.

*Sample:*

30 Head Start Teachers

300 Head Start Children

Sub-sample of 60 Head Start Children

*Measures:*

*Teachers:*

Teacher Surveys

Read Aloud Logs

*Students:*

PPVT-4

Researcher-designed target vocabulary assessment

**Meghan Fitzgerald**

*Project Title:*

Head Start in a Changing Context: How Teacher Input Improves Professional Development

*Mentor:*

Sharon Lynn Kagan, Ed.D.

*Project Funding Years:*

2008-2010

*University Affiliation:*

Teachers College, Columbia University

*Project Abstract:*

Teachers College, Columbia University will document and analyze instructional staff perspectives regarding professional development opportunities within medium- to high-quality Head Start programs. The sample will include education coordinators, teachers, and teacher assistants from three Head Start delegate agencies. The study will seek to answer the following research questions: (a) What types of professional development do the Head Start instructional staff members in medium- to high-quality Head Start programs receive? (b) How do instructional staff members perceive the effect of their professional development experiences in their practice? and, (c) What strategies do instructional staff members perceive can be employed to improve the quality and impact of professional development? The study will utilize grantee and delegate agency documents and records, education coordinator interviews, instructional staff member surveys, and teacher and teacher assistant focus groups. Through qualitative data analysis, findings will be used for policy analysis and to inform early childhood education professional development practices and services provided to the participating Head Start community.

*Sample:*

Three Head Start delegates, 104 instructional staff members

*Measures:*

Qualitative measures - Piloted questionnaires

Documents and records

Interviews

Focus groups

**Ariela Greenberg, M.S.**

*Project Title:*

Fighting Bias with Statistics: Detecting Gender Differences in Responses to Items on a Preschool Science Assessment

*Mentor:*

Daryl Greenfield, Ph.D.

*Project Funding Years:*

2008-2010

*University Affiliation:*

University of Miami

*Project Abstract:*

The University of Miami, as part of a larger study, will develop a direct assessment of preschool science which can be used to measure science content and process skills among preschoolers. The assessment will evaluate interventions in classrooms serving Head Start children. Specifically, the goal of this study is to study the gender differences in answer choices on assessment items. The study has two objectives: (a) to address whether items are measuring science skills differently for either male or female children; and (b) to qualitatively evaluate items to address possible reasons for gender differences in answer selection. Expected results of the study will provide a measure of preschool science that is fair to both boys and girls for use in future studies. The project will help disseminate information on a relatively accessible method for detecting item bias that other researchers can use in their validation of measures created for Head Start, or other preschool settings.

*Sample:*

500 Head Start Children

*Measures:*

Author developed measure to evaluate science knowledge gained in Head Start interventions

**Virginia Vitiello, M.S.**

*Project Title:*

Executive Functions and Approaches to Learning: Relationships to School Readiness in Head Start Preschoolers

*Mentor:*

Daryl Greenfield, Ph.D.

*Project Funding Years:*  
2008-2009

*University Affiliation:*  
University of Miami

*Project Abstract:*

The University of Miami will determine whether the effects of executive functions on school readiness are mediated by approaches to learning in Head Start preschoolers. Specifically, the study will seek to address two main questions: (a) Are executive functions related to approaches to learning? and (b) Do approaches to learning mediate the relation between executive functions and school readiness? As part of a larger study, data were collected during the 2007-2008 school year on 150 ethnically diverse four-year-old Head Start children. School readiness measures were collected at the end of the school year to assess how executive functions and approaches to learning affect gains across the school year. Children were given six tests of executive functions, producing scores for cognitive inhibition, cognitive flexibility, and working memory. It is expected that the results of the study will contribute to the understanding of executive functions and approaches to learning and how these constructs jointly affect school readiness in Head Start children.

*Sample:*

150 Four-Year-Old Head Start Children

*Measures:*

*Children:*

Blair and Willoughby (2006) – Battery of tasks to assess executive functions

Spatial Conflict

Operation Span (working memory)

Something's the Same (cognitive flexibility)

Silly Sounds Game (cognitive inhibition)

Pick the Picture Game (working memory)

The Pig Game (cognitive inhibition)

Classroom Assessment Scoring System-Child Version (CLASS-C)

Learning Express

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III)

*Teacher:*

Preschool Learning Behaviors Scale (PLBS)