Deb Cassidy Heads Project for Training ECE Teachers

Deb Cassidy has received new funding from the Guilford County Partnership for Children to enhance the professional development of the county’s early childhood education (ECE) professionals. As the current Director of the Partnership, Alice Moore, has noted, research shows that 90% of brains development occurs by age 5 so it is critical that children have the best possible developmental experiences in those first 1800 or so days. Nonetheless, Early Childhood Professionals often struggle to get the continuing professional development they need and want.

“Through this program,” Deb says, “our faculty will bring six interconnected services directly to teachers and directors in early childhood settings. Together, we’ll implement strategies we know have a direct impact on increasing the quality of early care and education.”

The six activities include creation of formal professional development plans, peer coaching, how to plan appropriate learning activities for children, leadership training, improving working and learning conditions for teachers, and quality enhancement for early care and education classrooms and homes. Faculty in the Birth Continued on page 2
through Kindergarten program will serve as advisors, consultants and trainers throughout the course of the project.

This new Project is part of the UNCG Human Development and Family Studies Early Childhood Education Community Engagement Network (ECECCN). The Network is an innovative model of early childhood research and education based on the principle of community and university collaborative engagement. The Network seeks to create and support opportunities for faculty, early childhood practitioners, community members, and families to collaborate with one another in order to influence policy and practice in the early childhood field. It focuses on using applied research to change and enhance education, to develop new training models, and to provide evidence to policymakers.

Tudge Receives Templeton Grant

Jon Tudge has received a major, multi-year grant from the John Templeton Foundation. His project will focus on the development of gratitude and materialistic values in 7- to 14-year-olds and the role played in that development by their parents and their culture. It is the first project to address these questions.

Jon notes that gratitude is a key aspect of character formation. Adolescents and adults who are grateful report high psychological well-being, tend to be more connected to community, and tend to have fewer materialistic values. Excessive materialism is neither environmentally sustainable nor psychologically healthy, but in societies that encourage consumerism it is difficult to raise children to have non-materialistic values. Developing gratitude in children may help to counteract excessive materialism.

Gratitude is more than just saying “thank you!” Parents can teach very young children to respond to a gift or help with those two words, and the politeness that’s involved is a very good start to feeling gratitude. True gratitude, however, involves feeling as much toward the benefactor who provided something needed or desired as about the help or gift received. This takes time to develop in children and adolescents, and parents, and the cultural group in which they live, can play an important part in whether and how this more sophisticated type of gratitude develops.

HDFS undergrad and grad students will collect data from parents and children in five different cultural groups (African and European Americans, and immigrants from Mexico, China, and Brazil). These cultural groups feel differently about connectedness among people, and are therefore expected to socialize their children differently in relation to their benefactors.

Jon’s goal is to provide evidence and materials that parents and teachers can use to promote children’s and adolescents’ gratitude and, in the process, develop a more psychologically healthy and environmentally sustainable view about the acquisition of material goods.
Does Children’s Biological Functioning Predict Parents’ Behavior?

The American Psychological Association has done a national media release on an article coauthored by HDFS alum Nicole Perry, and HDFS faculty member Susan Calkins with Jennifer Mackler and Susan Keane of UNCG’s Psychology department.

Developmental scientists believe, and have impressive evidence showing, that parents’ sensitivity to their children’s distress fosters children’s healthy development. Developmentalists today generally also recognize the influence children can have on their parents. The question Perry and her collaborators asked was “is there a bidirectional aspect to the link between children’s biological reactions to stress and the sensitivity of their parents’ responding? Does children’s ability to biologically regulate arousal also influence the type of parenting that they receive?”

Perry and associates observed children and their mothers in a laboratory setting when children were 2, 4, and 5 years old. Children’s biological regulation was measured during a frustrating situation. Mothers’ sensitivity was measured during situations designed to mimic what they would normally do at home, such as pretend play or cleaning up toys.

The results of this study did support the notion of age-specific bidirectionality of influence between parental sensitivity and children’s biological reactions to stress. Two key findings were: a) Maternal sensitivity to 2 year olds predicted children’s ability to regulate their reactions to stress at age 4, and b) children’s biological regulation at age 4 predicted how sensitive mothers were when their children were age 5 years. These findings suggest that maternal sensitivity may be more strongly related to the development of biological regulation earlier in childhood, when children’s internal regulatory abilities are rapidly maturing, rather than at later ages, when biological systems are more developed.

The study also highlights the importance of children’s biological regulation for the type of parenting that they receive. It may be that parents have lower expectations for children’s behavior when they are toddlers. So a decreased ability to biologically regulate and difficult behaviors that may arise as a result of being less biologically regulated may be considered typical at age 2 years and tax parents’ patience to a lesser degree, resulting in a greater likelihood that parents respond sensitively. However, by preschool, greater behavioral control may be expected: Children who are unable to biologically regulate arousal may not be able to control their emotions and behavior in a way that meets parental expectations and therefore (continued on page 4)
may be more likely to elicit less sensitive parent responses. For more information see http://paracom.paramountcommunication.com/hostedemail/email.htm?CID=22273720156&ch=238077B13250E65F4472DAE45F3BF728&h=9a9a07b4c8f60646c2508d57c756b1b96ei=sBRZ_VrNe

The Virginian-Pilot Features Research on Crying

In her September 12th column, Pat Ferguson, a writer for the Norfolk, Virginia-based paper and news website, featured a study by HDFS researchers Esther Leerkes, Andy Supple, Marion O’Brien and Susan Calkins. Ferguson focused on mothers’ responses to their crying infants. She noted that “Moms who experienced a ‘positive childhood with their caregivers’ and those who had ‘come to terms with negative experiences’ were able to respond and connect more sensitively to their baby’s needs. Moms who had a history of depression and/or unresolved negative past experiences, struggled to connect or respond to their baby’s cry.”

In reflecting on this study, lead author Esther Leerkes commented that “Responding sensitively to infant crying is a difficult yet important task. Some mothers may need help controlling their own distress and interpreting babies’ crying as an attempt to communicate need or discomfort.” Esther indicated that parenting classes, home visits and the like can help parents respond more sensitively when their baby cries. (To read Ferguson’s column, go to http://hamptonroads.com/2014/09/crying-babys-trigger-mothers-memories-new-study-reveals-why

Recent Publications

Two Articles in the Journal of Marriage and Family

The most recent, October 2014, issue of Journal of Marriage and Family has two articles involving HDFS authors.

Danielle Crosby coauthored an article entitled “Work Hours, Schedules, and Insufficient Sleep Among Mothers and Their Young Children.” The study examined the associations between maternal work hours and schedules and insufficient sleep among disadvantaged mothers and their young children. The results showed that mothers who worked more than 35 hours per week were more likely to experience insufficient sleep. Children were more likely to experience insufficient sleep when their mothers worked between 20 and 40 hours. Nonstandard work schedules were associated with an increased likelihood of insufficient sleep for mothers but not their children. The results highlight a potentially difficult balance between work and family for many disadvantaged working mothers in the United States.

HDFS members Cheryl Buehler, Marion O’Brien and Nan Zhou along with Kevin M. Swartout published an article on maternal employment and parenting of children in middle childhood. It also looked at the amount that mothers’ worked, dividing them into non-
 employed, part- and full-time employees. Comparing mothers who were employed part time to those not employed, mothers employed part-time were more sensitive in their parenting and provided more learning opportunities for their children than did mothers who were not employed. These differences, however, only characterized families during early childhood but not during middle childhood. Comparing full- versus part-time mothers, full-time mothers provided more learning opportunities for their children during early childhood (but not beyond). The authors interpret their findings in an expansionistic perspective. According to this view, multiple roles are beneficial for individual and relationship health up to a point but can be excessive if taken too far.

Johnston and Fletcher Article on Maternal Strategies for Fostering Children’s Friendships

The Journal of Social and Personal Relationships has accepted graduate student Carol Johnston and faculty member Anne Fletcher’s study of how African American and Euro-American mothers help their 8 to 10 years olds form friendships. The idea and the analyses for this article grew out of a paper Carol did for a methodology class she took her first semester in the program. The results of the study showed that the strategies mothers used varied as a function of the mother’s ethnicity and sense of self-efficacy, as well as their children’s behavior. In third grade, African American mothers were less likely to help their children physically get together with friends and more likely to talk to their children to facilitate friendships than were European American mothers. Mothers of children who reported higher levels of self-efficacy were more likely to engage in both types of friendship facilitation behaviors. Mothers who viewed their children as exhibiting more externalizing behaviors (e.g., disobeying rules, physical aggression) were less likely to talk with children in an effort to facilitate friendships. Mothers who viewed their children as having more social problems reported talking to their children more.

Upcoming HDFS Speakers

Fridays, 12 - 1:00pm 186 Stone

10/17 - Dr. Silvia Bettez, Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations Department, UNCG expert on privilege and oppression
11/14 - Jinni Su, HDFS graduate student, recipient of the Vira Kivett Research Award
12/5 - Dr. Margaret R. Burchinal, UNC-Chapel Hill, expert in data management and analysis, child development, and childcare.
Student Accomplishments

Kayo Robinson Invited to Diversity Recruitment Event

Kayo Robinson, one of HDFS’ outstanding undergraduates, has been invited by the University of Michigan’s Psychology Department to attend a Diversity Recruitment weekend. This was a very competitive program with only 25 applicants accepted. She will be flown to Ann Arbor for an all expenses paid two day program focused on the graduate admissions process at Michigan and beyond. The weekend will include sessions on writing a successful statement for graduate school, faculty perspectives on doctoral study, and what constitutes a strong application. HDFS is proud of Kayo!

Claire Wood Receives Research Award

Claire Wood has received a $1000 travel research grant from UNCG’s Graduate Student Association. Claire is working with Roger Mills-Koonce on his New American Family project concerned with how children grow up in same-sex families. Roger was extremely happy writing: “We are having local couples come into the lab for a visit, but many of our participants live too far away to ask them to travel to campus. Claire found this UNCG research travel grant for students and went out and got $1,000, which will allow us to see at least 30 additional LGBT families that live outside our catchment area. For a study like what we’re doing where every family counts, this is a big deal! So congrats to Claire!

Online Open Houses for Grad Applicants

MS and Ph.D general program online Open Houses scheduled 10/15 (4pm) and 11/3 (5pm). Requires a Gmail email address. Please RSVP to cpkernah@uncg.edu for an invitation to participate.

MS/Ph.D in early childhood -- online open houses On Oct 16, Oct 29 and Nov 17th. Requires a Gmail email address. Please RSVP to cpkernah@uncg.edu for an invitation to participate.
Rated License Contract Renewed

Linda Hestenes, along with Deb Cassidy and Sharon Mims, received a continuation grant from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services - Division of Child Development for “North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project” (NCRLAP). The project is a collaboration between the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education and UNCG. It is the HDFS Department’s largest and longest running project. NCRLAP’s purpose is to conduct voluntary assessments for child care centers and family child care homes attempting to earn a higher star rating in the North Carolina Star Rated License system. Each year NCRLAP staff typically complete 2,880 assessments (including approximately 433 NC Pre-K assessments). A recent noteworthy development in the project’s evolution is that effective July 1, 2014 NCRLAP began using the SACERS-U, the new spiral bound version of the School-age Care Environment Rating Scale. The work of the Rated License Project advances scholarship on quality assessment and serves the people of North Carolina.

UNCG Participates in the Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families

Danielle Crosby and Heather Helms along with four HDFS graduate students (Yuliana Rodriguez, Natalie Hengstebeck, Amy Johnson and Claire Wood) and HDFS undergraduate student Claudia Martinez are participating in the Center for Research on Hispanic Children and Families. The Center is made up of a strong team of national experts in Hispanic issues, and is a hub of research to improve the lives of Hispanics across three priority areas: a) poverty reduction and self-sufficiency, b) healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood, and c) early care and education. Danielle and Heather are collaborating on a series of projects in priority Area C, early care and education. For more information on UNCG’s involvement in the Center, see http://psy.uncg.edu/research/national-research-center-on-hispanic-children-families/.

Heather has organized a symposium to be presented at the National Council on Family Relations conference in Baltimore that features the work of several Center affiliates including discussant comments by Dr. Natasha Cabrera, PI of Priority Area B: Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood. Entitled “Mexican American Families: Illuminating Understudied Relationships” the session is scheduled for Friday, Nov. 21, 10:00 - 11:15 am. Members of UNCG’s HDFS family at the NCFR Conference are
especially invited to attend this symposium.

The symposium will advance our field’s understanding of family relationships among Mexican Americans by examining links between parent-adolescent and marital relationships from early adolescence to young adulthood, associations between economic hardship and child behavior problems mediated by co-parenting conflict in father-adolescent mother and grandmother-adolescent mother dyadic relationships, and marital relationships and coparenting among Mexican-origin couples residing in emerging immigrant communities in the southeastern U.S.

New BKISED Initiative Funded

Belinda Hardin (Specialized Education Services) in collaboration with HDFS’ Linda Hestenes received new funding from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services for “Online Masters Degree Emphasis in Early Childhood Leadership and Program Administration.” Although the Departments of Human Development and Family Studies and Specialized Education Services regularly offer a Master’s of Education program, the new emphasis in early childhood leadership and program administration is a new undertaking for UNCG. The traditional M.Ed. program and emphasis in advanced licensure is supported by existing staff resources and administrative support. The new emphasis in early childhood leadership and program administration, which was initiated through a planned Race to the Top project, led to a dramatic increase in student applications at UNCG, the abstract states. This funding will help accommodate this surge.