

**President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families**  
**Fall 2007 Awards for**  
***Disparities: Unequal Opportunities, Unequal Outcomes***

**Nan Skelton, Crossing Borders: Exploring the Landscape of Cross-Cultural Deliberation**

The project, "Crossing Borders," will add a new dimension to the work of the Jane Addams School by creating an intentional public leadership development opportunity for a diverse mix of new immigrants to practice communication of their experiences and reflections with broader communities. It will also involve reflective public spaces that bring together neighborhood residents, teens and children, college students and faculty to reflect on these communications. In the process, people will develop public confidence and valuable skills needed for the cultural life of our society. We also anticipate that college students, staff, and faculty will develop new insights and knowledge about the challenges facing new immigrants, as well as new strategies and skills for communicating the contributions they bring to our society.

The Jane Addams School will: 1) build the leadership capacity of a cross-cultural group of elders – Somali, Mexican, Hmong, Peruvian, as well as U.S. born participants – at the Jane Addams School to communicate their lessons of intercultural exchange and communication; 2) develop digital teaching tools useful across languages and cultures; and 3) convene at least five workshops to share lessons and learning with urban, suburban, and rural communities in Minnesota.

**Martha Bigelow, A Collaboration Initiative for Improving the Assessment and Instruction of Immigrant Youth**

Inequities in education for language minority adolescents abound. Public education frequently falls short in implementing effective programs, meaningful teacher development, state and school-wide policies and sound instructional practices for immigrant and refugee youth. The work funded in this project will focus on the ESL teachers at a large urban high school and their identified problems of practice situated in their school and program.

Martha Bigelow, Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and Adam Rambow, a Ph.D. student in the program in Second Languages and Cultures Education will collaborate with the English as a Second Language (ESL) Department at Edison Senior High School to develop a strong partnership between the University of Minnesota and Edison Senior High, a large urban school where 38% of the students are English language learners. The funds awarded will support time for teachers and University personnel to have in-depth, focused conversations and work sessions about their program. At a series of retreats, we will examine the department's assessment practices and how these practices link to both the articulated ESL curriculum and the larger high school curriculum. We will read, study and discuss important research related to this work and hope to present our outcomes at a local conference. These activities are

designed to build the department's district-wide leadership in developing strong programs and practices for educating language minority youth at the high school level. This work will serve as the foundation for an ongoing relationship between Edison and the University such that student teachers will be placed there and graduate students and faculty can collaborate with school staff on educational research of mutual interest.

### **Priscilla Day, Summer Institute in American Indian Child Welfare**

The Minnesota child welfare system is at a critical juncture in its ability to provide effective services to American Indian children. It is clear from the state's own data that Native children are far more likely to be separated from their families by the child welfare system than their white counterparts. A 2003 study demonstrated that if a child is American Indian, he or she is nearly twice as likely to experience an out of home placement, when all other factors are held equal. Being an American Indian was identified in that study as being the third highest factor in determining if a child would be placed out of home; only abandonment and substance abuse were shown to have a stronger correlation with out of home placement.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the needs of Native children are not being equally served by the Minnesota child welfare system. These discrepancies in American Indian child welfare have been chronic and persistent, most notably in rural reservation regions.

The University of Minnesota Duluth, Department of Social Work American Indian Projects has been working with tribal communities in northern Minnesota. Through a series of discussions last year with tribal human services, it was determined that training specific to tribal workers was needed. This summer an Institute in American Indian Child Welfare will be held at the Leech Lake Tribal College. The training will offer best practices of American Indian human service workers and will provide an opportunity for tribal workers and administrators to network with one another. This training will provide an important step towards effectively serving American Indian children.

### **Suzanne Miric, Perceptions of the Achievement Gap in a North Minneapolis High School: A Multi-perspective and Multi-disciplinary Approach**

Minnesota has one of the most highly ranked K-12 educational systems in the country. Yet it also has some of the most extreme disparities in terms of educational outcomes among students of color, particularly African-American students. This project seeks to examine such disparity in a deliberately mindful way by bringing together multiple perspectives and multiple disciplinary approaches to jointly focus upon understanding and improving test scores at one particular school - Patrick Henry High School in North Minneapolis.

In 2007, 56% of Patrick Henry's white 11<sup>th</sup> grade students were proficient in mathematics, as measured by the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments – Series II. A higher percentage, 83.3%, was proficient in reading. By contrast, only 2.38% of black 11<sup>th</sup> grade students were proficient in mathematics, and 34.5% in reading. Seventy-five

---

percent of students at Patrick Henry qualify for free and reduced lunch, yet social-economic standing does not fully explain disparate test scores. One way this study will seek insight into educational disparity is to examine *student perspectives* and lived experiences of the achievement gap. Although much has been written about the achievement gap, comparatively little qualitative research explores how students themselves view and experience disparity. This research will be enhanced by interviews conducted with school, community, and university based stakeholders. From a situated perspective, what do various stakeholders perceive as the most important and pertinent research questions at Patrick Henry? A meta-analysis of the findings is intended to facilitate future, multi-disciplinary collaborations between metro-area schools, the community, and the university.

### **Mary Hearst, "Advancing Interdisciplinary Research and Action on Health and Education Disparities"**

The goal of this symposium and subsequent research is one that explains and attempts to comprehensively understand the relationships among schools, neighborhoods and health, improving both the opportunities and outcomes of its inhabitants. We aim to not merely acknowledge their interdependence, but also offer mechanisms by which they can be altered to improve health and life chances for everyone. We will be linking University researchers from across a wide array of disciplines, policy makers and community partner organizations to advance research on the root causes of, and potential remedies for, health and educational disparities. Our agenda will focus on "upstream" factors known to affect health and educational outcomes of children and their families, such as neighborhood conditions, racial segregation, school-district boundaries, crime, and access to quality preventive health care. The long-term aim of this symposium is to set the stage for increased collaborative research by participants and to lead directly to both intervention research and public policy initiatives that translate results into action.

### **Tai Mendenhall and Bill Doherty, Sisters Helping Sisters: Partnering with the Hmong Community to Fight Depression**

The Hmong Women United Against Depression initiative engages local providers and representatives of the St. Paul Hmong community in a collaborative partnership oriented to investigating, understanding and improving the lives of those who are struggling with depression. The "Sisters Helping Sisters" project is the first community outreach series created by this initiative. It includes a recurring series of 5 bi-weekly gatherings wherein Hmong women and their families come together for an evening of fellowship, education, and support. Meetings' sequences encompass members socializing and sharing food, participating in lively and interactive educational forums (focused on topics including self care; healthy lifestyles and behaviors; understanding depression; and stress reduction and management), and sharing personal stories and support.

The current research project will serve to launch and evaluate Sisters Helping Sisters. We anticipate that: 1) women who participate in the series will report some relief from depression; 2) family members and loved ones will report some relief in their roles as care- and support-givers; and 3) depression will be more visible as a problem that can

be addressed openly in the community. Key indicators of success will include the successful launch and completion of the gatherings and the successful collection of data relevant to our anticipated outcomes.

**Linda Harris and Nancy Leland, Photovoice Evaluation Project for Diabetes Prevention: Teaching Anishinabe Children about Traditional Foods Using the Four Seasons Model**

The PICYF grant sponsors an evaluation of a diabetes-prevention program of the Anishinabe Center located on the White Earth Reservation. The high rate of Type 2 Diabetes rates for American Indians are thought to be associated with changes in diet and physical activity that occurred since being forced onto the reservations in the mid-1800's. This radical change deprived Native peoples of their traditional economies, food sources and lifeways, and forced them into dependence on commodity food. The White Earth Reservation is at the forefront of a movement to reverse these changes, and has a number of efforts focusing on land recovery, an emphasis on local, organic and traditional foods, and revitalization of culture and traditional practices around land and as food as a medicine.

The Anishinabe Center has an innovative diabetes prevention program working with young people. Part of the program involves "camps" that are offered four times per year in conjunction with the four seasons. The camps are held in a variety of woods, nature and community settings and last between two and five days. The Winter Count camp focuses on story telling, the Sugar bush camp focuses on harvesting of maple syrup, the Summer camp focuses on traditional gardening, foraging, and berry-picking, and the Fall camp involves wild rice harvest and processing. The children (ages 6 to 18) learn about and practice traditional food cultivation and gathering, preparation, and nutrition. The lessons are taught by an intergenerational combination of elders and community members.

The proposed project involves using the Photovoice technique with ten core youth in the diabetes program to support them to document what they are learning in the camps through photography and by telling their story using the photos they take. It is also an innovative, appropriate method for documenting both process and outcomes of a project such as this, as it involves children of a wide range of ages, literacy levels, and it is a culturally sensitive method for this community in which oral and visual traditions are so important.

**Ann Masten, Promoting Early School Success in Homeless/Highly Mobile Children**

Profound disparities threaten the development of children in homeless or highly mobile (HHM), poor families, and their school outcomes reflect those disparities. During the past two years, a strong interdisciplinary team of University and community partners has emerged with a shared interest in addressing disparities in HHM children. Our goal is to bring the best knowledge and contemporary research to this task in a collaborative context, working to develop an intervention design, supporting data, and competitive

grant applications aimed at promoting school success in young HHM children in the Twin Cities metro area. Our intervention plans will be focused on preparing children to learn at school through multiple component strategies. We would build on our ongoing basic research on the roles of children's executive function and motivation, and also parenting in the academic resilience of HHM children. At the same time, we plan to address concomitant system issues related to barriers and opportunities, including pre-K screening, quality child care and early child education, health care, mental health issues, and school stability in a context of high family mobility. Planned activities for 2008 include continued analysis of data from metro-area districts to document achievement disparity patterns related to HHM status and the predictive validity of screening tools for HHM children; analysis and summaries of State data on HHM children to provide a further context for understanding achievement disparities; focus groups to refine initial intervention plans with stakeholders (including parents, school district staff, State and County staff involved in services for HHM families, and shelter providers); development and submission of national and local grants to support innovative interventions aimed at reducing disparities for HHM children; and dissemination of user-friendly data documenting disparity issues and academic resilience in children from mobile families.

### **Pam Moore, Lessons Learned from a Community – University Partnership**

The Minnesota Youth Community Learning (MYCL) Initiative is a partnership with seven diverse communities throughout the state to: 1) Involve students who are disconnected from learning by linking them to a community teacher for skill based mentoring; 2) Empower parents by enhancing their youth advocacy skills and through educational supports efforts; 3) Assist schools by creating an environment where young people feel a sense of connectedness; 4) Engage the community by increasing their capacity to address the needs of all youth. The overarching goal of the MYCL Initiative is "Our Youth Finish School." It is the desire of the Konopka Institute to share the lessons learned from the seven initiatives by writing and publishing an article in a peer review journal. MYCL staff Pamela Moore and Paul Snyder will be the primary authors of this article. The article will be shared at national, state, regional and local conferences. Through these efforts, we hope to influence community-university partnerships at the local, state and national level, and particularly with regard to unique approaches needed for traditionally underserved communities. These approaches require tailoring methods so that the particular needs of unique cultural populations of youth are recognized, acknowledged, and addressed. Also, Moore and Snyder would like to present the findings to educational, community outreach and public engagement committees at the University of Minnesota. By sharing the lessons learned, we intend to effect the way the University engages with youth-serving communities statewide, with particular attention to distinct strategies to address populations of greater need.

### **Bill Allen, Exploration of Evidence-based and "Community Defined" Children's Mental Health Interventions in Culturally Diverse Communities.**

This project will support a partnership between providers of children's mental health services to culturally diverse communities (Cultural Providers Network - CPN) and

University faculty and staff. The goals of this partnership are to: increase CPN understanding of evidence-based practices in children's mental health; adopt or adapt practices relevant to culturally diverse communities, and expand the evidence base to include more community-based, culturally relevant strategies. A primary outcome for the Partnership is to eliminate disparities in utilization and outcomes for children's mental health services to culturally diverse communities. Network members will assess the evidence-base for effective mental health practice in their communities and partner with national experts and University of Minnesota researchers regarding the development of "community defined evidence" for effective children's mental health services in diverse communities.

The PICYF grant allows the Network to hire a graduate student to conduct a comprehensive review of existing children's mental health literature concerning effective engagement and intervention strategies in culturally diverse communities. It also supports a contract with a national consultant to train Network members and University of Minnesota faculty and staff regarding the successful application of children's mental health evidence in culturally diverse communities and the development of community-based evidence.