

IN THIS ISSUE

Educational Disparities: Communities

This Fall issue of Consortium Connections continues its concentration on Educational Disparities, using the Circles of Influence model as the guiding framework.

This issue and the next two issues will focus on the Communities circle of influence. The communities circle moves outside the family and informal supports to local institutions and practices that influence and are influenced by families and individuals. As is the case with all of the circles of influence, the Communities circle is also influenced by and influences the more distant circles, but the focus here is on the interactions with children and families.

There are many institutions in communities – schools, service agencies, religious groups, child care centers/providers and businesses, to name a few - that interact with, influence and are influenced by individuals and families in a variety of ways.

In addition, community practices and norms influence and are influenced by families. The physical and emotional environment, the community attitudes, and interaction and integration among people and institutions in both geographic communities (e.g. "neighborhoods") and socio-cultural communities influence the experiences of children and families.

Ideally, positive experiences of children and families in communities will strengthen their opportunities to develop and succeed. When communities and the institutions within them view child, youth and family development as a paramount concern to the well-being of the communities overall, and when they view youth and families as assets to the communities rather than problems to be solved, everyone benefits.

In an article in a past issue of Connections, Dr. Heather Weiss of the Harvard Family Research Project talked about the process of community-family interaction as circular rather than linear. She said, "Healthy family development requires strong nurturing families that in turn are nurtured and supported by institutions within the community. And communities are comprised of...strong nurturing families"...and the circle continues. When

this happens, children have the support and opportunities they need to succeed.

Unfortunately, however, the experience of children and families in communities is not always positive. Some community norms and practices don't reflect a commitment to the success of youth and families, and may even undermine parents and devalue youth. Some youth and families experience outright discrimination. Lack of access to quality resources, often for those who need it the most, is a commonly identified barrier. Families also experience a lack of coordination between families, programs, schools and other community institutions. It's difficult for anyone to negotiate the complex institutions in communities, but when families have insufficient resources to begin with, it is particularly trying to have to evaluate and coordinate community services and assistance that might be available to them.

In order to reduce educational disparities, the positive aspects of communities must be strengthened and supported, and the negative aspects must be critically examined and changed.

This current issue of Connections highlights communities in general, with special attention to two community institutions: faith related organizations and businesses. Other articles address ways in which communities benefit when all kids have opportunities to succeed and the relationship between developmental assets and educational achievement.

Circles of Influence is included in each issue of Connections, and readers will notice that some changes have been made to the Circles framework since its last publication. Feedback from stakeholders suggested that business is an important community institution that needed to be represented in this model. In addition, stakeholders felt that placing "culture," at least as it refers to race and ethnicity, in the outer circle as a part of "society" created a false distance between culture and the family and child. In fact, race and ethnicity is a critical influence in every circle.

We welcome your comments and feedback.

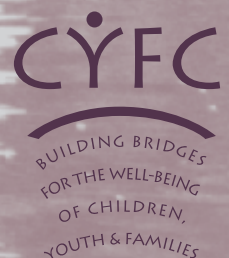
CONNECTIONS WEB VERSION

Consortium Connections has an enhanced web version that can be found at: <http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/publications/connection/index.html>

The web version contains a PDF copy of the print version. In addition, it contains all articles individually, some of which are more extensive than the print versions. When articles contain citations, they are included in the web version. Finally, the web version contains links to resources related to the articles.

The Children, Youth and Family Consortium was created in 1991. Its mission is to build capacity at the University of Minnesota and in Minnesota's communities to use research, inform policy and enhance practice to improve the well-being of Minnesota's children and families.

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS



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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



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Lessons from the Field

2007-08

Building upon the response to last year's Lessons from the Field Series on Attachment, the 2007-08 Series will explore more fully specific issues that impact attachment.

Currently two workshop topics and presenters have been confirmed.

- On February 13, 2008, Dr. Abigail Gewirtz, faculty member at the University of Minnesota and Project Director of the Minnesota Child Response Center, will be leading a workshop on trauma and its impact on attachment.
- On May 7, 2008, Dr. Miriam Steele, Assistant Director of Clinical Training at The New School for Social Research in New York, will lead a workshop focusing on the intergenerational consequences of attachment. The workshop will also include issues specific to adoption and foster care.

Once again the Series will be broadcast to multiple host sites in Greater Minnesota via video stream and ITV. Check CECMH's web-site for more information as specifics regarding each workshop are finalized: www.cmh.umn.edu. Contact Ellen Lepinski at 612-625-6527 with any questions.

CECMH – A New Director and a Developing Vision

CECMH has created a Director position. Drawing its criteria from a series of detailed interviews and focus groups with community and University members held during the past year, staff and Steering Committee members created a position and led a search for the most qualified candidate. In June, CECMH hired University of Minnesota graduate Joel Hetler, Ph.D., L.P. to lead the Center's efforts in integrating research, practice and policy in children's mental health.

Joel, a graduate of the U of M's clinical psychology Ph.D. program and Manager of Children's Mental Health at Ramsey County for the last eighteen years, brings almost three decades of community expertise to the University. Joel began his work at Ramsey County in 1976 providing in-home and community-based children's mental health services. He became Manager after the Children's Mental Health Act was put into place, developing Ramsey County's first children's mental health program. Since then he has managed and expanded the program, supervising service areas from community-based case management to mobile crisis teams and child welfare screening. In addition, Joel has been involved at the policy level with the state of Minnesota to help shape the direction of the public mental health system.

Joel sees CECMH as a catalyst for connecting the community and the University to benefit those who really matter: the children. "The traditional lore is that it takes 25 years to go from research to practice in children's mental health, and that is just not acceptable," he says. "There are too many children and families really struggling with these issues, and if we can connect research to practice we can help people a lot more directly than we do now – it is a shame not to."

Bringing research into community practice must be accompanied by infusion of community opinion and ideas into the research agenda. CECMH is working to develop a model of operations and a plan for engaging practitioners and organizations throughout Minnesota that would connect the ways we conduct and utilize research with the ways we work with children.

Joel comments on the "big return in helping the University understand what the needs are from the community's perspective. Using the communities perspective to grow the research agenda and influence training programs can help us produce interventions and clinicians that are better suited to go out and deal with daily problems."

This is an important historical moment in children's mental health. Researchers are becoming clearer about what works and what doesn't. Practitioners are more interested in utilizing research in making practice decisions. CECMH's vision is to connect community and University members while identifying and overcoming obstacles they can face in partnering together.

In the coming year CECMH expects to continue and expand its work on training and disseminating information on children's mental health research. New for this year will be an added emphasis on support for implementation of evidence based practices in clinical settings. CECMH is exploring the creation of partnerships with community mental health providers and culturally specific children's mental health providers for the purpose of increasing the use of evidence based practices in their settings. Support for implementation goes beyond training and education. Current research indicates that successful implementation efforts also pay attention to consultation/support/coaching, maintenance of fidelity in use of new techniques, evaluation of outcomes and assisting organizations to overcome barriers to sustainability.

CECMH remains committed to its role in supporting interdisciplinary research, education and public engagement. The Center will continue to sponsor its *Lessons from the Field* series this year [see box on left], as well as the *eJournal of Children's Mental Health: Bridging Research and Practice*. Center staff members are also now creating an interdisciplinary, web-based case study designed to train students and professionals in service disciplines to respond effectively to children with mental health needs. This year we will begin a faculty fellow position which creates an avenue for University or community experts to work in collaboration with CECMH staff to carry out relevant research, instruction or administrative tasks consistent with the CECMH mission.

Citations for this article can be found in the web version of Consortium Connections.

Developmental Assets, Educational Achievement, and the Role of Communities

The framework of Developmental Assets created by Search Institute has long been recognized as one important way of looking at positive youth development. Over the years, Search has developed and refined a group of 40 assets that are building blocks to help young people grow up healthy, caring and responsible.

Many of the assets relate directly to educational achievement (achievement motivation, learning engagement, homework, bonding to school, reading for pleasure, to name a few), and many more relate indirectly.

In 1998, Search began a study of students in grades 7-9, and followed them for four years to investigate the relationship between developmental assets and educational achievement over time. The study looked at GPA, rather than self-reporting, as the key indicator. The results of their study, as well as citations from other studies related to academic achievement, were published in the *Journal of Adolescence* in 2004.

Search's study found that the impact of developmental assets was considerably more influential in predicting future grade point averages than some of the more often recommended measures such as task mastery, autonomy, and de-emphasizing competition. More detail about the study can be found in the original article, linked in the web version of this issue of *Connections*.

Search does recognize the limitations of its study, and emphasizes that they find a relationship, but not causal effect, between developmental assets and student achievement. However, they conclude that there is enough promising evidence of a relationship that further study is warranted. Further, they cite other research that supports the general trend of their findings.

So how does this relate to the current focus on the "communities" circle of influence? Given the findings in Search's report regarding the relationship between assets, and particularly clusters of assets, and academic achievement, and the importance of school success being addressed in many different contexts simultaneously, it makes sense to look at strategies communities can use to strengthen and sustain asset development in their youth.

Following are some suggestions for community action, with the research from the Search article that supports them.

- Develop a community norm that values, supports and promotes educational achievement.
- Reframe the discussion about reducing the "achievement gap" to focus on

overall development of the child as a core process in student achievement, and recognize the importance of communities as one significant context of that development.

Search's report cited research showing that nurturing student development across many contexts, approaching it from a more holistic or ecological perspective, has the greatest impact on achievement.

- Explore ways community groups and businesses can provide education and support for parents so they can better understand their role in their children's success, how parenting styles contribute to children's success, and ways they can strengthen and/or develop parenting practices that support their children's educational development.

Search's report highlights a study that found the "quality of parenting in pre-adolescence significantly predicted academic competence."

- Develop ways for the community at large, as well as community institutions such as faith organizations and business, to support youth development and strengthen students' achievement potential. This might be in the form of out-of-school-time activities such as youth groups, 4-H, youth sports, and the like.
- Develop community partnerships that provide tutoring, mentoring, and other help for students specifically focused on improving their academic work.
Search's own research found that "for every higher point on the .asset factor reflecting connection to community (youth programs, religious community, service to others, creative activities, reading for pleasure), students were three times more likely to be in the high GPA group three years later."
- Develop community partnerships that recruit the involvement of youth in service learning activities.
Search's research in a related study found that service learning strengthened youth's relationships with adults, and increased their feelings of usefulness, resulting in "higher grades, attendance, and other academic success outcomes."

Search's report, as does all of their work on assets, focuses on strengthening the positive qualities that lead to student success rather than "fixing" the negative factors (while still recognizing the importance of the latter). This may be a good starting place for community involvement in addressing the overall issue of educational disparities.

*A link to the full article about Search's study, as well as citations and links to other resources, can be found in the web version of *Connections*.*

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

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Engaging Faith Communities as Allies for Reducing Educational Disparities

By Eugene C. Roehlkepartain

Historically, faith communities have been leaders in promoting and providing education. Before there were public schools, most schools were religious. As public education emerged, many faith traditions (though certainly not all) became ardent supporters, recognizing the social need for education for all. And though private schools are often maligned, some parochial schools have been leaders in helping students achieve who might otherwise have fallen through the cracks.

As life-forming and values-shaping ecologies and cultures for children, youth, and adults who participate, faith communities can be important allies and resources in reducing educational disparities. That power is magnified in communities and cultures (such as the African American community and some immigrant communities) where the faith community may be one of the only institutions that have maintained the trust of the neighborhood.

How Faith Communities Can Cultivate Educational Achievement

When discussing the role of faith communities in reducing educational disparities, it is tempting to jump quickly to programs and activities they can do to support schools. We'll get to those, but there are other ways faith communities can make a difference that are core to their identity. So let's start there.

Embrace and nurture all young people, especially those who are marginalized. Congregations' core strength may be to embed young people in a caring, intergenerational community that encourages, guides, and sets high expectations for them. And young people who are nurtured in that kind of web of support in many parts of their lives are more likely to engage with and excel in school. The challenge for congregations is to expand that care to embrace young people from many different backgrounds and many different circumstances, particularly those who struggle in school.

Cultivate a culture and climate that supports curiosity, learning, and education. The culture, climate, or norms of a congregation can either encourage or discourage engagement in learning. If it is a community that takes learning seriously (including religious education or formation) and creates a thinking climate that encourages exploration and questions, it can reinforce (and, in some cases, compensate for) the messages young people may receive at home, in their neighborhood, and in other parts of their lives about the importance of learning. Unfortunately, some research suggests that too few congregations have that kind of thinking climate that actively challenges young people to engage intellectually with the big questions of life and meaning.

Encourage and equip adherents to engage with education. Members of congregations are teachers, business people, neighbors,

civic leaders, factory workers, bus drivers, parents, grandparents—people from all walks of life who look to their faith community as a resource for shaping their priorities and perspectives. With a consistent call to action, congregations can help to mobilize these members to support schools through their volunteer commitments and other areas of influence.

Advocate for just approaches to education in society. As many have done for generations, congregations and their leaders can advocate for high-quality, caring schools while also promoting quality, comprehensive educational opportunities for all young people.

Offer programs and activities that directly address educational needs and disparities. Finally, faith communities can—and many do—sponsor or support programs and activities that support education for children and youth, including homework hotlines, tutoring, study places, after-school programs, parent support groups, English learning classes for parents, reading groups. When connected with the congregation's own sense of identity and mission, these kinds of volunteer-driven resources can reach and support students and families who may not have access to other resources to support their learning.

How Education and Community Leaders Can Engage Faith Communities

Policy, educational, and other community leaders increasingly recognize faith communities as resources for youth development, including education. Too often, however, they view churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other congregations are merely “marketing channels” or “delivery systems” for their own message or program. However, recognizing faith communities as allies in building community and as rich ecologies within themselves shifts the focus. Here are some alternative strategies:

Begin with conversation—Before assuming that congregations will adopt a particular program or strategy, take time to engage in dialogue about shared commitments, values, and the congregation's own strengths and priorities. Let their efforts to reduce educational disparities emerge from the congregation's own identity, priorities, and sense of mission.

Increase congregational capacity—Congregations often want to engage more effectively with young people, but may not have the skills or resources they need to do that work effectively. Educators, youth development organizations, and other potential partners often have insights or resources that can help the congregation in its work with youth—and, as a result, enhance capacity to reduce educational disparities.

Collaborate for learning among youth workers—A new study from the National Collaboration for Youth and Search

Eugene C. Roehlkepartain is senior advisor to the president at Search Institute and co-director of Search Institute's Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence (www.spiritualdevelopmentcenter.org). He is author of *Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide to Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy* (Search Institute) and co-author of *Embracing Parents: How Your Congregation Can Strengthen Families* (Abingdon).

Business Has A Stake in Eliminating Educational Disparities

Who benefits when all children have opportunities for educational success? The short answer is that everyone does!

But one community institution that has a particular stake in the success of the next generation is business. And interestingly, business is not always mentioned when we look at ways to address educational disparities.

Business has a huge stake in a well-educated future workforce. Economic health is built upon knowledge. When the systems that provide education are compromised, and children are not being adequately educated, communities suffer. And while Minnesota does quite well overall, the disparities that continue to exist are extremely troubling. If educational disparities between race and ethnic groups, high and low income groups, and core city and suburban groups are not reduced, it will likely have a significant negative impact on Minnesota's future economic strength and competitiveness.

So there are many reasons that reducing educational disparities matters to business:

- The business community is concerned about overall economic health, and economic health is at risk if children – the adults of the future – do not succeed academically. If educational disparities are not reduced, the population in Minnesota will be poorer, less educated, and more in need of services than the state has the capacity to provide. All of these put the economic health of communities at risk.
- With baby boomers poised to begin retiring in just a few years, it is imperative that there be a well-educated and skilled pool of workers to replace them. The current state of educational disparities in Minnesota seems to threaten that need.
- Maintaining a strong market economy requires customers that have some purchasing power. Having larger numbers of people earning at least a middle-class income fuels the local economy, and increases the tax base. Research shows that children who do not succeed in school have much lower earning potential overall than their peers who do succeed.

Recognizing that the assets Minnesota has do not work for everyone, and based on their concerns about disparities of race, class and place, including educational disparities, a group of Twin Cities leaders, in collaboration with the Itasca project and the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, prepared a report called “Minding the Gap: Reducing Disparities To Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities,” and a companion report, “Closing the Gap: A Business Response to Our Region's Growing Disparities.” Both reports can be found linked in the web version of *Connections*.

Business Eliminating Educational Disparities — *continued on page 6*

Faith Communities — *continued from page 4*

Institute highlights the potential of cross-sector professional development, showing that both community- and faith-based youth workers share commitments to, among other things, empowering and engaging youth as leaders, building strong relationships with youth, and utilizing asset-building approaches with youth. Tapping into these shared interests through training and peer learning among youth workers in both sectors can strengthen shared commitments, relationships, and capacities to support young people's development and learning throughout community life.

Invite participation in community-wide efforts—As communities engage in multi-sector collaboratives to address educational disparities, invite leaders in faith communities to join the efforts, particularly those that serve underserved or distressed neighborhoods. Though some may not see connecting with others as a priority (for lots of different reasons), others will. And they have the potential of building bridges into their own networks and resources that can be unleashed to support young people. They can also offer to other partners important perspectives on young people and the communities in which they live and serve.

Recognize the inherent challenges—It can

be easy to see the potential and gloss over the challenges of engaging faith communities. Those challenges can be many. Their leaders are busy, and their all-volunteer decision-making processes can be tedious and slow. Congregations have their own priorities and agendas, some of which don't fit with a shared community commitment to reducing educational disparities. And there really isn't one big “faith community” sector; rather, the religious community tends to be disconnected by denomination, faith tradition, ideology, race, culture, class, and other dynamics that fragment community life.

Yet, despite these kinds of challenges, congregations remain valuable, if imperfect, allies and resources for supporting the healthy development of all young people, including addressing the educational disparities in this society. And while it can take energy and effort to build the trust, relationships, and commitments needed to fully engage with faith communities, they—perhaps more than any local institution—have staying power and sustained presence in communities and in the lives of millions of children, youth, and families.

A longer version plus full citations for this article can be found in the web version of Connections.

CYFC's Advisory Council has historically served three functions - to advise CYFC staff, to provide information to its members, and to provide a networking opportunity. Achieving all three functions simultaneously and effectively has been a challenge. As a result of feedback from Advisors, CYFC has created a smaller, more focused group of community and University advisors, the Core Advisory Group, to provide direction to our work and feedback on our programmatic ideas. The Core Advisory Group is co-chaired by a University faculty member and a community leader. See "Who's the Consortium" on page 8 for details on the co-chairs. This group will meet three times per year and members will serve up to two 3-year terms.

To address the networking and educational needs of CYFC stakeholders, CYFC has created a new CYFC Community-University Leadership Network. This group will meet each fall for a socializing opportunity and an educational forum focused on a timely topic related to children, youth or families.

Watch for more details in the next issue of Connections.

Readers' suggestions for *Connections*:

- Make a reference to the web version more prominent. *As noted above we will do this from now on.*
- Include tips for practical application. *We will consider this with at least some of the articles in the future issues. This current issue has several articles that are more "application" based.*
- Include an annual index of articles. *We are working on an on-line index. We hope to have it available by the time the next issue comes out.*
- Make it more user-friendly by including photos. *We have done this in the past, but it is very hard to sustain, because of the lack of available photos that are relevant to the articles and the need to obtain permission from all subjects in every photo used. Stock photos just don't "cut it" for us. We are looking into some creative ways of adding photo and/or graphic interest.*
- Continue to have articles written by parents (like the one we had in the last issue). *We will continue to have articles written by community members, including parents.*
- Develop a way to provide feedback – including ways for people who don't use e-mail or the web. *This is a very interesting idea and we are looking into possibilities.*
- Change the size of the print version to 8½ x 11 (it is currently 8½ x 14). *The reason CYFC decided to use the current size is so it would "stick out." But some indicate that the size is a problem for filing it! The web-based PDF version can be printed on 8½ x 11 paper. We will continue to discuss the size.*

Consortium Connections: Feedback survey results

The last issue of *Consortium Connections* included a short survey, asking readers to give us feedback on the value of this publication. Our goal was to learn how we can make *Connections* the best resource possible.

The vast majority of respondents rated *Connections* as outstanding or very good. Only two said it was not useful to them. We received a great deal of valuable information, and we will be making some adaptations as a result.

We asked if people used *Connections* for purposes other than just reading it. Over 80% said they had. Respondents identified a range of ways they had used it: shared it with other professionals, clients and parents; used it in the classroom (as a teaching tool or a reading assignment) or at staff development events; used it for personal growth or background information; used it to support work related program decisions; used as a catalyst for new ideas or a discussion starter in meetings; quoted it in grant applications; shared with school teaching staff; shared with policymakers; and summarized information to share with parents in their programs.

All of these uses are things we hoped for. It is gratifying to know that the majority of readers – at least those who responded – use *Connections* in their work.

Three years ago, CYFC began an "expanded on-line" version of *Connections*. In addition to a PDF copy of the entire print version, the on-line version has the individual articles from each print version, allowing specific articles to be printed. If the original article

contained references or citations, they are included in the web version (citations are not included in the print version). Some of the web articles are longer versions of the print articles. All articles contain links to additional resources on the topic.

The intent of the expanded on-line version is to provide readers with opportunities for greater depth on the subject of the article than can be addressed in the print format. In the survey, we asked if readers had looked at the on-line version. Just under 20% said they had. Those who had looked at the on-line version liked the additional research and references, being able to refer others to the web version, and being able to e-mail and print individual articles.

Several people indicated they did not know about the on-line version until we mentioned it in this survey. Even though the web version is mentioned through *Connections* in every issue, we clearly have not made the link to the website as visible as we should in order for it to be most broadly used. Beginning with this issue, the web version will be highlighted on page 1.

Readers had a number of suggestions for things they felt would improve *Connections* – some were format related, and some were content related. A sampling of those suggestions, and our response can be found in the box on the left.

CYFC thanks all of who took the time to provide feedback about *Connections*. We are taking your suggestions for changes seriously and putting some of them into practice immediately.

Business Eliminating Educational Disparities — *continued from page 5*

The report acknowledges that reducing disparities will require major systemic changes as well as many ongoing smaller behavior and policy changes, and offers numerous suggestions for things business specifically can do in several areas of disparity, including educational attainment. A few of their ideas, taken directly from the report, are highlighted below. Many more can be found in the report.

- Offer parenting support groups and classes, and link parents to other parenting resources in the community.
- Offer flexible work options that support parents' ability to be involved in their children's education.
- Encourage employees to be involved in tutoring and mentoring partnerships at the workplace.
- Offer scholarships to employees, their children, and other students in need.
- Help employees navigate the educational systems and help them make good choices for their children's education.
- Offer employee education assistance (GED to graduate school) by providing financial support and time allowances.

It is clear that business has a unique stake and role in reducing educational disparities in communities. Partnerships between business and other community stakeholders are critical to address educational disparities in a systemic way. The willingness of the business community to take this on and be involved in community efforts is very evident in the report.

Citations for this article can be found in the web version of Connections

Fellow's Commentary—

Education for the common good: A practice of living in community

By Audrey Appelsies, PhD

It is hard to write about how our community would benefit from ending educational disparities just days after the 35W bridge collapse. We so often use the metaphor of a bridge to describe how parents, educators, administrators, and legislators need to work together to insure equal educational opportunities and outcomes for all of our children in schools today. A bridge provides a nice metaphor. People understand what it means: we need to cross over divides of race, class, language, culture, and religion to find some common ground where our children can learn, experience new ideas, thrive, and achieve.

Too often, however, our bridges buckle and sway underneath the pressure of test scores, accountability, and calls for reform. Today “education” is marketed and sold like a commodity: indeed, if one can afford a Starbucks Venti, one can and should buy the “best” education. It is reasoned that this is fair, as if somehow the market forces can tell us what education for the common good is. Public discourse and political rhetoric has turned this thinking into a common sense notion that needs to be explored and critiqued.

I must continue to argue against economic indicators as the most important measure of educational success. The bottom line in education cannot be explained by profit margins. Instead, education ought to be considered as part of the practice of living in community—understood and valued for its infinite possibilities, for its endless openings, for its immeasurable wonder. An education, as I imagine it, allows us to communicate our dreams and ideas; to forge and sustain diverse, interdependent relationships; and to work to create possibilities especially for lives caught in the spaces of poverty and discrimination.

In sorting through what education and community have in common and how they are at the root of what it means to live in a democracy, I have found the work of Todd DeStigter, bell hooks, and Maxine Greene especially helpful. Each of these three educators/writers has been influenced, as have I, by John Dewey and Paulo Freire, who teach that true democracy, just communities, and equal education are in many ways promises yet unfulfilled in our country. And yet all of their work underscores that being involved, being committed to the struggle, and being at times completely *unreasonable*, are worth it.

In DeStigter's book *Reflections of a Citizen Teacher* he draws on Dewey to define democracy. He writes that his understanding of democracy refers to “a process of associated living in which individuals participate in deciding what their world should be like, in acting to

pursue these aims, and in sharing equitably in the consequences of that action” (2001, p. 12). If we continue to choose aims (such as policies and practices that continue to reify stereotypes of children of color) in education that insure unequal opportunities and outcomes for low-income children and children of color we will continue to insure unequal consequences. In contrast, for example, we must all imagine that the choices we make for our children and our family are not a matter of grabbing more and more for ourselves only to leave less or nothing for, as Lisa Delpit put it, “other people's children.” Education, as I have defined it, is limitless. There's no need to grab.

I also like the way that bell hooks understands how DeStigter's “associated living” works in the classroom itself. Like other educators, hooks conceptualizes the classroom as a community and it is her expressed desire to “educate for freedom” from hierarchies, from discrimination, and from images that we all hold about what an educated person looks like. In *Teaching to Transgress*, she writes about her college classroom and the ways she works to dialogue with her students in order to “teach students *how to listen, how to hear one another*” (italics original). Her aims do not sound measurable on a standardized test yet these are the sorts of images and beliefs that many educators carry with them and work toward, in community, with their students.

To close, I will again draw on Maxine Greene's concept of community. She has been writing for decades, challenging educators to rethink the ways we conceptualize children as learners in the world. Her prose reflects her dynamic, non-linear thought process. She writes that, “*In thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying and the like. Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict. Like freedom, it has to be achieved by persons offered the space in which to discover what they recognize together and appreciate in common.*”

Education benefits the community when it is understood as intimately connected to our ideas of democracy and freedom. When teachers can act on their deeply held desires to allow children to discover their own gifts, to take joy in simply reading a book, or writing for real purposes—and not worry about being held accountable by somehow measuring the discovery and joy of the learning process—then we will have reinvented the meaning of how education benefits the community.

Citations for this article can be found in the web version of *Consortium Connections*.

“Community is not a question of which social contracts are the most reasonable for individuals to enter. It is a question of what might contribute to the pursuit of shared goods: what ways of being together, of attaining mutuality, of reaching toward some common good.”

—Maxine Greene, *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*

Audrey Appelsies is a CYFC university fellow currently working on issues related to educational disparities. Her research interests include the history of race in America, critical whiteness studies, the politics of education, and the socio-cultural contexts of learning. Her dissertation research focused on the experiences of white urban teachers working with students of color in urban schools.

BRIEFS...

Family Impact Seminars

CYFC was recently accepted as the Minnesota site for **Family Impact Seminars**, a nationwide family policy initiative administered through the University of Wisconsin – Madison and now active in 22 states. Family Impact Seminars uses seminars, policy briefs and consultation to encourage policymakers to utilize research in developing public policy. FIS will be one part of CYFC's Family Impact Policy Initiative. The goals of the Initiative are to provide objective, nonpartisan information in a deliberately responsive manner, promote a family impact perspective in policymaking, and develop varied delivery mechanisms geared to diverse learning needs of state policymakers

New CYFC Staff

Karen Cadigan has joined the staff of CYFC as Policy Director. Karen has been Director of Outreach and Public Policy with the Center for Early Education and Development. She will remain in that role 50% time. Karen is trained as a school psychologist and is currently finishing her doctorate in educational psychology at the University of Minnesota. Among other initiatives, Karen will direct Family Impact Seminars.

Luis Garcia will serve as AmeriCorps Promise Fellow from September 1, 2007-August 31, 2008. Luis will coordinate and provide technical assistance to the Parent Involvement Resource Sharing Network (PIRSN), a learning and resource-sharing network of parent involvement practitioners that CYFC has been convening over the last year. He will also compile and disseminate research evidence about parent-school collaboration and parenting practices that contribute to school success. Luis is a 2006 University of Minnesota - Twin Cities graduate with a background in political science and psychology.

University-Community Fellows

CYFC recently launched a University and Community Fellows program to bring important expertise and diverse perspectives to our theme/issue work - currently, Educational Disparities. Two University Fellows recently joined us. **Audrey Appelsies**, PhD, joined CYFC in June. Her area of passion and expertise is culture and teaching. **Sandra Christenson**, PhD, joined CYFC in September. Her areas of passion and expertise are student engagement, parent-school collaboration, and parent involvement. Each will work on individual projects as well as contribute to CYFC's strategic thinking regarding educational disparities. When we secure additional financial resources, we hope to add two Community Fellows.

Who's The Consortium?

Noya Woodrich, Executive Director of the Division of Indian Work and Senior Vice President of the Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, will be the community co-chair for CYFC's new Core Advisory Group. Noya, who holds bachelor's and master's degrees in social work, and is currently working on her Doctorate in Public Administration at Hamline University, has taught as Community Faculty at Metropolitan State University in the Social Work Department and as Adjunct Faculty at Augsburg College in the Social Work Department. Originally born in Anchorage, Alaska, Noya is an Alaskan Native of Athabascan descent. She grew up for the most part in Wausau, Wisconsin and came to the Twin Cities to start college in 1988.

Eugene Roehlkepartain is co-director of Search Institute's Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence, an international initiative to advance knowledge and practice in this understudied area of human development. Gene is also the senior advisor in the office of the president at Search Institute, where he leads several initiatives related to families, youth development, faith communities, and strategic communication. He most recently co-edited *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence and Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*.

Dale Blyth, Associate Dean for Youth Development at the University of Minnesota and Director of the Center for 4-H Youth Development, will be the University co-chair for CYFC's new Core Advisory Group. Before coming to the University he was the Director of Research and Evaluation at Search Institute where he co-developed the 40 asset model with Peter Benson and wrote the original *Healthy Communities, Health Youth* research. He previously served on the faculty at Ohio and Cornell Universities, and worked on community, school, and adolescent health issues for the American Medical Association. Dale's career has focused on bridging research with practice, programs, and policy issues in order to make a difference in the lives of youth and the communities in which they live.

Nimi Singh, Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Director of the Adolescent Medicine Fellowship in the Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health at the University of Minnesota, serves on the steering committee of the Center of Excellence in Children's Mental Health. Nimi received her undergraduate degree at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and her medical degree at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. She is currently pursuing the Clinical Scholars academic track with research interests focusing on disenfranchised youth including homeless and incarcerated youth, and on the mental health needs of youth in varying socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Nimi is exploring, teaching and evaluating means by which to promote mental health and resilience in youth, as well as in medical students, residents and medical faculty.

And the Consortium is YOU!

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Circles of Influence In Family Development: Educational Disparities

Race and Ethnicity (see explanation on back)

The Child

- Gender
- Personality
- Innate abilities
- Race/ethnicity
- Physical & mental ability
- Academic & social skills
- Gender identification
- Sexual orientation

Family Situation

- *Are parents or guardians physically and/or emotionally present in the child's life?
- *Is there sufficient household income to meet basic needs?
- *Is the physical environment stable, safe, comfortable?
- *Is the emotional environment supportive or stressful?
- *Do children have a place to study?

Schools

- *Are schools culturally aware and sensitive?
- *Is there a safe, orderly and welcoming climate in the school?
- *Are there high expectations and sources of support for all students?
- *Does school encourage involvement of parents in and out of school?
- *Does the school recognize the individual learning needs of the child?
- *Does the school (or district) encourage (and pay for and reward) professional development for teachers?
- *Are community volunteers used to enhance the child's learning?

Parents/Parenting

- *Do parent/s have a positive, healthy relationship whether they are together or apart?
- *Do parent/s have good parenting skills? Do they have access (time, financial resources and availability) to parenting classes?
- *Do parent/s talk and read to children routinely?
- *Do parent/s expect their child to succeed, and are their expectations reasonable?
- *Do parent/s provide children opportunities for learning?
- *Do parent/s teach children social skills?
- *Do parent/s model learning?

Informal Supports

(parents, siblings, extended family, neighbors)

Communities in general

- *Is learning valued and encouraged in the community?
- *Does the community provide opportunities for youth to be involved in learning?
- *Does the community offer opportunities for youth to take leadership?
- *Does the community feel safe to its residents?
- *Is there adequate police protection?
- *Are there quality, accessible out of school time opportunities?
- *Does the community offer parent education opportunities?

Business

- *Do businesses demonstrate commitment to diversity efforts at the highest levels of management?
- *Do businesses partner with community groups in helping to address the inequities in educational opportunity and access (tutoring, scholarships, for example)?
- *Do service agencies provide parent education/skill development?

Communities

(Schools, faith communities, community groups & agencies, business)

- *Does public policy adequately fund out of school time opportunities?
- *Does public policy adequately fund early childhood experiences?
- *Does public policy adequately fund out of school time opportunities?
- *Is information accessible to all learners?
- *Is the media aware of its influence on children's achievement?

Policy

(Local, state, national, international)

- *Does public policy fund optimal student teacher ratios for schools?
- *Does society value early childhood learning experiences?
- *Does society understand the concepts of prevention and return on investment?

Society

Child Care

- *Is quality child care accessible and affordable?
- *Are there quality early childhood experiences available in the community?
- *Do child care providers in the community understand their role in children's learning and development?

Faith Communities

- *Do faith communities support public education?
- *Do faith communities value education for all children? kids, parents and kids and parents together?
- *Do faith communities provide learning opportunities for boys and girls?
- *Do faith communities value learning equally for all children?

Service Agencies

- *Do human service agencies take a holistic/ecological approach when they work with children and families?
- *Do service agencies involve families as partners?
- *Are physical AND mental health screening and related services available for all children?
- *Do service agencies provide parent education/skill development?
- *Does public policy reflect an understanding of quality school experience and adequately fund them?
- *Does society as a whole understand the "culture" of poverty and consider eradicating or reducing it important?
- *Does society value youth?

Adapted by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium, U of MN, and based on The Ecology of Human Development originally created by Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner.

CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE...

The model on the reverse side of this insert, *Circles of Influence*, has been created by the Children, Youth and Family Consortium as a way of visually illustrating the multi-layered influences underlying the issue of Educational Disparities.

It is based on the original "ecological model" (The Ecology of Human Development) developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s that is well-known to most family scholars and practitioners. The model has had many permutations and interpretations over the years, but at base level, it recognizes that each individual, as well as the family as a unit, is significantly affected by interactions among a number of overlapping contexts, systems or environments. This includes systems in which the family and/or its members are directly involved, such as neighborhoods or schools, as well as systems that are more distant from direct interaction or influence, such as community, policy and society.

Briefly, the five circles are:

- **The child:** Everything children are born with and how they influence and are influenced by the world around them.
- **Informal Supports:** The influence of parents and parenting, siblings, grandparents, extended family, neighbors, and informal mentors. It includes the quality of the relationships as well as the quality of the home environment.
- **Communities:** The influence of schools, faith communities, service agencies, business and communities at large. Includes access to quality resources, the physical and emotional environment, attitudes, and interaction and integration among people and institutions in geographic communities (e.g., "neighborhoods") and socio-cultural communities.
- **Policy:** Public and private policies. The most effective policies consider all the various influences, as well as the intended and unintended impacts on families and children.
- **Society:** Societal beliefs, values, norms, customs and practices, including those of media, technology and the arts.

In addition to the five circles, this model recognizes the cross cutting impact of **race and ethnicity**. All of the five circles, from individual children to society, are profoundly affected by race and ethnicity. It is critical that these influences be identified, acknowledged and included in developing strategies to address educational disparities.

The Circles of Influence: Educational Disparities is an attempt to systematically examine educational disparities using this ecological model. It raises questions about many different aspects of educational disparities and the achievement gap that occur in each of the circles of influence that affect children and their families. These questions are not intended to be judgmental or prescriptive. They are intended to raise issues that research shows to have an effect on children's ability to learn. Although children's innate potential to learn is important, these external factors have the capacity to enhance and detract from that potential.

We recognize this framework is a work in progress. We will continue to add, subtract, and modify the contents of this model as our work on Educational Disparities grows over the next two years.

Readers will notice the Circles of Influence graphic and the content have both changed since it was first "launched" in the Fall, 2006. This is based on feedback from the variety of groups and individuals with whom CYFC works.

We welcome your comments. Feel free to contact any of our staff, or e-mail our office at cyfc@umn.edu.

Sources used to create this model include the following:

- The collective wisdom of the Family Relations educators with the U of MN Extension Service, Dr. Sandra Christenson of the U of MN School Psychology program, Dr. Harold Grotevant of the U of MN Family Social Science program, and CYFC staff.
- **Working With Families For School Success**, a paper/module by Dr. Sandra Christenson (available on web version)
- **Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap**, by Richard Rothstein, Columbia University Economic Policy Institute, 2004.
- **Learning From You: All Parents Are Teachers**. University of Minnesota Extension Service, 2000.
- **Going to School: How to Help Your Child Succeed**, By Drs. Sharon L. and Craig T. Ramey, Goddard Press, 1999.