

CHANGING MINDS

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SMU

ANNETTE CALDWELL SIMMONS
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
& HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

SIMMONS CONFERENCE ADVANCES MATH TEACHERS' SKILLS

Would driving 300 miles to SMU for a conference on how to better prepare students in math be worth a trip? Denise Blume, a veteran public school teacher from Enid, Okla., thinks so. She was one of 118 teachers who attended the inaugural Research to Practice Conference, a component of the Research in Mathematics Education unit developed by the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development.

The unit, created last year and funded by The Meadows Foundation, provides evidence-based research to support math educators' teaching practices. The goal is to improve students' understanding of math concepts critical to their achievement.

The director of the program, Associate Professor Leanne Ketterlin Geller, believes that today's more complex and technology-driven industries require math teachers to engage in a higher level of instructional quality so they can teach their students more effectively.

"I don't think people view mathematics as a way that we access the world, and yet, you really do need to approach the world mathematically. There's so much that we need to do day-to-day that is mathematically driven," she says.

She adds that elementary school teachers have to be well-versed in math and other subjects so their students can matriculate to the next grade level and beyond, but many teachers don't have a passion for math. "A large percentage of the population," she observes, "will say, 'I don't like math.' And when they're teachers, that's likely coming across in the way that they're designing and delivering their instruction. It's the way they think about math."

Blume, who teaches fifth-grade math at McKinley Elementary in Enid, acknowledges the obstacles to teaching math. She says it's a challenge to think of different and creative ways to engage the students and then train them to apply math skills and concepts to everyday life.

For this reason, she was enthusiastic about



Associate Professor Leanne Ketterlin Geller (center) directs Simmons' Research in Mathematics Education unit at SMU. She conducts a workshop on diagnostic assessments for middle school algebra students with consultant Nicole McGilvray (left) and Simmons doctoral student Lindsey Perry. To hear an audio interview with Leanne Ketterlin Geller, go to our Facebook page.

the February conference. "The presenters have the knowledge of what the research tells us, and we can take that. It was not fluffy stuff. It was really important knowledge," she says.

Ketterlin Geller says it's more important than ever to provide support for math teachers. Performance on tests indicates most students are struggling. In fact, a majority of students aren't reaching proficiency in math. "We know teachers are committed to their profession and to helping children," she says. "Teachers need support because they're faced with high expectations and a diverse classroom."

Today's classrooms include some students who have been exposed to math concepts early in childhood and others who were not challenged to think mathematically until they were in school.

Sixth-grade teacher Terri Guillen finds this disparity in learning experiences to be the challenge for teachers. Guillen teaches at St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic School in Dallas. A 12-year veteran, she has seen students grasp math concepts quickly because of

early exposure to math. Others struggle. Part of the problem, she believes, is the students' lack of confidence. It's especially important, she says, that students have a strong foundation in order to understand more complex math concepts later. One way a teacher can help students is to give them a variety of ways to learn, and the conference gave Guillen ideas for brainstorming and collaborating with colleagues.

The challenges a math teacher faces increase when students matriculate to secondary schools, where more complex math concepts are taught. Ketterlin Geller believes math teachers need to be given the tools to teach elementary concepts in a way that provides the foundation for subsequent mathematics. "If we're not providing the support for the teachers, then they're not going to be able to provide the depth of understanding for the students," she says.

By the time students get to middle school, they often lack systematic exposure to core mathematics and are at a juncture when they are making decisions about a future in math or science.

To turn that around, Ketterlin Geller believes the teacher must train a student to think analytically. "Teachers should be building multiple strands of thinking, including conceptual, procedural, reasoning and problem-solving. We want to be developing multiple skills."

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LEANNE KETTERLIN GELLER

Organizers hope that the conference will become an ongoing, annual event. This year's, the first of three funded by The Meadows Foundation, was designed to help math teachers become more versed in math concepts, apply them to the design and delivery of their instruction and develop important analytical skills for using assessments to guide instruction. Conference presenters included researchers from SMU, educators and professionals from fields such as engineering. Ketterlin Geller says the first year targeted area teachers; next year, organizers hope to attract educators from the North Central Texas region, and year three will include participants from throughout the state.

"We'll always be a research to practice conference, and with that comes responsibility to present research, meaningfully linking it to practitioners," says Ketterlin Geller. "We met a need, and that's what we set out to do."

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THROUGH ADVOCACY, NOEL FAMILY BOOSTS DYSLEXIA EDUCATION

For brothers Ed Noel '75 and Will Noel '82, a mutual desire to help address learning difficulties faced by those with dyslexia cemented a lasting relationship with the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development.

Dyslexia, a disorder that hinders reading and writing, has been a constant focus for the Houston-based Noel family. Ed, a semiretired real estate appraiser, and Will, an attorney, are dyslexic.

The family takes a keen interest in training teachers to teach children how to work around their dyslexia. That's why the Noels have donated generously in recent years to support Simmons' research-based teaching methods. "Education is the key, and at the lower grade levels of schooling is where you have to capture it," Ed says. "We're just glad that SMU and Simmons are embracing that area."

Ed's wife, Pat Oden Noel, '75, who earned a Bachelor's in education and has taught K-8, says children with dyslexia often aren't identified until the third or fourth grade – critical years because of the large amount of new information introduced. Training teachers to identify struggling students earlier and to use methods that bridge the gap in reading abilities could make the difference in how they succeed.

"We're very excited to help" with that training, Pat says about the Noel family contributions. "We're very grateful we're able to do it."

Ed and Will's late mother, Virginia G. Noel, was one of the founders of the Neuhaus Education Center in Bellaire, near Houston. Neuhaus started as a resource center for parents and teachers trying to help students with dyslexia. Its mission has since expanded to include providing teachers of all students with professional development in research-based methods of reading, writing and comprehension.

The Noel family stays active on the center's board, and Will serves as a lifetime trustee.

The Noels have long been proponents of education, but when David Chard, who has a strong research background in learning disabilities, was selected to lead Simmons as dean in 2007, the family stepped up its involvement with the school.

"We felt like it was a natural fit," Will says. Since then, the dean's conference room in Simmons Hall was named for the Noels' mother. And Simmons collaborates with Neuhaus to offer through distance learning a Master's degree of education in reading and writing. The International Dyslexia



Pat Oden Noel '75 (left), Simmons' faculty members Laurie Campbell, Dara Williams-Rossi and Barbara Morganfield, and Will Noel '82.

Association recently recognized Simmons for being one of the top nine American university programs meeting IDA standards in teacher training.

Last year, Neuhaus also received Simmons' Luminary Award, which honors individuals or organizations that have shown extraordinary commitment to improving lives through education.

But it isn't just the work Simmons does with dyslexic education that impressed the Noels. It's the overall research-based teaching methods the school advocates, as well.

"What we want is to have a well-qualified

teacher in every classroom, and training teachers is a very important part of that," says Barbara Noel, Will's wife and a dyslexia tutor, who has been impressed by what she has seen at Simmons.

Will attributes the strides Simmons has made in education research to Chard, as well as to SMU President R. Gerald Turner for his leadership.

"When you see programs being led well," Will says, "you just know the organization is on the right track."

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FACULTY

PROFESSOR PAUL YOVANOFF was recruited from the University of Oregon to continue his research and instruction at Simmons in the Department of Teaching and Learning. He teaches doctoral level measurement and quantitative research methods classes. His research interest is psychometric modeling, specifically design of culturally sensitive measurements. Currently he works with the Center on Communities and Education and the Research in Mathematics Education unit on design and research evaluation.



STEPHANIE AL OTAIBA

Formerly with Florida State University, Professor Stephanie Al Otaiba joins the faculty of Teaching and Learning. Her research focuses on improving literacy outcomes for children, particularly children with or at risk for disabilities and children who are English language learners. She’s interested in helping teachers use evidence-based instructional practice.



ROBERT BARNER, associate director of executive education and lecturer in Dispute Resolution, recently published his seventh book, *Building Better Teams: 70 Tools and Techniques for Strengthening Performance Within and Across Teams*. He co-wrote it with his wife, Charlotte Barner, an executive consultant and an adjunct in the Master of Liberal Studies program.



BEACHUM JOINS NFL



KELVIN BEACHUM, SMU football player and recent graduate of Simmons’ Master of Liberal Studies program, delivered the spring commencement address for his class. Now off the academic field, he joins his new team, the NFL’s Pittsburgh Steelers. *Read more about him @smu.edu/mls and see Simmons graduation photos@ Facebook/smusimmons.*

ART TOUR



Larry and Murlyn Zeske (right), Linda Ludden and Jay W. Oppenheimer ’78, ’86 were among Simmons’ friends and alumni touring the contemporary art collection at Cowboy Stadium. The event was hosted by SMU Trustee Gene C. Jones.

STUDENT CONSTRUCTORS

Jaylin Knight (left), Simon Cohen, Roland Baumann, Kalen Beacham, Rachel Shimas, Claire Richey, Anjelica Sanjuan, Star Jackson and Rubi Perez join Santiago Calatrava (middle), architect of the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge, during the Dallas opening celebration. These middle school students participated in an educational program to build a model of the bridge, sponsored by The Trinity Trust in partnership with SMU’s Summer Youth Program and the Simmons School’s Talented and Gifted Program.

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HOMING IN ON COMMUNITY AND WEST DALLAS SCHOOLS

Proponents of the recently unveiled Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge hope the structure straddles the cultural and geographic divide between West Dallas and the rest of the city.

But other symbolic bridges currently under way could link West Dallas families, and most notably its children, to endless roads of possibility reaching far beyond city limits. That’s the vision for the new Center on Communities and Education in the Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development. The center, formed in October in partnership with the Dallas Faith Communities Coalition, seeks to address poverty and its effects on education in the community. “Education is kind of the canary in the coal mine. The fact that education in the upper grades is not working is an indicator that a lot of other things in the community are broken,” says Regina Nippert, the center’s executive director. “We recognize we can’t just fix one of the broken pieces and expect it all to work. We have to fix all the pieces, which is why we refer to it as an educational ecosystem,” she says.

that any school faces with children who lack resources,” she says. Ninety-nine percent of Carr students qualify for the federal free-lunch program; the average family income is \$12,000 annually. Many students are raised by single parents or elderly grandparents, Ruiz says. “The challenges we face are what happens to the children when they’re not here,” she says, explaining that some may not have food or electricity at home. Addressing those problems has united the center’s partners and schools. Lynn Romejko Jacobs, associate professor in Simmons’ Department of Applied Physiology and Wellness, says she’s excited about working with West Dallas students. She’s particularly focused on researching the effects of exercise on education. In the upcoming school year, Jacobs plans to pair up with Paul Yovanoff, professor in Simmons’ Department of Teaching and Learning, to observe the current exercise



Alexandra Thibeaux, SMU senior, tutors third-grade students in math and reading at Sidney Lanier Expressive Arts Vanguard in West Dallas.

Dolores Sosa Green, executive director of Trinity River Mission, which offers after-school tutoring, says she believes the Metrics Project will help nonprofit agencies get additional funding with outcome-supporting data. It also will help families get improved services, she says, because organizations will be better able to evaluate progress on each family.

“We’ll know what family is getting what services,” she says. “Now, if we enroll a kid in our tutoring program, we may not know the child’s circumstances because we focus only on academics. The Metrics Project will definitely prevent a lot of kids and families from falling through the cracks.”

Also, each nonprofit can customize its metrics and outcomes measures to track success with individual programs or services. Measuring data can point to an understanding of what works and what doesn’t but also explain why, Nippert says, adding that the center’s approach could be used as a model in other communities if it’s successful.

That’s key for Sosa Green: “If it’s successful here, eventually the ultimate goal is that (the neighborhood) won’t need us anymore. Then we’ll pick up and go to another community where they need us, and do it all over again.”

But first, the center must determine whether research supports its effectiveness.

“We not only have to prove that partnership works, but how it works,” Nippert says.



“Education is kind of the canary in the coal mine. The fact that education in the upper grades is not working is an indicator that a lot of other things in the community are broken.”

REGINA NIPPERT

SMU brings its faculty and graduate students to the mix with research designed to evaluate and help neighborhood schools and nonprofit agencies. Undergraduates also have opportunities for hands-on learning through internships, work-study programs and service learning. Research possibilities for faculty and students are open. Topics in discussion include the effects of poverty on communities, the effects of exercise on academics and possible impediments to parent engagement in low-income households. To focus on how to effectively deploy community resources to students and families, the center formed the School Zone with 10 public schools, three private and charter schools and 20 nonprofit organizations in West Dallas. For educators like Christian Ruiz, principal of C.F. Carr Elementary, the School Zone offers hope. She knew that when SMU became involved, it meant something big for her school. “My school faces the same major challenges

program and general activity level of students at Heights Prep elementary school. The following school year, as part of the study, Jacobs and Yovanoff will add more exercise to Heights Prep’s program to determine whether increased aerobic activity improves students’ academic performance and cognitive skills. “I have a vision that somehow this will have an impact,” Jacobs says. Through the School Zone’s partners, the center is tackling other issues associated with academic performance: training parents to read and converse with their children to build larger vocabularies; offering summer camps that keep children engaged, helping them retain knowledge; providing mentors in high-quality after-school programs and in-school tutoring; and boosting teacher appreciation efforts. Another important step for the center is developing a common measurement database though the Metrics Project, a program that allows partners to share information, tracks program outcomes and provides access to all available resources.

TEACHING AND LISTENING TO TEENAGERS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

Special education teacher Julie Bore’s students faced daunting obstacles – pregnancy, drug abuse, mental illness, homelessness – in a low-income urban school. But Bore’s students faced a compounding challenge; they were in her classroom because they were diagnosed with a disability such as a learning difference or an intellectual disability.

In her new book, *Voices: Stories From a Classroom for Teens with Disabilities*, Bore shares her conversations with 40 students, like Tammy, who threatens to commit suicide; 15-year-old pregnant Michelle, whose boyfriend hits her in the stomach; and Matt, who lives in a homeless shelter. Each chapter ends with a follow-up note on the student.

“I wrote the book to provide insight for teachers, parents, school administrators and policymakers,” says Bore, now assistant clinical professor of education at SMU’s Annette Caldwell Simmons School of Education and Human Development. “We must improve the education and social outcome of teenagers with disabilities, particularly those who live in poverty.”

Research shows that youth with disabilities are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, drop out of school, participate in inappropriate sexual behavior and become



victims of bullies, Bore says. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 13.4 percent of U.S. students receive special education services. But, Bore says, low-income schools and parents often lack the resources to help students with disabilities face social and environmental obstacles.

In her book, Bore says special education teachers are key to helping students with disabilities succeed.

“Special education teachers need to establish trusting relationships with students and

parents in order to serve as a link to these already marginalized children,” she says.

The book includes an index of agencies and resources for children with disabilities.

A native of Ngechek, Kenya, Bore says her parents inspired her commitment to children. Proceeds from *Voices* benefit Empowering Children of the Village, Inc., a nonprofit organization Bore helped create to educate and provide medical services to children in her village and neighboring villages.

SUPPORTING SCHOOLS FROM BLOCK TO BOARDROOM



DAVID CHARD (center), Simmons dean, moderated a discussion in the spring about the public’s ethical role in supporting high quality education. The dialogue was hosted by SMU’s Maguire Ethics Center, the Center on Communities and Education and the Simmons School. Panelists included (at Chard’s right) Gerald Britt, CitySquare’s Vice President of Public Policy and Community Program Development, and Florencia Velasco Fortner, CEO of Dallas Concilio. Read more on upcoming community conversations [@Facebook/smusimmons](#).

YOUNG LEADERS IN EDUCATION



Anna K. Lee ’09 (left), R. Claire McCormack ’09 and Carl G. Dorvil ’05, ’08 recently chaired activities for Simmons’ Young Leaders in Education. They hosted a spring benefit for the school’s Mustang Learning Center for Youth, a tutoring service and academic resource for Dallas-area parents, children and teachers. The group raised \$16,000 in support of the program.

EVENTS

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October 25, 2012 PARENT ENGAGEMENT SUMMIT

Engaging in the Success of Our Children: A Blueprint for Parent Involvement, hosted by Simmons’ Center on Communities and Education, will feature discussions on how to develop effective parent involvement programs. Hiro Yoshikawa, professor of education and academic dean at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, will deliver the keynote address. **For information, contact Erin Crosby, ecrosby@smu.edu.**

October 27, 2012 HOMECOMING!

Join Simmons faculty, students and staff at the school’s tailgate party on the Boulevard. Food and beverages will be provided. Interested? **Email us at simmonstailgate@smu.edu**

January 24, 2013 SIMMONS LUMINARY AWARDS

Upcoming awards will recognize the work of America’s Promise Alliance for dropout prevention, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Superintendent Daniel King for improving student outcomes, and the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden for providing model science education.

February 15, 2013 RESEARCH IN MATHEMATICS EDUCATION

The annual RME conference conducted by Simmons researchers for math educators takes place on SMU’s campus, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. (see story on page 2). **Visit smu.edu/RME.**

SANDY NOBLES, director of the J. Erik Jonsson Community School in Dallas, receives the 2012 Simmons Luminary Award for her organization, the Salesmanship Club Youth and Family Centers.



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