

IN THIS ISSUE

As Connections readers, you are no doubt aware that The Children, Youth and Family Consortium has been focusing its work for the last three years on the topic of Educational Disparities using the Circles of Influence framework found in the center of this issue. So far, we have addressed three of the five circles: children, informal supports, and communities. All past issues and supporting material can be found in Connections On-line (see box below).

This issue focuses on the policy circle as it relates to educational disparities.

As we have continued to explore educational disparities in greater depth, we have increasingly come to believe there is strong evidence that most of the factors that are cited as contributing to disparities can be traced back, at least in part, to institutional racism. We are also aware that our educational systems and policies have largely been created by and for the dominant culture, with the expectation (spoken and unspoken) that other cultures will “fit in.” The influence of racism on educational disparities is complex, and solutions that really work seem to have eluded us thus far, except for a few models that have yet to be replicated on a large scale.

In order to get at the relationship of

educational policy, disparities, racism and culture, we asked a number of people from different perspectives to respond to this question:

“As education policies are developed at any level – such as school, district, city, county, state, federal - how can equity and culture be put at the forefront, instead of being incorporated as an afterthought?”

Two people with very different viewpoints took on this challenge, and their responses can be found on pages 4-5 of this issue. As a non-partisan organization, CYFC is committed to looking at all issues from a variety of perspectives, as long as those perspectives are sound and based on solid research, evidence and/or experience.

This issue also includes articles on worksite policies, and how they can affect families and educational disparities, and a more general article on the effects of policies on families and how these effects can be considered in policy development. Finally, the Center for Excellence in Children’s Mental Health is featured in each issue of Connections - this time with an article on a public health approach to children’s mental health.

As always, your feedback is encouraged and welcome!

CONNECTIONS ON-LINE

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

Connections On-Line 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 on-line version, but not the print version.

The web version also contains links to other resources related to the articles. Finally, Connections On-Line contains an index of past articles.

CONNECTIONS NEW FORMAT

Readers will notice a change of size with this issue of Connections. This change was made largely because respondents to our survey a year ago indicated they would prefer a “standard” size publication so it would fit in file folders, and the PDF on-line copy would be easier to print. We will be interested to hear what you think.

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, influence policy and enhance practice to improve the well-being of Minnesota's children and families.

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS



Winter 2009



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
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CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN
CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

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Lessons from the
Field

The 2008-09 Lessons from the Field series will focus on the Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Check the CECMH website (above) for more details. All sessions (except the parent workshop) will be held in the Coffman Union Theater as well as host sites in greater Minnesota.

See *Lessons From The Field Calendar* on p. 4.

Children's Mental Health as a
Public Health Issue

By Cari Michaels

(This article includes citations. They can be found in the on-line version.)

Meeting the needs of children with mental health issues is challenging. Our knowledge of available services and the extent to which they are utilized is limited. Many parents who seek care for their children are met with a fragmented system that is difficult to navigate and provides only short-term services. Barriers related to geography, cost, and language complicate delivery of services. Children often are served by many providers in different fields of practice with specific areas of expertise but little communication with one another. Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, some children with significant needs may not receive services at all.

Increasingly, public health professionals in the United States have begun to examine issues related to children's mental health. In contrast to medical practice, where intervention happens at the individual level, public health practice focuses at the population level. Epidemiology is the science of public health. It addresses the incidence and distribution of an illness or condition in a population, the conditions that cause it, and methods to control and prevent it. The Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General emphasizes using epidemiology to determine incidence and prevalence of mental health in the United States. Theories and intervention models known and well-documented in the public health field can help clearly define children's mental health problems and inform effective interventions.

Epidemiological methods encompass not just the "disease" but also the determinants that contribute to it. Public health models emphasize a thorough environmental assessment of a condition that includes factors that are social, behavioral, environmental, educational, and political in nature. As with the socio-ecological model conceptualized by Urie Bronfenbrenner (and adapted by CYFC as Circles of Influence, found in the center of this publication), these models place the child within the context of a specific family,

community, and society with particular policies and administrative practices. Whether the child is generally healthy or significantly ill, all affect the child's mental well-being. Public health also strongly emphasizes the need to engage the population in defining the problem. Those directly affected by a problem can most accurately characterize its influence on individuals and the community and culture in which they live. Questions to ask regarding assessment include: Do the child's parents have knowledge of mental health disorders? How does this family perceive services available to them? What are the beliefs of this community regarding mental illnesses? Do services providers in this community emphasize the need for early diagnosis and treatment? Does this community consider children's mental health to be a significant problem?

Much of public health practice is interdisciplinary in nature. Creating a successful intervention in a field as complex as children's mental health requires the theories and models of practice from many disciplines. The discipline of public health also emphasizes the entire spectrum of intervention activities, from promotion and prevention to treatment and rehabilitation. The terms universal, selected and indicated are used to reflect interventions that target entire populations, those determined to be at increased risk, and those in need of treatment, respectively. Prevention of further suffering or the progression of an illness can happen at any point along this spectrum. Identifying risk and protective factors help determine the likelihood of an individual developing a particular condition. These can be targets for intervention as well (for example, educating parents about early signs of mental illness, improving social connectedness, increasing the number of providers available within a community, and reducing stigma within specific populations).

It is critical to engage community members at the stage of prevention. This is

Children's Mental Health— *continued on page 10*

Worksite Policies Can Help Make A Difference in Children's Achievement

By Marcie Brooke

Work and family issues begin at birth and end with death. They involve every human being regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, gender or religion, because every person is part of a family – whether a family of origin or a family they choose to create. No matter what the family type, if children are a part of it, they need a sense of belonging, as well as structure, boundaries and education that will help them to learn about the meanings of behavior, how they affect those around them, how to learn well, and what they need for a healthy life.

Children learn from the family they are born into, the environment they grow up in, and the formal and informal education they receive. In the Circles of Influence (ecological) Model found in the center of this publication, educational and community influences are regularly discussed. But the influences of the worksite on children and families are not brought into discussions as much. In the 21st century more men and women are in the workforce than ever before. In Minnesota over 77% of women are in the workforce, not for extra spending money, but for basic economics of raising a family. Rent, food, clothing, education, healthcare, automobiles, electricity and basic necessities generally cost more money than one income can provide!

Policies in the workplace have the potential to contribute to children's learning success. Policies that recognize the needs of employees who are parents can provide flexibility and resources that they might not have time or access to receive in other ways. When businesses begin to look at simple, efficient ways to help employees with their whole beings at the workplace through work/family education and "family respectful" policies, everyone wins. A few examples are included below.

Educational opportunities at the worksite.

One way the working poor, low-wage workers, middle class families, and wealthy families can all receive parent and family education is to bring the education to the workplace during the workday. Family life education seminars can cover tips, techniques and resources that are practical and easily implemented. It can offer content to help families learn about developmental stages, communication, discipline, boundaries, school work, eldercare, transitions, finances, and ways to navigate the various systems (education, health care) in their lives. Educational seminars are prepared and presented by experts in fields of Family Life, Nutrition, Health and Wellness, Psychology, or whatever field is necessary for the topic and audience.

Some workplaces currently offer such seminars. One model is a seminar over the lunch break, in a brown bag type format. Many resources are available for worksites to implement seminars (including through the Working Family Resource Center).

When work-life education is offered at the worksite, employees not only learn concepts about their family functioning, they also feel valued, they learn about themselves in non-threatening ways, they network, they build relationships, and they begin to understand their colleagues not by stereotypes but by building trust, listening, asking questions and working together. This not only helps their families, but it can enhance their work as well. New ideas emerge, and the brain drain becomes the brain boom with so many people learning from one another.

The 24/7 world with technology and global information at everyone's fingertips often just results in overload. People need more than millions of bits of information. They need to know what's reliable, what's best and what will work in their situation. Family education at the worksite can help overloaded parents sort through all these complexities.

Worksite Policies— *continued on page 11*

CONSORTIUM CONNECTIONS

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Lessons from the Field - Calendar

April 14, 2009

9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
(check-in at 8:30)

Multi-disciplinary Intervention

Keynote Presenter:
Dr. Randi Hagerman,
M.I.N.D. Institute, UC Davis

May 13, 2009

9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
(check-in at 8:30)

Integrative Medicine

Keynote Presenter:
Lawrence Rosen, M.D.

Parent Workshop:

March 26, 2009

6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Location: Wilder Complex
(formerly Wilder School)
3345 Chicago Ave S,
Minneapolis
*Only in the Metro area

Dwelling on Institutional Racism Will Not Close the Achievement Gap

By Mitch Pearlstein

In the very same month that the United States elected its first African American president, the Children, Youth and Family Consortium, in preparing for this publication, saw fit to declare that “institutional racism is at the bedrock of [educational] disparities.” There’s a terrific irony here, of course. But of far greater importance than any historically rich juxtaposition is this very sad fact: It’s hard to think of any animating idea *less* likely to improve American education in general and the achievement of minority and low-income children in particular than dwelling on embedded racism, regardless of how debilitating or overstated it may be.

For how many decades have enormous numbers of like-minded educators and activists been making the same exact argument as made by CYFC? For how many decades has just about every issue in American education been funneled through “multicultural” and related prisms? And for how many decades have such preoccupations been party to not nearly enough kids learning how to read, write, and compute adequately?

Or more precisely from the obverse, for how many years have many of the most successful schools been those which have concertedly focused, not on racially or ethnically grounded cultures and subcultures, but rather on what might be described as racially and ethnically nondescript, albeit demanding middle-class values? Places like KIPP schools, where teachers and administrators focus much more on whether boys and girls are working hard enough, and for enough hours each day, than on celebrating their various diversities and differences. Places of learning where the explicit aim is not on reinforcing the values and attitudes many children drink from in their homes and neighborhoods, but rather, on explicitly countering and *overcoming* some of them.

Do I believe there is something real called “institutional” or “systemic” racism, and that it can make it disproportionately hard for many people (as the saying frequently used to go) “to get there from here”? Of course I do. My doctoral adviser in the old College of Education 30 years ago, Prof. Sam Popper, was a Parsonian, meaning well versed in how everything is connected to everything else. For example, in the case at hand, it’s absurd to believe that centuries of slavery and Jim Crow no longer matter; that all of their old-time poisons have drained away. As a society, we’re infinitely fairer and better than we were, but I have no hesitation in acknowledging how rotten effects of a sometimes deplorable history can linger.

But having said that, a pivotal and exceedingly practical question needs to be asked: How might educators translate belief in the supposedly crippling power of current-day racism into actual and everyday educational improvements? Short of fundamentally remaking American society in their preferred shape, and doing so pronto, how do men and women who embrace this view propose to significantly reduce achievement gaps? Bluntly put, making educational progress contingent on revamping society is futile. Or if you will, assuming that millions of children are unlikely to do well academically unless and until the United States gets its house in supposed order is equally defeatist.

So what to do? How to better conceive the very large problem before us? Three quick points, if I might.

First, common denominators in successfully educating low-income children are captured in the title of a recent book by journalist David Whitman: *Sweating the Small Stuff: Inner-City Schools and the New Paternalism*. The book explores how half-a-dozen unusually successful inner-city high schools across the country build and reinforce “character traits and middle-class values that inner-city adolescents can use to rise out of poverty.” The schools have rigorous academic standards as well as longer school days and academic years,

Dwelling on Institutional Racism— *continued on page 10*

Mitch Pearlstein, Ph.D., is founder and president of Center of the American Experiment in Minneapolis. His newest book is *Riding into the Sunrise: Al Quie and a Life of Faith, Service & Civility*.

The Role of Cultural Capital in Educational Policy

By Bryan E. Cichy and Larry C. Bryant, Ph.D.

Readers familiar with the work of the Children, Youth and Family Consortium at the University of Minnesota will know that they have been focusing their work for the last two years on the topic of educational disparities, which they have defined as the “differences in educational opportunities and outcomes among various groups of people.” Given our work on the issue of the disproportionate representation of African American and Native American students in K-12 special education programs, we have been asked to discuss how we would approach the creation of educational policies that account for culture head on, instead of as an after thought.

In order to set the stage for this discussion, let us paint the picture. American schools are increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. The percentage of public school students who state membership in racial or ethnic “minority” groups increased from 22 percent in 1972 to 43 percent in 2006. However, over the same period, the teaching force has remained largely white. In 2007, the percentage of teachers who were white was a staggering 83 percent. Given this environment in which the teaching force is so unlike the student population we find an imbalance across races in the rates at which students are being labeled as having a disability. Nationally, in 2006, an African American student had a 1.24 times and Native American students had a 1.25 times greater chance of receiving special education services than a student from all other groups. When the data is disaggregated by disability category, that difference is even larger for students from those two groups in the categories that require more subjectivity in the diagnosis. Given these statistics, scholars have begun to suggest cultural dissonance between educators and students as a contributing factor to many of these diagnoses of disability.

In 1977, Pierre Bourdieu introduced the field of anthropology to the idea of *symbolic capital*. He pointed out that

capital, the wealth of an individual or a group that can be called upon for a particular purpose, does not need to be economic to be of use, but rather that it can be symbolic, in the form of a family name, an educational degree, or a particular world view. When the symbolic capital belongs to a larger group, such as a racial or ethnic group, and that group needs to distribute that *cultural capital* among its members, the group needs to “resort to systematic inculcation” to effectively accomplish that goal. In American society, this distribution takes the form of public schools. Educational policy therefore, “does no more than symbolically consecrate—by recording it in a form which renders it both eternal and universal—the structure of the power relation between groups and classes which is produced and guaranteed practically by the functioning of these mechanisms”.

Additionally, Bourdieu’s theory suggests everyone possesses cultural capital regardless of the cultural group to which he or she belongs, and all people use the capital they possess to barter for goods, services, and access to the institutions of their cultures. People with family names such as Kennedy or Bush can use their cultural capital for political gain, while educational degrees can be traded for entrance to higher paying occupations. Race, too, has been a form of cultural capital, providing or inhibiting access to certain institutions in American society. In the case of special education, therefore, the issue of ethnic disproportionality may be a case in which the cultural capital possessed by these minority students is not valued by schools, or at a minimum is perceived as different, and that difference is redefined as disability because this is the only paradigm to which school personnel have been exposed to explain this situation. Utilizing this understanding of cultural capital, many contemporary scholars have been investigating how schools determine and then rank whose cultural capital will

(This article contains citations. They can be found in the online version.)

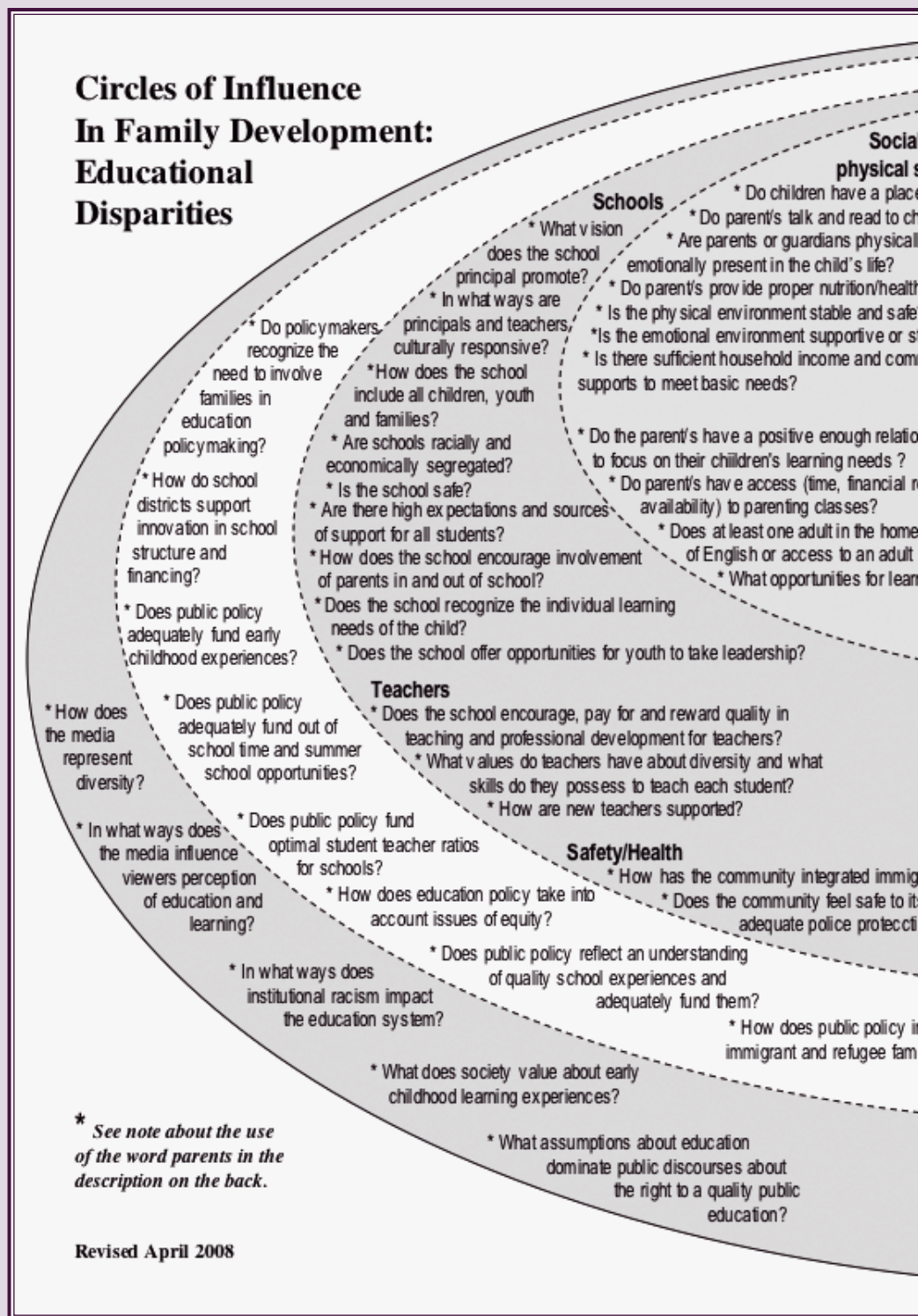
Bryan Cichy is a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Larry Bryant is assistant professor at Saint Xavier University in Chicago. See “Who’s The Consortium” on p. 12 for more detail.

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, affects and 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, peers, 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.



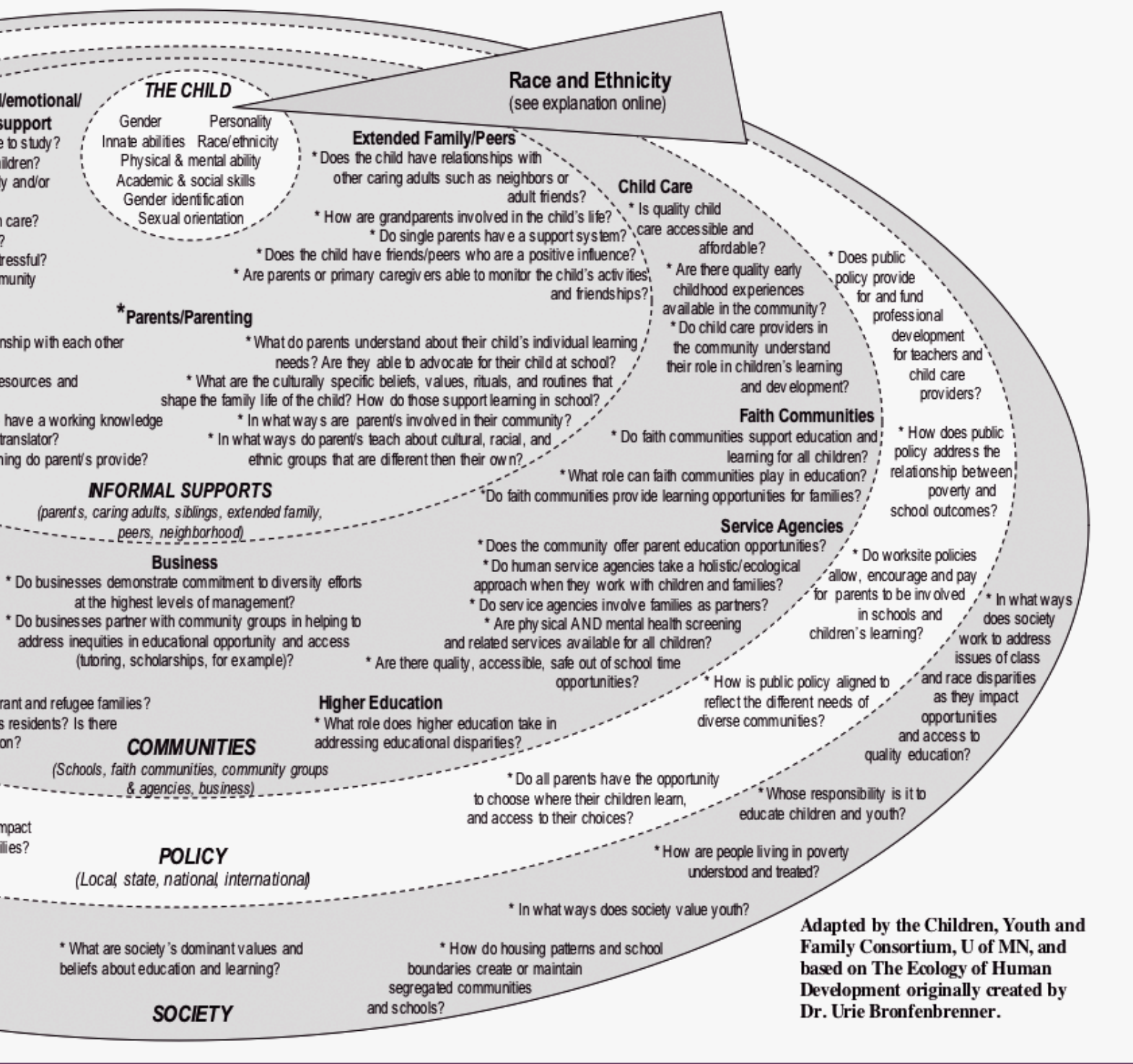
In addition to the five circles, this model recognizes the cross cutting impact of **race and ethnicity**. All of the five circles, from individual children to society, are profoundly affected by race and ethnicity. It is critical that these influences be identified, acknowledged and included in developing 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. Readers will notice the Circles of Influence graphic and the content have



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.

both changed since it was first "launched" in the Fall, 2006. This is based on spontaneous and intentional feedback from the variety of groups and individuals with whom CYFC works.

Readers will note the frequent use of the word "parent/s" in the Circles of Influence. The intention is that the use of the word parents refers to any adult/s who serve in a primary parental type role with the child. This may be one or more biological parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, guardians, foster parents, or others.

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 and review 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
- *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.
- An ad hoc Educational Disparities Advisory Committee convened by CYFC.
- The CYFC Core Advisory Council.

How Can Policymakers Ensure that ALL Public Policies Are Family-Friendly?

By Sara Benning

Understanding the Many Layers of Educational Disparities: Circle of Influence Questions

It's important for policymakers to understand how policies affect families. Yet it's critical to look beyond their own area of influence to see how other environments or factors impact families. Using this big-picture view, policymakers can consider how policy is only one piece of the puzzle. The questions below are just a few that illustrate the intersections between multiple environments as they relate to children's educational outcomes:

In what ways do policymakers recognize the need to involve families in education policymaking? How do school districts support innovation in school structure and financing? Does public policy adequately fund early childhood and out-of-school time and experiences? Does public policy fund optimal student teacher ratios for schools? How does public policy impact immigrant and refugee families? Do all parents have the opportunity to choose where their child learns? What are society's dominant values and beliefs about education and learning? In what ways does society work to address issues of class and race disparities as they impact opportunities and access to quality education?

(Questions adapted from Circles of Influence insert in Spring 2008 issue of Consortium Connections)

Policies impact people, and certainly education policies impact students. Now more than ever it is important to look beyond “the policy” or “the student” and consider how each is influenced by and influences many other factors (such as one's community or our larger society), and how these many factors have consequences for families.

Because students come from families of all kinds, CYFC offers two tangible tools to help policymakers keep the family - no matter how it is defined - at the forefront of policymaking. *Circles of Influence* and the *Family Impact Checklist* are used as part of CYFC's Family Impact Policy Initiative. Both promote deep and broad thinking that inform policy level decision-making, and illustrate opportunities for policymakers to build the capacity of families to help themselves and others.

Circles of Influence

CYFC is currently in the third year of its theme focused on “Educational Disparities”, which we define as those factors within *various* environments (i.e., home, community, school, policy, society) that create differences in opportunities to learn and result in the achievement gap. *Circles of Influence* (found in the center of this publication) was created and continues to evolve as one mechanism for conceptualizing complex social issues, and providing a visual means of illustrating the many ways these environments interact with one another. One of those environments is the policy arena.

While the policy circle appears to be distant from the child at the center of the model, in truth policies have direct implications for children and their families. This is no secret to policymakers, who hear about “policy trickle-down” from their constituents – who are part of families – on a daily basis. And yet it's important for policymakers to think about how policies influence and

are influenced by all of the environments in *Circles*, and how each of those environments impacts families.

One way that policymakers can use *Circles* to assess the potential impact of policies on families is to think about the questions provided within each circle, and to develop some of their own, to consider how policies influence or “push on” other environments in order to create positive change around any issue (see questions in box to left for an example). In so doing, they are thinking about creating positive outcomes for other environments because they are considering how policies of *any* kind – not just policies that specifically name families – impact other environments, including the ones closest to the family.

The Family Impact Checklist

Like a map, *Circles* provides points of reference and topography of a given environment, yet it represents living, breathing populations of families. The *Family Impact Checklist* is another related tool that provides policymakers and implementers with criteria to evaluate how policies and programs are sensitive to and supportive of families. The *Checklist* is a nonpartisan tool designed to improve policymakers' ability to assess the intended and unintended consequences of policies and programs on families.

The *Checklist* is based on six key principles –family support and responsibilities, family membership and stability, family involvement and interdependence, family partnership and empowerment, family diversity and support of vulnerable families. It is practical because, while it's used to analyze current proposed legislation, it also keeps in mind potential long-term outcomes of implementing a policy. It can also be used to review and evaluate existing policies to ensure that they still best meet the needs of many types of families (see box on page 9 for

Family Friendly Public Policy— *continued on page 9*

examples of issue-specific checklists of policies).

Like *Circles*, the *Checklist* is important because it can be used to understand how transportation or agriculture- related policies (that do not specifically target families) have intended or unintended consequences for families.

Real-Life Application for Policymakers

Policymakers are encouraged to become familiar with both *Circles of Influence* and the *Checklist* using some of the suggestions below:

Create your own Circles of Influence framework around an issue.

Staff members or work groups can identify questions related to the issue at hand, focusing on one area of *Circles*. Then talk together about the overall framework, noting common questions and unexpected insights or gaps (where are there questions missing, and does this mean that you'll need to dig a little deeper to better understand this part of the issue?).

Designate a staff member to become a "family impact" resource.

Even having just one person ask, "What is the potential impact of this proposed policy on families?" ensures that unintended and potentially costly consequences are avoided from the very inception of a program or bill.

Review the Family Impact Checklist with staff.

When creating or analyzing any piece of legislation, take out a copy of the *Checklist* and review the key principles and components. Determine if new data needs to be collected, constituents should be consulted, or current research reviewed.

Develop an issue-specific Checklist.

If you've already done so, use questions created for your *Circles of Influence* to determine *Checklist* content.

Share your results!

Sharing the *Checklists* or *Circles* frameworks you've created with other policymakers and staff encourages their use, and can result in better policy across parties, committees and districts. Importantly, undertaking any of the above activities in a bipartisan group - and one crossing urban, suburban and rural boundaries (such as a committee) - brings together the most diverse opinions, backgrounds and values, and therefore has the potential to effect the most comprehensive changes for families.

Conclusion

The above tools show how policymakers shape family outcome. *Circles of Influence* allows individuals (including policymakers) to focus on their area of influence or expertise while keeping the big picture in mind. Because of this, *Circles* illustrates how everyone is responsible for and invested in understanding complicated social issues.

In the same way, the *Family Impact Checklist* has the potential to provide a deep understanding of an issue while serving as a reminder that policies always leave an imprint on families - positive or negative, intended or not. Both help policymakers answer questions about how they are ensuring that all families in their district are being considered when proposing any policy.

For more information about CYFC's Family Impact Policy Initiative, please contact policy director Dr. Karen Cadigan at cadigan@umn.edu or coordinator Sara Benning at sbenning@umn.edu

Using Issue-Specific Checklists to Review Policies

Visit

<http://familyimpactseminars.org>, click on "Policymakers" then choose the "Family Data" menu item from the left to access checklists created around the following issues (and more):

- Early Care and Education Policies
- School Policies
- School Funding Formulas
- Adolescent Treatment
- A Child and Family Services Plan

Children's Mental Health— *continued from page 2*

the population that will be responsible for long-term change, and their involvement leads to programs that are more appropriate for their intended population and more likely to be utilized. Successful interventions address each level of the environmental assessment. In addition to improving mental health within a specific group, successful interventions will ultimately reduce stigma, improve services provided to children, improve public policy, and change cultural perceptions of mental illness and services designed to prevent and treat it. Questions that inform intervention include: Are preventive services available and affordable to children in this community? Do some individuals have greater access to knowledge and/or services? How effectively do services meet the needs of specific children? How well do systems of care work with one another to diagnose and refer children? What are the barriers to receiving prompt, high-quality care? What cultural practices contribute to

or help prevent mental illness?

What does this all have to do with public policy? Children's mental health policy that is developed using a public health lens would:

- Include the full spectrum of intervention (promotion, prevention, intervention, treatment);
- View the child in the context of the many environments in which they interact (using a Circles of Influence model), and not address the child in isolation;
- Involve those affected in the shaping of policy;
- Recognize issues of culture and ethnicity that may not be the same for all population groups;
- Include plans for long term solutions and not just intervention in immediate crises;
- Assure that services are widely available and accessible, and represent the populations.

Dwelling on Institutional Racism— *continued from page 4*

but “key to their success is that they tell students exactly how they are expected to behave – with real rewards for compliance and penalties for noncompliance.”

The intense, universalistic ethos described here is incongruent, profitably so, with contrary notions of instruction in which institutional racism is thought to be controlling. Or, from another angle, while “No Excuses,” the rallying cry of schools like the celebrated six, can be unrealistic, it's an infinitely better fight song and spur than suggesting to millions of young people that they're inescapably and unfairly stunted from the start.

Second, while I'm a strong voucher proponent, some partisans have been known to oversell them. Nevertheless, it's accurate and fair to say this: Statistically controlling for everything that needs to be controlled for, low-income students, perhaps African American boys and girls especially, who attend private high schools are more likely to graduate than their counterparts in public high schools. For confirmation, read Paul Peterson. Not only is he a Harvard political scientist, but he grew up in Montevideo, Minnesota, making both his conclusion and qualifications unassailable. Increasing educational options for low-income families is a moral issue for many people, of whom I'm very much one.

And last, it's frankly absurd to talk about achievement gaps without talking about family fragmentation, which almost certainly is more severe in the United States than anyplace in the industrial world. How could anyone, for instance, not believe that non-marital birth rates of 80 percent and higher in inner cities do not subtract enormously from what schools can generally accomplish? A profound example of the lengths to which many educators and others routinely go in evading this elemental fact of life is Richard Rothstein's well-received book, *Class and Schools*. In many ways it's a brilliant and persuasive argument about how cultural and social impediments, starting with poverty, can make it hard for poor children to keep up academically with middle-class children. But by some contortion, Rothstein hardly ever acknowledges how maybe, just maybe, out-of-wedlock births and divorce contribute to poverty. Blind spots like this – or, more correctly, stubbornly averted eyes – have substantially more to do with educational failure than allegedly locked-in American racism.

Cultural Capital— *continued from page 5*

be acknowledged and valued. One can deduce that policymakers conceptualize, implement, and enforce policies based on their own of acculturation and their understanding of the ways in which their own cultural capital has been promoted. However, in order for policymakers to create policies that are grounded in a social justice orientation, they must position themselves as the *fundamental other*; in other words, they must realize that they are not called to maintain the ways in which they inherited their own line of cultural capital, but rather they represent only one of the many groups of people whose cultural capital must be integrated into the new order of American schooling. The *status quo* is not useful any longer in our quickly diversifying educational environment.

Policymakers cannot afford to view themselves as the standard by which to judge and/or govern others, instead, they must come to know that they hold a

position equal to that of members of any and all other groups. In addition, policy makers have the charge of giving a human face and voice to the socially marginalized and oppressed; those whose social identity markers (race, gender, sexual and/or gender orientation, etc.) have historically been viewed as less than desirable by the institution.

As policymakers develop their skills in articulating issues of cultural diversity, it is imperative that these behaviors become internalized. Although much of culture and ethnicity is externalized, the spirit of equal treatment and social justice is not. Policymakers must find ways to put forth policies that are going to integrate the various worldviews of their constituents, not to continue hierarchical power structures.

Worksite Policies— *continued from page 3*

Release time for school activities

One of the biggest challenges for working parents is how to make time to participate in their children's learning, particularly in school conferences and events that occur during the school day. Research shows that children are better learners when their parents are involved in their schools.

All employees - from salaried executives to hourly assembly line workers - and their children - would benefit if they were able to take time off from work (preferably paid time) to participate in children's school activities. When this is allowed, employers find that workers have increased loyalty and productivity, and schools and communities benefit from healthy, educated students and citizens.

Establish mentorship opportunities for employees

Another way the workplace can support children's learning is by encouraging employees to volunteer to tutor or mentor students, or volunteer in schools in other ways - and even provide them with paid time off to do so. For instance, when someone from a local business comes to school and reads to kindergartners, it reinforces the importance of reading and learning, and also increases the visibility of the business. Although this isn't directly aimed at children of employees, it contributes to the community overall by supporting education and the learning needs of children.

Establish scholarship programs for children of employees

Offering even small scholarships for children of employees can be a powerful incentive for them to continue their education beyond high school.

Businesses have varying abilities and resources to establish policies such as those highlighted here. But even starting with one of these ideas can be a significant contribution to families, children and their communities.

The worksite is an important part of the circle of influence that affects the life of every child. Although often overlooked, it has much potential for positive change.

2007-2008

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BRIEFS...

Family Impact Seminars

Family Impact Seminars connect research and policymaking by providing objective, non-partisan information on a current policy topic. Each seminar includes forums, briefing reports, and follow-up activities for legislators, key agencies and staff. The seminars offer a range of policy options and provide opportunities for participants to identify common ground. CYFC's first Family Impact Seminar in April 2008, focused on "Options for A Responsive and Accountable Early Childhood System in Minnesota," was attended by 48 people, including 26 legislators. The keynote speaker, Louise Stoney of the Alliance for Early Childhood Finance, has continued to work closely with the Bi-Partisan Early Childhood Caucus, including presenting to a group of advocates, practitioners and other key members of the EC community via live video feed. This December event was held on campus, sponsored by the Caucus and coordinated by CYFC. Planning is well under way for the 2009 Family Impact Seminar that will focus on Special Education Finance. For more information, visit: <http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/policy/fis.html>.

CYFC Scholars

Over the last two years, CYFC has experimented with models of "fellows" or "scholars" - University faculty or staff who are affiliated with CYFC to conduct their CYFC theme-related work under our auspices. Sandy Christenson and Audrey Appelsies have served in this capacity during our Educational Disparities theme. As CYFC shifts its focus slightly to eliminating disparities to increase equity in educational and health outcomes, the scholar program will shift as well, based on learnings from the first two years. We will soon be putting out an RFP for university faculty and research staff at any of the UM campuses to submit proposals to become a direct part of CYFC's work by conducting research on some aspect of CYFC's theme focus. Up to four scholars will be chosen to begin working with CYFC in May 2009. Watch for more information as this plan unfolds.

Who's The Consortium?



Bryan E. Cichy is a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. **Larry C. Bryant, Ph.D.**, is Assistant Professor at Saint Xavier University in Chicago. In addition, the two, with a third colleague, form Cichy Learning Group, a professional development organization offering specific, research-based techniques and cultural information and perspectives to help teachers become more culturally responsive professionals. With particular expertise in special education, they also consult with school

districts regarding special education identification and placement issues.

Marcie Jefferys is the fiscal policy coordinator for the Office of the Senate Majority Leader at the Minnesota Legislature. For several years, Marcie was on the faculty of the School of Social work at the University of Minnesota, teaching and conducting research in the areas of child abuse, child welfare, work and family, and CYF policy, and serving as the director of the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare. Marcie is now applying her academic experience and expertise directly to the policy development process through her position in the Senate Majority Leader's office at the Minnesota Legislature.

And the Consortium is YOU!

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