Cura Personalis: Nurturing Mustard Seed Seeds
Early Childhood Education with Marginalized Families

Grant awarded from Better Way Foundation of the Opus Family Group

Better Way Grant
The education of young children and their caregivers is of primary importance in building a strong foundation for supportive families and successful communities. Dr. Sharon Ishii-Jordan (College of Arts and Sciences) and Dr. Lynn Olson (Education Department) chose to focus on Omaha's inner city neighborhoods with the goals of 1) developing teachers and families to improve the preparation of young children in impoverished areas for eventual successful academic achievement, and 2) researching the design for a well-developed teacher preparation program to meet the needs of early childhood education in at-risk environments. They were awarded a renewal grant over two years for a total of $65,816 to work with four partner early childhood centers to deliver teacher training workshops for teachers and families, coordinate health fairs in the schools, link Creighton education majors with teaching demonstrations, and develop syllabi for early childhood teacher preparation.

Partner Schools
Four early childhood centers are partners involved with this grant. Educare North is attached to Kellom Elementary, a few blocks from Creighton University and largely serves an African American population. Educare South, attached to Indian Hill Elementary at 31st & W Streets, serves a largely Hispanic population. Holy Name Church and School has been an anchor in the community of north Omaha for 90 years with education as a key component. The James R. Russell Child Development Center is located on Creighton's campus. The population that will be served on this project include approximately 500 children and their families enrolled in the four early childhood centers. The majority of the students in the Educare and Holy Name centers are of diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds and receive free/reduced meals at the centers.

There is a need for current staff in the child development centers to receive more information on research-based strategies, models, and achievement-enhancing activities that can be used to improve the outcomes for students from marginalized populations.

Jesus proposed a parable to the crowds.
"The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches." (Matthew 13:31-32)

Workshops
The workshops for the 2011-12 grant year have been focused on developing literacy and readiness skills for young children who are preparing to enter kindergarten next school year. Four teacher workshops were designed to build literacy through: developmental language skills and oral vocabulary; music and gross/fine motor skills; handwriting readiness with spatial orientation and shape recognition; and art as a function of receptive and expressive language development. Partner schools have sent early childhood teachers to the workshops, and were later responsible for hosting parent/caregiver workshops at their own schools to demonstrate ways that parents could support the same developmental levels of literacy in home activities. Early childhood literacy development, especially in marginalized communities, requires a partnership among school personnel, home caregivers, and community supporters.

Health fairs at partner schools in 2010-11

Teacher workshop on literacy and handwriting readiness

Teacher workshop on literacy and music

Teacher workshop on language development