

Child Development and Family Studies

March 2008

Getting to Know You: Dr. Jennifer Dobbs Ready to Read Preschool Project

[Jennifer Dobbs, Ph.D.](#), Assistant Professor in the [Department of Child Development and Family Studies](#) is director of the [Ready to Read](#) project.

Years of research tell us that reading with young children is one of the most important activities for helping them develop the skills they need to learn to read, and to succeed in school. However, just as with any educational effort, there are some "best practices" that can maximize the reading experience and help children learn more quickly. These practices are known as "Dialogic Reading." They are called that because the goal is to make the reading experience a conversation—or a dialogue—between the adult reader and the child. By using some simple techniques, readers are able to help children become actively involved in the reading experience, developing their vocabulary and other essential pre-reading skills.



Project Start-up

The [Ready to Read](#) project was designed to provide "Dialogic Reading" training to community volunteers, who in turn, volunteer in preschool and child care centers to read with young children. The project began with Dr. Dobbs in September of 2006 as part of the vision of former first lady of Purdue, Mrs. Patty Jischke, and other members of the Purdue Women's Club, who were committed to providing volunteer work in the community in support of school readiness and literacy. They were interested in using a research-based approach and focusing their efforts on making a difference for young children in Tippecanoe County.

The project was a natural fit for the volunteers, and for Dr. Dobbs, whose major research interests focus on emergent literacy and preschool learning and behavior. One of the objectives of Dr. Dobbs' research program is to develop interventions that promote academic success and social-emotional well-being for young children. Dr. Dobbs trained the volunteers in the "Dialogic Reading" approach and created a research project to document the outcomes of their program.

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Current Implementation

To date, close to 175 volunteers have been trained, and the *Ready to Read* project is being implemented in five (5) child care settings in Tippecanoe County. Individual volunteer commitments to read with preschool children vary—some read twice a week; some once a month; some read in summers only; others read all year long. The flexibility of the program is a good fit for volunteers from all walks of life.

Funding support to Dr. Dobbs is being provided through the Susan Kontos Faculty Fellowship Award from [The Center for Families at Purdue University](#). The initial phase of research connected with the project has been completed, and data is being analyzed in order to craft a grant proposal for a larger and more rigorous implementation of the project. The long-term goal is for the project to expand locally and become a model for volunteer groups to use in their communities. With additional funding (to provide free books to the children involved in the program and to continue the research), the hope is that the *Ready to Read* model will expand to all of Tippecanoe County and eventually be offered statewide.

Dr. Dobbs notes, “It’s exciting to empower community volunteers to meet the challenge of helping children be better prepared for success in school and in life. This work allows me to generate new knowledge about children’s development and to connect my research to the needs of the community, which is something that is very important to me.”

On-going Involvement

Dr. Dobbs’ research on school readiness and young children also recently afforded her the opportunity to attend a special session sponsored by the U. S. Department of Education. She was



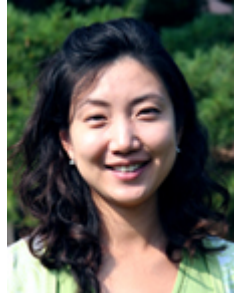
one of a select group of national researchers invited to review the birth cohort data set for the [Department’s Early Childhood Longitudinal Study](#) (a national early childhood research initiative). She met with other researchers interested in school readiness, and now has the opportunity to use this national data set to explore research questions from her earlier local research related to preschoolers’ development of math concepts and social and emotional growth.

In addition to Dr. Dobbs’ research expertise, she is also skilled in providing a “research-to-practice” application of her research. On several occasions she has provided training about the importance of reading with children to Purdue Extension educators statewide in support of their work with local communities focusing on school readiness. The Extension Homemakers Association members involved in the *First Books for Kids* project have also benefited from her training. Check out one of Dr. Dobbs’ sessions with Extension educators: [Raising](#)

[School Readiness by Reading with Children/Dialogic Reading.](#)

Home Literacy Environment and Literacy Growth of Low-Income Children: A Longitudinal Study of Kindergarten Transition

CDFS faculty member, [Seung-Hee Son, PhD.](#) has received funding from the [Purdue Agricultural Research Program](#) in support of Project Learning Environment which documents the home literacy environment of low-income children and their literacy growth over time.



Children who fail to achieve literacy skills by the time they start school will continue to struggle in school achievement and even fall behind as time goes on. Children in low-income families face an especially high risk of starting school without the necessary levels of literacy. In searching for the sources of low skills in low-income children, researchers have identified home literacy, especially parents reading books to their children, as a major predictor. However, detailed evidence on the impact of book reading has not been examined extensively in previous research.



Dr. Son's current research project investigates the nature of the home literacy environment and its impact on low-income children's language and literacy growth during early childhood. It builds on an on-going investigation (funded by Purdue Research Foundation and Kinley Foundation) about the home literacy environment and literacy skills of sixty (60) low-income preschoolers. This new research project proposes to study the

issue of home literacy during the children's transition to kindergarten.

The study includes visits to the homes and classrooms of each participating child with on-going child assessment; specifically, home visits consist of a parent interview, parent-child reading of three different kinds of books, parent-child writing activity, and parent-child cooking activity. These observation data will be coded and analyzed longitudinally to determine important changing patterns in the home that contribute to children's growth in language, literacy, and numeracy skills. Findings from the project are expected to be used in designing an early intervention program for low-income families in the future.

New Couple Relationship Fact Sheet Series Available:

Successful intimate partner relationships require nurturing and attention. Recently released Extension fact sheets address six areas of couple relationship challenges based on



research by prominent marriage and couple researchers. The series was created by Dr. Shruti Poulsen, Continuing Lecturer in the [Department of Child Development and Family Studies](#):

CFS-742-W, Handling Conflict with Your Partner and Staying Emotionally Connected

www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-742-W.pdf

- CFS-743-W, Making Time to Talk to Your Partner

www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-743-W.pdf

CFS-744-W, A Fine Balance: The Magic Ratio to a Healthy Relationship

www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-744-W.pdf

CFS-745-W, Increasing the Positives in Your Relationship

www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-745-W.pdf

- CFS-746-W, The Art of Complaining: Getting Your Concerns Across Without Criticizing

www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-746-W.pdf

- CFS-747-W, Sharing Dreams and Goals: Creating an Emotional Connection

www.extension.purdue.edu/extmedia/CFS/CFS-747-W.pdf