

## Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center Report of Activities 2019-2021

The Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center (referred to in this report as the Center) has continued the mission to provide an innovative site for early childhood research, teacher and professional training, and high-quality early childhood services to the Southern Nevada community. This report provides a summary of activities from 2019-2021 in relation to these goals and includes a strategic research plan for 2020-2025. This report is a follow up from a previous report of 2019.

### Summary of Community Engagement and UNLV/CSUN Preschool

#### Total Families/Children Served:

- July 2019- June 2020 (T=192)
- Summer 2020 (T= 64), Fall 2020 (T=94), Spring 2021 (T=110)

#### Current/Renewed MOUs:

- Clark County School District (Special Education Inclusion)
- Therapy Management Group (Early Intervention Play Group)

#### Center Personnel:

18 UNLV head staff members (FTE 1.00), 7 CCSD staff, and 40 UNLV student workers part time (FTE.50).

#### Coursework and Programs Accessing the Center

- ECE 299 practicum students
- ESP781 fieldwork students
- FOCUS Project Vocational Training/Employment: 3 students
- Early Childhood Assessment Center Access for ECE473 & ESP773

#### National Accreditation and Quality Rating

The Center again received accreditation renewal through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)<sup>1</sup> in 2019 and 2020.

The Center maintained its 5-star rating with the Nevada Silver Stars Quality Rating and Improvement System<sup>2</sup>.

#### Response to COVID19

Following state orders, in March 2020, the Center closed due to COVID-19. During this time, staff continued to work remotely providing families with developmentally appropriate activities supporting their children's learning and development. Teaching staff conducted virtual group times to provide children with social interaction and learning activities. The administration conducted family information sessions regarding CDC recommended guidelines and updates. Staff also engaged in virtual professional development. In June 2020, the Center re-opened with established and confirmed Phase- I Guidelines for children ages 3-5 only at 50% capacity while also providing home activities for families. The Center implemented strict safety procedures as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in accordance with state, local, and university regulations including temporary sick room or program closures for exposures. The school did close

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<sup>1</sup> National Association for the Education of Young Children is an international professional organization dedicated to high quality programs for children birth through 8 years old. Accreditation is a rigorous process to ensure quality programs. Learn more at <https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation>

<sup>2</sup> Nevada Silver State Stars QRIS is a state-wide evaluation system through the Nevada Department of Education's Office of Early Learning and Development and administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Child Care Development Funds to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality of early learning programs on a tiered rating (0-5 stars). Learn more at <http://www.nvsilverstatestars.org/>

three times from June to December for precautionary measures on individual reports for a 7 to 14 day period each time. No outbreak occurred. In January 2021, toddler classrooms were also added. Vaccines were made available to Center staff in early 2021. In March 2021, we welcomed back students and staff from the Clark County School District's early childhood special education program. As time passed, the Center continues to increase its capacity and age range with plans to be at full capacity by August 2021. During this time, student activities and research was paused. However, a virtual library of resources and publicly available videos was created by faculty and Center staff to support student coursework. Twenty ECE practicum students were assigned to classroom teachers for collaboration and coursework. Additionally, researchers were allowed to recruit participants for off-site research such as online surveys. On-site research and student experiences will resume in accordance with state and university policies.

*We want to thank the Center staff for their amazing work during the pandemic and applaud the outstanding leadership of Dr. Tredwell, Ms. Wright, and Ms. Quinn!*

## Summary of Research Activities

### Research Week 2019

The Center was highlighted as part of UNLV's Research Week in October 2019. A presentation, *Early Childhood Realm of Research*, presented research from the Center as well as other faculty and students at UNLV.

### Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center Research Grants

In 2021, we launched the Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center Research Grants to support research at the Center. These grants are designed to provide seed funding to support the development or extension of a research project addressing topics related to young children birth to 5 years old, their families, and/or professionals in this context and intended to stimulate new research and partnerships. These grants were available to faculty and students with College of Education faculty serving as Principal Investigators for budgets up to \$10,000.

*Recipients to be announced October 2021*

### External Funding Awarded

*Practice-based on Pyramid Model Practice Coaching in Early Care and Education. UNLV Accreditation Awards and Mission Fulfillment Grants. \$1500. 2020-2021.*

This project was led by Eileen Quinn, Program Coordinator, Yamilia DeOliveria, Shin Silver, and Ruxandra Draia, Head Teachers to increase the effective use of Pyramid Model strategies to promote social and emotional development of young children through practice-based coaching. The participants completed an online course on the Pyramid Model, participated in recorded and live webinars on evidence-based coaching models (i.e., practice-based coaching), and read current research articles on the topic. Acting as coaches, the participants coached three other staff members in implementing Pyramid Model strategies in Center classroom. In addition to supporting high quality programming at the Center, this project acts as pilot for future research studies on practice-based coaching at the Center with novice staff and UNLV students.

*Family-Centered Practices for Children with Disabilities during Distance Learning and Beyond: Supporting Early Childhood Professionals (FCP & Beyond). Nevada Department of Education. \$170,479.93. 2020-2022.*

Headed by Dr. Jenna Weglarz-Ward, this project will develop virtual, multi-faceted professional development for preschool professionals from the Center and the Clark County School District to support young children

with disabilities through family-centered practices with a particular focus on how to use distance or virtual practices. Professionals will engage in synchronous learning sessions, communities of practice, and individualized action planning and consultation. Measures include changes in beliefs and practices as well as effectiveness of professional development experiences.

### **Center-Supported Research Studies**

*A Mixed Method Study on the Professional Resilience of Preschool Teachers in their Pursuit of Equity and Quality for their Students during the COVID-19* (in progress)

Dr. Katrina Liu, Teaching & Learning; Dr. Richard Miller, Music, & Dr. Claire Tredwell, UNLV/CSUN Preschool

*Effects of Eye-Movement Modeling on the Social Attention of Typically Developing Children and Children with Autism* (Dissertation, pending approval)

Catherine Bacos, Doctoral Student—Teaching & Learning; Dr. Michael McCreery, Faculty Advisor

### **Center-Supported Publications and Presentations**

Yarczower, M., Weglarz-Ward, J. M., & Tredwell, C. (2021). [Eliminating Exclusionary Practices in Early Childhood in Nevada](#). *Policy Issues in Nevada Education*, 4(1).

### **Research Advisory Council**

Dr. Jenna Weglarz-Ward, Chair, Early Childhood, Multilingual and Special Education

Dr. Claire Tredwell, Director, Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center

Catherine Bacos, Family Representative

Dr. Alain Bengochea, Early Childhood, Multilingual and Special Education

Dr. Andrew Cummings, Psychology

Dr. Erin Hannon, Psychology

Dr. Margarita Huerta, Early Childhood, Multilingual and Special Education

Dr. Sarah Jordan, Marriage Family Therapy/Behavioral Health

Dr. Dak Kopec, Architecture

Dr. Erica Marti, Civil and Environmental Engineering and Construction

Dr. Sean Mulvenon, Professor, Educational Psychology and Higher Education

Dr. Jennifer Nash, Physical Therapy

Dr. Jennifer Rennels, Psychology

### **Center Staff Accomplishments**

#### Awards and Honors

Dr. Claire Tredwell, Director—*UNLV Administrative Faculty of the Year, Honorable Mention (2021)*

Laura Callihan, Support Staff—*UNLV Classified Employee of the Month (November 2020)*

Dr. Claire Tredwell, Director—*Rose C. Engel Award for Excellence in Professional Practice, Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (2019)*

Maralisa Deguzman & TeaAsha’Nique Caldwell, Teachers—*Classified Service Award, College of Education (2019)*

### Staff Certifications Maintained 2019-2021

Center staff are certified in varied assessment tools and are registered trainers for Nevada's professional development programs. Center staff conduct multiple in-house and public training sessions for professionals and families to support early learning in the Southern Nevada community. Annually, the Center supports approximately 60 students in completing professional practicum experiences that lead to educator licensure and degree completion.

Brigance Assessment Trainers: Claire Tredwell, Mardene Wright

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)--National Certified Coach: Mardene Wright

- Infant/Toddler and Preschool Positive Climate Dimension
- Understanding Social/Emotional Classroom Supports, Classroom Organization and Instructional Supports

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale 3 Trainers: Claire Tredwell, Mardene Wright

Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS) Certified Trainers: Claire Tredwell, Mardene Wright

Math Talk Certified Trainer: Mardene Wright

Nevada Registry Approved Trainers: Yamila DeOliveira, Shin Silver, Ruxandra Draia, Eileen Quinn, Mardene Wright, Claire Tredwell

Zero to Three Approved Trainer: Ruxandra Draia

### Center Leadership Teams

- Early Childhood Special Education: Claire Tredwell, Mardene Wright, Eileen Quinn, Yamila DeOliveira, Shin Silver
- Facilitating Leadership for Inclusive Early Childhood Program Model: Claire Tredwell, Mardene Wright, Eileen Quinn
- Inclusive Curriculum Development and TSG assessment: Mardene Wright, Claire Tredwell, Yamila DeOliveira, Shin Silver, Marisol Cipres, Kimberly Crossley, Charisse Adams, Teashanique Caldwell, Maralisa Deguzman, Sharmaine Quimsing, Turia Stewart, Sarah Calkins, Ruxandra Draia
- Infant/Toddler Curriculum: Ruxandra Draia, Sarah Calkins, Maralisa DeGuzman, Turia Stewart
- Program Operations: Josie Boyle, Claire Tredwell, Mardene Wright, Eileen Quinn
- Pyramid Model Trained: Claire Tredwell, Mardene Wright, Eileen Quinn, Yamila DeOliveira, Shin Silver; National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations Fellow: Jenna Weglarz-Ward

## Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center Research Strategic Plan 2020-2025

### Center Mission

The Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center, built in 2004, was creatively envisioned, innovatively designed, and intentionally built for combining research, educator preparation, and world-class delivery of high-quality early childhood education. The Center encompasses the UNLV/CSUN Preschool and Early Childhood Assessment and Training Center. Its mission supports UNLV’s Top Tier Initiative aiming to increase high quality research, scholarship, and creative innovation to continually strengthen community partnerships.

### Center Infrastructure and Research History

The Center includes 25,000 interior sq.-ft. of multiple learning spaces for young children birth through age 5 and collaborative spaces for staff development (i.e., 12 separate classrooms, 25,000 sq.-ft. outdoor learning/play spaces, multipurpose room, family library, research lab, collaborative staff office space, conference room). The Center has a Research Advisory Council, composed of representatives from faculty, staff, families and UNLV students; the Council meets regularly to review research studies, develop strategies to enhance research activities, and support researchers throughout their study. Since opening, 22 studies have been conducted at the Center by researchers in special education, early childhood, teaching and learning, psychology and physical therapy. Half of all studies conducted have been to support graduate students in completing their dissertations or theses. The Center has pursued research collaborations with local and state entities as well. College of Education faculty, Center staff, and UNLV students have regularly distributed research findings and high-quality early childhood practices through publication and conference presentations. (*To see a [full report of past research activities](#)*)



### Center Research Objectives

The Center aims to support high quality, innovative research that examines meaningful and challenging questions in the field and address state priorities and national trends. As UNLV is one of the most diverse universities in the U.S. and is situated within the rich and diverse community of Southern Nevada, the Center takes care to address research that benefits our community’s priorities, best serves the surrounding population, and enhances the experiences of children, families, and professionals in the area. We regularly collaborate with community agencies including Clark County School District, Therapy Management Group, City of Las Vegas, and Nevada Registry.

From our past research and through relationships with community partners, we have developed research priority areas to propel the Center's research presence. As presented below, priority research topics for the Center are: (1) supporting social /emotional development of young children and addressing challenging behaviors, (2) understanding meaningful program inclusion of young children with disabilities and their families, and (3) increasing implementation of quality developmental assessment in early childhood settings. Each priority area, and select research initiatives aligned with it, are described below.

Across these priority areas, the shared mission of the Center addresses evidence-based models of professional training, family engagement, and culturally appropriate curriculum. The Center seeks to expand its capacity for cutting edge research in these priority areas and has identified the following resource needs: technological, personnel, and physical support; materials and supplies; ongoing professional development; and assistance for researchers to conducting work at the Center.

## **Research Priorities and Needs**

Social/ Emotional Learning and Addressing Challenging Behaviors: Supporting the social and emotional learning and development of young children has been identified as a critical area in state educator licensing, state strategical plans, and national initiatives. Understanding developmentally appropriate social/emotional learning serves to reduce children's challenging behavior and expulsions and suspensions in early childhood. There is a need to increase knowledge how to best train professionals across levels and families in social, emotional, and behavioral interventions for children birth to eight years old.

### **Potential research initiatives:**

- Examining effectiveness of program-wide implementation of social/emotional learning interventions.
- Implementation of innovative training models for professionals including practice-based coaching and mentoring.
- Family education on social/emotional learning and addressing challenging behaviors at home.

Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: Including children with disabilities with their peers without disabilities is beneficial for all children's learning and is the goal of local, state, and national recommendations and policy in early childhood. Meaningful inclusion however is challenging and requires professional collaboration and family engagement. The Center has been a leader in inclusive models in early care and education for Southern Nevada for decades. There is a need to replicate this model state-wide and develop products to disseminate this model widely.

### **Potential research initiatives:**

- Identifying key components to including children with disabilities in early care and education settings.
- Implementation of cross-disciplinary training models (e.g., special education, general education, speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy) to increase the inclusion of young children with disabilities.
- Examining the needs specific to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

Quality Assessment of Young Children: Assessment in early childhood is essential to providing high-quality experiences. Regular developmental screening and assessment is essential to meeting the needs of young children including using screening to identify children in need of further evaluation for special education and guiding instruction and curriculum. There is a need to revitalize our Early Childhood Assessment Center so that research in this area can be implemented.

**Potential research initiatives:**

- Examining the effectiveness of transdisciplinary play-based assessment to inform instruction of young children and identify children in need to evaluation for specialized services.
- Implementing in-depth training models to increase professionals’ appropriate and reliable use of current assessment tools.
- Understanding assessment processes for multilingual children and their families.

**Research Infrastructure Needs**

To address these research priority areas and needs, the following types of research infrastructure have substantial financial support needs.

Technological Needs

- *Database development and management*—to systematically organize and maintain regularly collected data at the Center to allow for researchers to examine Center data cross-sectionally and longitudinally. Costs include purchase and maintenance of software.  
Estimated costs: \$5,000
- *Comprehensive video and audio systems*—to install and maintain a secure, Center-wide video and audio system to allow researchers and students to unobtrusively and/or remotely observe early childhood classrooms.  
Estimated costs: \$25,000

Personnel Needs

- *Center Research Director*—a full-time faculty to oversee research activities at the Center including recruitment and management of studies, development and implementation studies, mentoring of student researchers, seeking external funding, and disseminating Center activities through local, state, and national publications and presentations.  
Estimated costs: \$90,0000 annually
- *Center Graduate Assistants*— consistent support for research and curricular activities at the Center through graduate-level assistants. These assistants would provide assistance including study management, recruitment activities, supervisor of student teachers and undergraduate researchers, and grant writing.  
Estimated costs: \$55,000 per graduate assistant annually

Physical Space Needs

- *Increased Program Space*—in order to broaden the scope of research and provide excellent, quality programming to meet the demand of a wider demographic in the community, the preschool needs additional classroom and activity space with physical research space (e.g., observation rooms, lab space).  
Estimated initial costs: New construction on UNLV property: \$10,000,000 or leased space: \$500,000

- *Early Childhood Assessment Lab*—in addition to having updated assessment materials, there is a need to establish a dedicated space for novice professionals and students observe and practice assessment activities. Funding in this area would support physical areas of the Center to be transformed for UNLV classes and training for professionals in Southern Nevada to practice assessment skills with young children and their families in typical early childhood environments. Estimated costs: \$5,000

### Materials and Supply Needs

- *Current assessment materials*—in order to train professionals and conduct reliable research, the most current assessment materials are required. There is an urgent need to update and expand materials of the Early Childhood Assessment Center which has need received updates since 2014. Current assessment materials more appropriately address the needs of diverse children and families and may be available in multiple languages. Assessment materials include physical copies of implementation manuals, assessment protocols, and scoring forms; software programs to analyze and store data; and purchase of specified assessment materials (e.g., children’s books, toys).  
Estimated Costs: \$10,000 biennially
- *Curricula and instructional materials*—to examine the implementation of evidence-based practices, curricula need to be maintained and materials purchased as needed to support instruction. Curricula materials include physical copies of published curricula and their supporting materials (e.g., children’s books, toys, consumable materials such as paper, paint, writing materials).  
Estimated costs: \$10,000

### Training and Professional Development Needs

- *Professional development activities*—to integrate research into the Center’s mission of professional training and to support innovative and valid research activities, there is a need to (1) participate in professional development for our staff, students, and faculty and (2) develop and evaluate training and professional development in early childhood education. Funding in this area would support the certification of faculty and staff in assessment tools required for high-quality research and training; certification in professional training models such as coaching and mentoring; and participation in evidence-based training cohort to stay current on early childhood practices across Research Priority Areas.  
Estimated costs: \$10,000 annually
- *Family and community education*—to further support the Center’s commitment to the Southern Nevada community, there is a need to support training for families and community partners on Research Priorities. Funding in this area would support the (1) development of training events for families of young children, community members, and professionals outside of UNLV; and (2) expenses related to hosting training events at the Centers (e.g., facility costs, trainer fees, technology for presentations, training materials (e.g., handouts, books), refreshments, childcare).  
Estimated costs: \$5000 annually

### Research Scalability Needs

- *LBECEC Research Fellowship Program*, The Center requires research affiliates to fulfill its mission aligned with the aforementioned priority research areas and needs. The LBECEC Research Fellowship Program is designed as a competitive seed funding opportunity to support high-quality graduate students and UNLV faculty to serve as research fellows for one academic year through the Center. Graduate students would be provided with up to \$2,500 per project and faculty would be provided with \$5,000 per project. Funding will be used to support research activities including: research costs for materials and measures; data analysis support including software and research assistance; participant recruitment and incentives; professional development; and dissemination activities. Fellows would engage in the following competitions:
  - *Applied research mini-grants*—these grants focus on research activities aligned with Center’s Research Priorities and research questions that address the practical application of early childhood practices with young children birth to 5 years old.
  - *Community engagement mini-grants*—these grants focus on research that actively involves community partners in the research process to address questions related to the diverse, multi-cultural community of Southern Nevada.

Estimated costs: \$15,000 annually

### **Interested in conducting research at the Lynn Bennett Early Childhood Education Center?**

See our [website](#) or contact us at [preschoolresearch@unlv.edu](mailto:preschoolresearch@unlv.edu)