Developing an Expert Model for Bilingual Learners

Educators have a number of expert models in traditional subject areas, but lack an expert model for bilingual language skills. “All too often, we see bilingualism as a hindrance rather than as a community strength,” said Professor María Carlo, Department of Teaching and Learning (TAL). “I believe that a deficit perspective is limiting how much progress we can make in this field; it is essential that we develop a model for expert performance.”

Since joining the School of Education faculty in 2002, Carlo has focused her research on the development of literacy skills in bilingual children and students.
Understanding the Human Metabolism

Professor Kevin Allen Jacobs, Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences (KIN), studies the impact of exercise intensity, nutrition, training, and other variables on the human metabolism.

“I’m now conducting a pilot study on whether an exercise regimen can improve the metabolic functioning of victims of spinal cord injuries,” said Jacobs, who joined the School’s faculty in 2004. “Most metabolic studies have been conducted on healthy individuals. I believe there is significant potential to help people with spinal injuries, who often gain weight and suffer from related health problems due to inactivity.”

Drawing on the resources of the School’s Laboratory of Clinical & Applied Physiology, Jacobs’ research has involved men and women of various ages and levels of fitness. He recently completed a two-year study on the effect of sildenafil citrate (sold as Viagra) on cardiovascular hemodynamics in both genders. Prior studies conducted at high altitudes – about 15,000 feet – found that sildenafil could improve blood flow to the lungs, thus increasing exercise capacity and performance, he said. “We tested the drug on 60 subjects at the simulated altitudes of 13,000, and 7,000 feet, and found no benefit at all,” he said.

For 2011, Jacobs is planning another pilot study on whether preischemic conditioning can affect exercise performance at sea level and at a simulated high altitude.

Jacobs is a member of the American College of Sports Medicine. His research involves basic measurements such as the analysis of respiratory gas exchange, and concentrations of various blood metabolites and hormones, to more complex measurements of substrate turnover by stable isotope infusion and analysis.

“We spend enormous energy helping to treat people who are obese, but we don’t talk a lot about the multiple causes,” said Syme at the University of Miami’s recent Global Business Forum. “We need to pay more attention to prevention and we need to change the national culture about obesity.”

In keeping with its mission of promoting personal, organizational, and community well-being, the School of Education presented a special panel on January 13 at the forum on “Promoting Wellness and Preventing Obesity: Public Private Partnerships.” To reinforce the message, exercise physiology students from the School of Education’s Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences provided health and fitness screening prior to the panel discussion.

Moderated by Dean Isaac Prilleltensky, the Erwin and Barbara Mautner Chair in Community Well-Being, the panel discussion explored how effective partnerships can help prevent obesity and promote wellness. “When we partner with other entities, we understand the importance of taking it slowly and doing it right,” he said.

In his opening remarks to the overflow audience, Prilleltensky noted that about two-thirds of American adults and about a third of American children are overweight or obese. “Our country spends almost $150 billion every year treating obesity-related diseases, most of which are preventable,” he said.

Panelist Arlette Perry, professor and chair, Department of Kinesiology and Sport Sciences, School of Education, called for a comprehensive approach to attacking childhood obesity. “Forget genetics or the environment,” she said. “It’s everything, from sitting at a computer to advertisements on TV, to cutbacks in physical education in school. We have to look at all the aspects.” Perry recently developed the School of Education’s THINK program (Translational Health in Nutrition and Kinesiology) to engage students on multiple levels. “THINK is all about empowerment, letting kids make intelligent decisions about their health,” she said. “As we did weight training, we showed them metabolic charts so they could see what was happening in their bodies. When they ran sprints or long-distance races, we showed them changes in their lactate levels. We had them bring in a favorite food and identify all the sugars and fats in the label. It gets students, and their families, involved with their health.” Perry concluded her remarks by noting that new coalitions and novel cooperative ventures are essential in the fight against obesity.

Barbara Kahn, PhD., former dean of the School of Business Administration, pointed to the importance of packaging and branding in influencing consumer food choices. “For marketers, perceptions are more important than reality,” she said. “Now, just imagine what would happen if marketers were motivated to make you eat healthier, like marketing carrots as junk food,” she added. “That can really nudge those perceptions.”

Another panelist, Chef Michel Nischan, chief executive officer and president of Wholesome Wave, focused on helping residents of impoverished urban neighborhoods make healthy food choices. “It takes both access and affordability,” he said. “You can’t just put in a big-box grocery story without looking at the economic factors as well. Someone who has only $2 to spend on dinner will buy an inexpensive cup of noodle soup for her family rather than expensive fresh fruit or broccoli.”

Through his foundation, Nischan launched a “Double Wave Coupon Program” offering twice the value of food stamps when used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmers markets. “That means more servings of healthy foods for families and increased agricultural production for farmers,” he added. “We want to show that food can be a measurable means of preventing problems and promoting wellness.”

America’s overweight children have “an energy gap,” according to Richie Woodworth, president of Saucony, Inc. and president of the board of the Saucony Run for Good Foundation, which assists community organizations that promote running and healthy lifestyle programs for youth.

Citing a recent study by the American Medical Association, Woodworth said 70 percent of obese teens remained obese as adults, resulting in long-term health problems and higher health costs.
Research: A Key to Fulfilling Our Mission

A vigorous and growing research program is one of the keys to fulfilling our School’s mission of promoting educational, psychological, and physical well-being in multicultural communities.

As a major research institution in one of the nation’s most diverse metropolitan areas, the University of Miami is well situated to make important contributions to our understanding of critically important educational and social issues.

Currently, we have a number of grant-funded research initiatives underway in our three departments: Teaching and Learning, Kinesiology and Sport Sciences, and Educational and Psychological Studies. This issue of Perspective focuses on several of those projects, and also profiles two of our School’s researchers, María Carlo and Kevin Jacobs.

In addition, this issue highlights our exciting new master’s program in Community and Social Change – another indication that our School is in the forefront of the dynamic intersection of community psychology and social activism. I am confident that graduates of this program will make significant contributions to organizational development, community development, and social well-being in diverse multicultural environments.

In this issue you will also read about the School of Education’s panel at UM’s Global Business Forum. A standing room only audience heard from researchers about the vital topic of promoting wellness and preventing obesity.

Finally, I would like to thank our many donors and partners for their support. We have accomplished a great deal in the past few years and look forward to even greater achievements in the future. Best wishes for a wonderful year.

Dean Isaac Prilleltensky
Erwin and Barbara Mautner Chair in Community Well-Being

TED Talks
Dean Isaac Prilleltensky was an inaugural speaker for TEDxMIA, an extension of the famous TED talks that invite creative thinkers to spread their ideas. His talk can be viewed at the following link:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJlx8CI-rRg

About Our Mark

The University of Miami School of Education is organized into three departments:

• Teaching and Learning (TAL), which fosters intellectual and educational development
• Educational and Psychological Studies (EPS), which focuses on emotional health and psychological factors
• Kinesiology and Sport Sciences (KIN), which promotes physical wellness, fitness, and sport
Community and Social Change Program: Preparing Tomorrow’s Leaders

With the launch of its Community and Social Change master’s degree program, the School of Education is taking another step forward in promoting community well-being.

“Our goal is to prepare globally aware leaders, researchers, and agents of change with the knowledge and skills to foster well-being in diverse multicultural communities,” said Professor Laura Kohn-Wood, director of the program offered by the School’s Department of Educational and Psychological Studies (EPS).

Professor Scot Evans is one of the teachers in the inaugural student cohort, which includes executive directors of non-profits, lawyers, Teach for America and Peace Corps alumni, as well as life-long community workers.

“As someone who has worked in non-profits for well over a decade, I am excited to be learning theories and disciplines that will inform and shape the future of my career as well as my approach to work,” said Noah Youngstrom, recruitment director, City Year Miami, an international non-profit AmeriCorps program that focuses on the nation’s high school drop-out crisis.

Amy Rubinson, director of the Miami Museum of Science’s Upward Bound math and science program, said the master’s degree program is providing both practical and theoretical knowledge that will assist her in working with disadvantaged students.

Partnersing with the Peace Corps

The University of Miami and the Peace Corps recently signed a memorandum of cooperation that will enable Peace Corps Master’s International Program participants to earn a Master of Science degree in Community and Social Change through the School of Education. Peace Corps volunteers meeting university admission requirements will complete 27 credit hours on campus as a complement to their Peace Corps service.

“As a former Peace Corps volunteer, I am personally aware of the value of service and global understanding,” said UM president, Donna E. Shalala. “The goals of Peace Corps align very well with the University’s core values and our mission to provide students with the foundations for ethical citizenship and service to others.”

Since 1961, 357 University of Miami alumni have joined Peace Corps. This year, UM ranks 15th on the annual national rankings of top Peace Corps volunteer producing schools, with 23 undergraduate and four graduate students currently serving.
DOE Grant Will Enhance Teachers’ Preparation for Inclusive Classrooms

A five-year $1.4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) will help the School’s Department of Teaching and Learning (TAL) revamp its curriculum and implement a course of study to empower elementary and secondary school teachers to serve children with various learning, behavioral, and developmental disabilities.

“Over the years, school systems have become more inclusive,” said Elizabeth Harry, TAL professor and chair. “They expect kids with a range of learning difficulties to be included in general classrooms.”

The Department of Teaching and Learning is one of nine such departments in schools of education across the country to be awarded this funding for the 2010-2015 period. The grant will fund the school’s new Project INCLUDE (Inclusive, Collaborative Leaders United for Diversity in Education), which will allow TAL to graduate teachers who can effectively teach, support, and provide effective programs for special-needs students in their classroom. The ultimate goal of the program is to graduate prospective teachers with dual certifications in special education and general education.

During the first year of the grant, TAL’s curriculum will be restructured to train future teachers to identify needs, provide positive support to students, and utilize divergent methods of teaching students with high incidence disabilities. These could range from attention deficit disorder to speech delays and difficulty in subjects such as reading or math. A major objective of the curriculum will be to equip future teachers with the knowledge and skills to utilize Response to Intervention, or RTI, in accordance with accepted national and local models.

As part of the grant, professors from the College of Arts and Sciences will collaborate with TAL faculty to ensure a high caliber of content area instruction, according to Harry. Learning how to instruct children who come from underserved and diverse communities is also part of the new project.

Additionally, the grant will provide workshops for School of Education professors to access new technology programs designed to assess and instruct students from culturally diverse environments. Representatives from cooperating Miami-Dade County Public Schools, where teachers in training are placed for field service, will also participate in these workshops.

Improving Mathematical Literacy

Although mathematical knowledge is vital to success in secondary schooling and beyond, multilingual students in fourth and eighth grade continue to show an ever-growing achievement gap when compared to their white monolingual peers, according to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

To address this gap, the School of Education recently received a grant to develop a Language in Math (LiM) intervention to increase upper elementary and middle-school English language learners’ knowledge of the academic language that is used in math (M-AL) as well as to enhance teachers’ ability to teach mathematics to English Language Learners or ELLs.

“We are excited to blend two distinct disciplines – mathematics and linguistics – to investigate how language may impact mathematical understanding and achievement, particularly for English learners,” said Professor (story continues on page 15)
Promoting Science Among English Language Learners

Through a partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS), the School of Education is aiming to improve science achievement in fifth-graders, especially English language learners. The Promoting Science among English Language Learners (P-SELL) Efficacy and Sustainability project is a four-year project funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education.

Professors Okhee Lee, Randall Penfield, and their team are working with Miami-Dade schools to evaluate the efficacy of the fifth-grade P-SELL science curriculum, which engages students in scientific inquiry as a major tool in the understanding of key science concepts. P-SELL is also designed to prepare students to perform well on the state-administered fifth-grade FCAT Science assessment.

After one year of planning, the project is currently being implemented at 32 randomly selected elementary schools. These schools are using the fifth grade P-SELL science curriculum for two years, and will sustain the intervention for one year with limited support. A control group of 32 schools is using the standard science curriculum adopted by the school district.

The fifth grade science teachers in the treatment group receive curriculum materials and science supplies, professional development workshops to help teachers implement the curriculum, and school-site support. P-SELL focuses on three areas:

- Reform-oriented practices to promote students’ scientific inquiry and understanding
- Science instruction with English language learners to enhance understanding of science and acquisition of English language and literacy
- State science content standards

At the end of each school year, an evaluation of the impact of P-SELL on student achievement will be conducted by comparing FCAT Science scores of fifth grade students in the treatment group with those of fifth grade students in the control group. P-SELL is a collaborative project with the school district across many aspects, including curriculum development, teacher professional development, school selection, and school-site support.
To help fight the “insidious disease” of racism, the School of Education hosted its third annual Day of Dialogue for teachers, parents, community leaders, and community members on October 30. The goal was to provide individuals with fresh perspectives and new tools for reaching students in the classroom.

“We want to partner with Miami-Dade schools to address the needs of students, teachers, and parents, while seeking to improve tolerance and understanding in our community,” said Guerda Nicolas, professor and chair, Department of Educational and Psychological Studies (EPS). “This annual event allows us to share our experiences and perspectives to see how we can move forward together.”

Emily Gunter, educational training manager for Urgent, Inc. and founder of the Rites of Passage Youth Empowerment Foundation, engaged attendees with a series of exercises demonstrating the subtle effects of racism and how to let go of outdated belief systems. “We can change the way students learn,” she said, “and everyone has something to contribute to that process. We want our children to be free of the disease of racism so we can live together in peace.”

Carlo is co-principal investigator on a NICHD/OERI funded study on the transfer of reading skills from Spanish to English among 4th and 5th grade students. She was also co-principal investigator of a similar study among 2nd and 3rd grade students. “We want to identify the skills that underlie reading in bilinguals who are fluent in both languages,” she said. “To what extent are their cognitive skills different than mono-language learners?”

Another line of research is focused on optimizing the development of English language vocabulary. “One thing we know from the literature is that children who are English language learners catch up to their peers fairly quickly on reading skills that involve phonological awareness and decoding – sounding out and reading words,” she said. “But they do not catch up in terms of comprehending text at a higher level, perhaps because vocabulary is not a strong component of the curricula. I believe we need to make learning vocabulary more of a priority so English language learners can catch up to their peers.”

Carlo has served on the editorial advisory board of Reading Research Quarterly and Contemporary Educational Psychology, and is a member of the American Educational Research Association, International Reading Association, National Consortium on Instruction and Cognition, and Society for the Scientific Study of Reading. Her current professional articles include “Depth and Breadth of Vocabulary in Two Languages: Which Skills Transfer,” in Journal of Educational Psychology, and “The Assessment of Levels of Domain Expertise While Reading” in Cognition & Instruction.

Like other faculty members, Carlo appreciates the support of the School’s Dunspaugh-Dalton Foundation Community and Educational Well-Being (CEW) Research Center. (http://cew.miami.edu/)

“The center is helpful in many ways, from providing space to work with my doctoral students to assistance with grant proposals, and technical support for refinement of statistical methodologies,” she said.
Fostering Alumni Connections

From guiding the work of a violence-prevention institute, to helping children cope with loss, to counseling families, graduates of the School’s Department of Educational and Psychological Studies (EPS) are making a difference in the South Florida community.

On October 29, Guerda Nicolas, professor and chair, EPS, welcomed alumni for a breakfast get-together that highlighted the work of its graduates. “It is a pleasure to provide our alumni with an opportunity to reconnect with each other,” she said. “There is a lot of synergy and opportunities for collaboration in our group.”

Dean Isaac Prilleltensky told attendees about the School’s Dunspaugh-Dalton Foundation Community and Educational Well-Being (CEW) Research Center. “I believe we are in the vanguard of the university’s efforts to reach out to the community,” he said. “If you go to our research center’s website, http://cew.miami.edu/ you can learn more about our active partnerships with area organizations.”

Professor Etiony Aldarondo, director of the CEW center, urged alumni to reach out to the School if they would like assistance in projects that promote community well-being. “We’ll see how to match your interests with our resources and create structures for moving forward,” he said.

Featured alumni speakers were Suzanne Keeley, Ph.D., president, The Melissa Institute; Mindy Cassell, Ph.D., executive director, Children’s Bereavement Center; Felicia Adler, LMHC, chief executive officer, Family Counseling Services of Greater Miami, Inc.; and Patricia Whitely, Ed.D., vice president, Division of Student Affairs, University of Miami.

“It is a pleasure to provide our alumni with an opportunity to reconnect with each other. There is a lot of synergy and opportunities for collaboration in our group.”

– Guerda Nicolas

Above: Alumni and faculty of EPS reconnect at the October 24th meeting.

Far left: Speaker Suzanne Keeley with Dean Prilleltensky at the EPS event.

Left: Mindy Cassel, Executive Director of Children’s Bereavement Center addresses the group.
Teaching Runs in the Family

With the support of a special program for Cuban teachers, Aida Peruyera, B.Ed. 1973, enjoyed a long career in the Miami-Dade Public School District, while raising two children who also earned degrees from the University of Miami.

“I came to the United States in 1962, after spending more than three months in the Mexican embassy in Havana,” said Peruyera. “Castro didn’t want teachers to leave the country.” In fact, Peruyera’s parents had 13 children, of whom ten became teachers.

“I started working here as a teacher’s aide down in Homestead,” Peruyera recalled. “I didn’t have a car, so another university student had to give me rides to class. I was very proud to graduate from the University of Miami with honors.”

She then became a classroom teacher, a curriculum development specialist, and returned to teaching before retiring in 1992 from Riverside Elementary School. “I loved every moment of my career,” she said. Along the way, Peruyera raised a family. Her daughter Teresita Figueras, B.Ed. ’74, also became a Miami-Dade teacher and her late son Rafael Peruyera earned a bachelor’s degree from the School of Architecture.

Institute Provides Support for New Teachers

Under the guidance of Professor Joyce Corces, Teaching and Learning, the School’s Support Network for Teachers held its 10th annual Summer Institute in August. New first-year teachers provided assistance in preparing themselves for the school year. Professor Anita Mienbach offered second-year participants the opportunity to become certified as Clinical Teachers, and National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) teachers helped young colleagues learn about the National Board process. Topics discussed included professional responsibilities, planning and managing the classroom and students, and encouraging a healthy learning environment.
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Mary Avalos, Teaching and Learning. “This pioneering work will address a range of needs – from teacher knowledge of language in math, to instructional practice, to assessment of academic language that many struggling students do not come to school with or learn implicitly.”

For instance, ELL students will often draw upon their knowledge of “everyday” or conversational English knowledge that is not always sufficient when trying to communicate about or comprehend mathematics. Research also indicates that mathematical tasks are needlessly complicated by linguistic features that, if simplified, would allow students to better demonstrate their competence in mathematics.

“By focusing on the linguistic barriers to teaching mathematics and assessing the mathematical academic language knowledge of English language learners, we will create a model professional-development program and instructional intervention for teachers of ELL students, thereby having social and educational impact,” said Avalos.