

Summary of Professional Contributions and Scholarship

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“In the long term, how one interacts with change is the difference between surviving and thriving in one’s personal life, family life, or one’s work or business life. ~ Sharon Danes, professor, University of Minnesota

UW-Extension family living educators are charged to “increase the families’ abilities to adapt to and effect change.” When I started working for UW-Extension in 2001, the Dodge County family living educator interacted with the community predominantly through direct teaching. Dodge faced complex problems that required comprehensive solutions and significant change. Anticipating change instead of resisting change and working cooperatively instead of working alone prepares people to adapt to and effect change—people become the instrument of change rather than its object. To meet the UW-Extension charge and address the challenges faced by our children and families, I committed myself to moving from a didactic approach to one that included significant community involvement.

This was a pivotal time in the history of the Dodge County family living program. To improve the quality of family life, I not only provided classes and education materials, I worked to build county-wide awareness about the issues faced by our residents and to develop community partnerships to address these issues. To maximize the input of each partnership, I sought to engage community leaders, agencies, and colleagues by building coalitions and strengthening community organizations. To cultivate the synergy needed to accomplish far-reaching and complex goals, I asked Dodge families, businesses, and leaders to work together with me as a community to effect change. In the process, the role of the Dodge County family living educator has changed and so have I. While I continue to be an effective teacher in the classroom and an increasingly competent researcher, writer, and presenter, I have significantly enhanced my scope, effectiveness, and impact as an educator by involving families and community leaders in their own education and change process.

Shortly after assuming the position of family living educator, I conducted informal interviews with key community members. These community members viewed childcare and parenting, personal financial needs, and changing ethnic demographics as Dodge County’s most significant areas of concern. To begin to meet these concerns, I focused my programming efforts on two high priorities: a) promoting child development, and b) promoting respect for diversity.

Promoting Child Development

Coalition Development

Research from the National Research Council shows that quality childcare is a critical component to raising children who can succeed when they enter kindergarten and who can build on that success to become competent adults. In 2001, childcare was a \$10 million annual business in Dodge County and its quality was critical to economic development, but few agencies were engaged in discussing or working towards its improvement. I initiated a meeting with the administrator of Moraine Park Technical College and together we called key childcare agencies and providers to form the Dodge County Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force (Task Force). I chaired the Task Force’s monthly meetings.

To effectively transform the community’s understanding of quality childcare, a comprehensive approach involving multiple partners was required. I recognized that childcare center directors would be key to improving the quality of childcare and so urged the Task Force to develop a network of education and support for directors now called the Director’s Caucus (Caucus). In the first year, I presented educational

programs to develop trust and build a cooperative working structure. Although I thought as leaders of their childcare centers that it would be appropriate for the directors to lead the Caucus, they were hesitant to lead their peers. In the second year, I agreed to co-facilitate the Caucus by leading the meetings, identifying goals, presenting educational programs, and arranging for other speakers. In that role I worked to build the directors' leadership skills. Matching their strengths with leadership skills, I encouraged directors to volunteer and delegated one task at a time with a short timeline. Directors built their confidence, met the needs of the group, and improved their centers by teaching each other, sharing resources, pursuing educational goals, and arranging outside speakers. Twelve to 20 childcare directors from inside and outside the county attended the monthly meetings. Most importantly the Caucus established a home base for childcare directors. One co-owner and director told the group, "For years I attended classes and meetings in both counties and never felt welcomed by either county. Not now. I am proud to be a part of this Director's Caucus and have my business in Dodge County."

Throughout the first year, the members of the Task Force built their sense of community connectedness with each other. In 2002, I modified the UW-Extension Community Group Member Survey to evaluate the Task Force (**exhibit 1**). The survey results indicated that members wanted to improve the group's effectiveness. This evaluation provided the starting point when I led the group in strategic planning and setting goals for the following year. I have also chaired committees for the Kid's Share Fair and Child Care Providers' Appreciation.

To address another component in Dodge County's comprehensive need for improved quality childcare—educating parents and policymakers—I authored a three-part series entitled "Piecing Together the Child Care Puzzle" for the Parent Resource Place newsletter, in which I discussed affordability, accessibility, and quality as key components. I linked Dodge County data with research to explain the reality of childcare issues facing young families. The following year I updated the statistics, combined the three articles into one, and submitted it for publication in the *Beaver Dam Daily Citizen* (**exhibit 2**). My peers demonstrated how they valued this series by honoring it with a first place Written News Communication Award from the Wisconsin Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. I reached even broader audiences when I was invited to be the guest speaker on *Public Report* (WWRS-TV) and *Community Comment* (WBEV-AM). In addition I addressed the political side of quality childcare by establishing crucial communication with public policymakers about the business of childcare and why quality childcare was so critical to the economic success of the county. I developed and gave a PowerPoint presentation to both the mayor of Beaver Dam and to the Dodge County Board of Supervisors (**exhibit 3**). As a result quality childcare was identified as a county issue as well as a family issue. In June 2005 a Task Force member described Dodge County's accomplishments at the Madison and Waukesha area meeting of the Department of Workforce Development. Our work advocating for quality childcare was showcased as a model of a comprehensive collaborative community effort.

I found the four-year process of building the Task Force a significant challenge. As budgets were shrinking and resources were re-allocated, Task Force members frequently changed and decreased in number. Agencies were reluctant to commit resources to the mission of the Task Force when agenda items did not directly impact their organization. To evaluate and determine future programming efforts, I redistributed the Group Member Survey in 2005 (**exhibit 4**). When I presented the results of the survey, the Beaver Dam Kid's Care director reflected the value of the group's personal and professional accomplishments by saying, "In just four years, the things we've done are pretty grand!" The accomplishments reached beyond the capacity of any individual member organization.

Education for Childcare Providers and Parents

The most important single element in providing higher quality care for children is the person providing the care. Providers with more education have higher quality interactions with children than providers with less education. In 2001, Dodge County childcare providers expressed frustration with the lack of

affordable and easily accessible childcare classes to obtain continuing education. Concurrently with collaborative activities, I taught classes for childcare providers.

Nan Baumgartner, Fond du Lac County UW-Extension family living educator, and I started team teaching classes in 2001 at Quad Care, a childcare center. We used the recently published *The Whole Child* video series and curriculum. The research-based content was appropriate for childcare providers, and we augmented the series by developing interactive and practical applications to capture the providers' attention and build on their existing knowledge of children. I developed the promotional materials and the first class exceeded our expectations with an overwhelming attendance of 42 childcare providers. One family provider expressed her gratitude: "I want to thank you for *coming to us* to teach classes. In the past I've had to drive for almost 45 minutes to attend a class. Valuing my time and energy after a long day of teaching is a gift that I appreciate."

Before each of the 13 monthly classes in *The Whole Child* series, Baumgartner and I built the teaching outline during telephone conferences. I took the lead to develop and present "Developing Thinking and Reasoning Skills" (**exhibit 5**). Childcare providers experienced emergent learning, a process that allows the learner, not the teacher, to lead the learning process and make choices on what and how they wanted to learn. "Developing Thinking and Reasoning Skills" was taught in September 2002 to childcare providers at both Quad Care and Willow's Christian Child Care Center. I designed the end of session evaluation to assess the knowledge gained and identify what the providers intended to do to encourage creative thinking and develop emergent learning (**exhibit 6**). Attendees gained knowledge, reflected on the value of the material, and identified immediate strategies to apply their knowledge.

The most consistent, significant contribution I offered childcare providers was to teach a variety of research-based classes throughout Dodge County each year. My 2003 class schedule illustrates the breadth and depth of my work (**exhibit 7**). In 2003, however, I identified the salient challenge as how to adapt the child development research to the immediate and specific needs of each audience. When I was again invited to present 13 sessions of *The Whole Child* in Beaver Dam, I altered my role from teacher to facilitator of the classes, sharing education responsibilities with the providers and directors. At the conclusion of *The Whole Child* series, I asked the directors to identify the changes that had resulted from this intense staff education (**exhibit 8**). The most evident and long-lasting skills teachers gained were increased willingness to listen to children before jumping in to solve problems, using positive language and encouragement, and facilitating problem solving. Directors' responses reflected the difficulty of sustaining permanent change. Teachers were receptive to applying new knowledge and practicing new techniques, but sustained changes in teaching skill or interactions only after multiple repetitions.

I disseminate UW-Extension research-based child development information to parents by teaching parenting classes and by providing *Parenting the First Year*, a monthly newsletter, and *Parenting the Second and Third Year* (PSTY), a bimonthly newsletter. The Kiwanis and Beaver Dam Community Hospital have financially supported the newsletters for the past 12 years, but the impact and usefulness of PSTY had never been evaluated. I organized the evaluation process, mailed the evaluation form to parents, and analyzed their responses. UW-Extension specialists and I cooperatively wrote an evaluation of PSTY (**exhibit 9**). The results showed that this long-standing community collaboration contributed to children's health, safety, nutrition, and overall development. I shared the results with the local Kiwanis clubs in Dodge County and with the public through a series of five newspaper articles in the *Beaver Dam Daily Citizen* (**exhibit 10**). Providing evaluation data to community collaborators strengthens their support of UW-Extension community education programs.

County efforts to improve quality childcare received support when Governor Doyle proposed the Quality Care for Quality Kids program in January 2005. The proposed two-tiered Quality Rating System (QRS) would rate the childcare centers and provide higher amounts of state reimbursement money for higher quality childcare. I moved quality childcare to the fast track and taught eight sessions of QRS to childcare

directors, providers, and Dodge County Human Services staff. UW-Extension childcare specialists analyzed pre- and post-tests to identify the change of attitudes and determine knowledge gained during the classes. Attendees developed significant positive changes in attitudes, knowledge, and understanding of the QRS. I presented a summary of the classes and the outcomes to the Agriculture and Extension Education Committee of the Dodge County Board of Supervisors (**exhibit 11**). To determine the actual changes made to improve childcare quality, I sent the directors who attended the first QRS class a survey three months later. The responses indicated that the directors valued the information I provided and responded quickly to the proposed QRS. The greatest commitment to increasing quality childcare was demonstrated by the childcare directors themselves. They requested that Moraine Park Technical College offer six three-credit classes locally so they could obtain the Administrative Credential in one year rather than the typical three-year format. An Administrative Credential provides childcare directors with the background information to more effectively and efficiently operate a childcare center. It was identified as one component of quality for group childcare centers by the QRS. Twenty-two directors and teachers completed the first three-credit class held in Beaver Dam in June 2005.

After attending the QRS class, a caseworker for Dodge County Human Services requested guidelines for low-income families searching for quality childcare. She thought the brochure she was using was too wordy, so many parents did not read the materials. I developed a new brochure “Looking for Quality Child Care?” with a checklist, short questions, and simple explanations (**exhibit 12**). We circulated the brochure throughout the county at childcare centers, hospitals, doctors’ offices, and community agencies. The caseworker who originally requested the brochure said, “This is something my clients will use!” My leadership with the Dodge County Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force and the Director’s Caucus, teaching classes for childcare providers, and my knowledge of the Quality Care for Quality Kids program established UW-Extension as the county resource for childcare education.

Contributions to the University

Prior to the public announcement of Quality Care for Quality Kids, I joined UW-Extension colleagues to develop introductory QRS materials for statewide family living educators and childcare professionals. Curriculum Resources for QRS is a resource link from the internal UW-Extension Family Living Web site organized to provide workshop materials for QRS educators (**exhibit 13**). I wrote two fables to introduce the trainings and stimulate the thinking of the attendees (**exhibit 14**). I also wrote two case studies so providers could determine the star rating that hypothetical centers would receive (**exhibit 15**). I presented the fables and case studies to family living educators at the Family Living UW-Extension Wisline in February 2005. They are posted on the UW-Extension Family Living Web site at <https://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/apps/flrc/intres/qualityrating.cfm>. I shared my Dodge County training experiences at the train-the-trainer session in April 2005, teaching 120 educators throughout the state. As a result, 34 classes on QRS have been taught in 17 counties throughout Wisconsin to 627 childcare providers and educators.

My work to develop a comprehensive program of quality childcare in Dodge County has prepared me to contribute to the UW-Extension Family Living state team, “Building Community Connections with Families.” As a member of the subcommittee “Early Childhood Education,” I am developing a new curriculum for childcare providers, “Connecting with Families in Early Care and Education.” I will pilot this five-session teaching curriculum in Dodge County and we will offer it statewide to family living educators in 2006.

Promoting Respect for Diversity

Coalition Development

The initial 2000 U.S. Census data became available in early 2001, and the changing demographics of Dodge County were uppermost in people’s minds. As I extended an invitation for Dodge County

community members to attend the UW-Extension Hispanic Needs Assessment in West Bend, I became aware of the readiness of community members to serve the growing Latino population. Several organizations, including UW-Extension, made preliminary steps to serve the Latino population but were unaware of each other's efforts and frustrated by the lack of resources. Dodge County organizations and agencies had few bilingual employees able to contact and communicate with Spanish-speaking families. Communication was limited to an occasional brochure and a quarterly newsletter jointly produced by four counties and supported locally by the Dodge County Health Department and United Way. I called community members and agencies that had an interest in serving Latino families. One call led to another call or another contact, and in mid-year I brought together the Dodge County Multi-Cultural Coalition (DCMCC).

At that time UW-Extension had few resources to assist me in this area of programming. I was learning about the Latino culture and learning from my mistakes. I organized the initial meetings that were held at a Mexican restaurant so everyone felt comfortable. Time had a different meaning in the Latino culture, and I learned to allow extra time for conversation and refreshments before working on a project. I learned that building trust required many meetings, but once achieved lasted a lifetime. I volunteered one Saturday to help prepare food for a migrant worker's festival. The Latina women expressed appreciation for my help that day, but more than three years later when I was looking for assistance, one woman reminded me, "You helped us with the food. I'll do anything to help you." My community contacts opened doors and developed long-lasting support for UW-Extension.

Latino families were navigating a patchwork of healthcare. They needed more effective communication to seek and receive quality medical care. As chair of the Minority Health Mini-Grant ad hoc committee, I authored the grant proposal "Communication Is Access" that creatively integrated cultural knowledge of Hispanic medical care with the acquisition of Spanish language skills by medical providers (**exhibit 16**). A summary of the grant's impact showed the involvement of 82 people committed to improving communication with Latino families and their access to healthcare (**exhibit 17**). Increasing communication is an ongoing process toward more equitable healthcare, and several clinics and medical offices have since offered similar programs.

The DCMCC community projects and county demographics were highlighted in the 2003 promotional and recruitment brochure (**exhibit 18**). As DCMCC chair for the first three years and now co-chair, I have witnessed the changes in members of the organization. As they learned about themselves and became comfortable with diversity, they developed positive working relationships with others. Friendships developed; networks were built. Through the years community members have realized that the DCMCC is about people, not only projects. To illustrate this, the 2005 brochure highlights community members active in the coalition (**exhibit 19**). Respecting diversity in Dodge County gave people the opportunity to tell their stories, and neighbors became friends.

A successful coalition can do more than change individual behaviors; it can create community change. I learned about the challenges of coalition development from my participation and leadership in DCMCC, the Task Force, and other coalitions. My strength in identifying community needs and bringing community members together to discuss these concerns and affect immediate change has transformed the role of Dodge County family living educator. Keeping members engaged and dedicated to future changes when the immediate media attention and the urgency have passed requires the commitment of all members. The long-term sustainability of coalitions depends upon shared leadership and the organizational structure to provide public relations, advocacy, marketing, and continual recruitment of new members along with leadership development.

Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment

At the same time Dodge County was addressing the emerging needs of a growing Latino population and building the DCMCC, other south central Wisconsin counties were addressing similar issues. UW-

Extension Southern District colleagues in Dane, Dodge, Jefferson, Rock, and Walworth counties engaged UW-Whitewater faculty to explore previous research, and plan and envision changes that led to the Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment Project. As a team, we planned, organized, and coordinated the research, but each UW-Extension county representative organized and executed three focus groups in their own county. As the Dodge County UW-Extension representative, I was responsible for determining local Latino families' needs, identifying barriers, and determining improvements needed locally. Without the groundwork I had established through DCMCC, I would have faced a difficult task. Friendships opened the doors to other Latino families. Many were willing to "return the favor" and contribute to the research project. Using the combined and Dodge County data, I participated with the team of UW-Whitewater and UW-Extension educators in analyzing data, preparing county reports, and developing presentations on the research.

I wrote a concise summary of the Dodge County research (**exhibit 20**) and developed an accompanying PowerPoint presentation. Other county educators followed this template by developing similar charts, summaries, and presentations. The Dodge County Summary is posted on the Dodge County UW-Extension Web site: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/dodge/> as well as the Cooperative Extension Resources for Latino Clientele Web site: <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/latino/>.

I found the opportunity to share this research locally when the editor of the *Beaver Dam Daily Citizen* requested an interview about the Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment project in July 2004 (**exhibit 21**). The front-page article both educated the community about the Latino project and invited organizations new to DCMCC to a meeting. I disseminated the research to even broader audiences and increased its influence by giving other presentations, including radio and television interviews. This publicity framed Latino needs as social concerns that needed the attention of all sectors of our county rather than one group's singular problems.

In 2004, I led the DCMCC strategic planning session to prioritize future goals. The DCMCC goal with the most long-lasting impact in Dodge County may well be the establishment of a Latino community service center in Beaver Dam. Taking immediate steps in that direction, I circulated an information form to county agencies and organizations, and arranged for translation. This work led to the compilation of the Dodge English/Spanish Resource Directory (**exhibit 22**). UW-Extension is listed as the point of contact for updating resources, and revised editions will be available on our Web site. This resource directory provides Latino families with connections to health, education, and legal resources.

Education for Childcare Providers

Accepting your neighbors regardless of skin color begins early in life. Childcare providers recognized children's racial biases and were receptive to learning about changes they could make to teach acceptance of all children. I developed a research-based teaching outline called "Children Next Door" to incorporate outstanding picture books as a basis for teaching multicultural respect (**exhibit 23**). My goal was to encourage providers to read and to enjoy reading the books with their children and to confidently and respectfully respond to questions and comments about skin color. To engage the providers in the learning experience, I designed activities to complement and extend the content of the books. I developed and facilitated interactive discussions and hands-on learning sessions that gave providers the skill and confidence to quickly incorporate the new teaching materials into their classrooms. A post-session evaluation proved the effectiveness of this learning process (**exhibit 24**).

A month after taking the class, teachers returned feedback about the children's books and the learning activities to aid my curriculum development. One of the books I selected, the award-winning *Baby Rattlesnake*, is a Native American folktale. From the teachers' comments I realized that the children were more interested in the snake than the Native American girl and were not learning that children of other ethnicities than their own could become their friends. As a result of this feedback, I replaced *Baby*

Rattlesnake with Where Did You Get Your Moccasins? I learned the importance of listening to the childcare providers and critically analyzing my work when I develop materials.

To determine the long-term impact of the “Children Next Door” class, two years after the class I randomly selected and surveyed 14 of the 28 original participants (**exhibit 25**). Teachers and children enjoyed the books, and children were encouraged to respect each other. The class helped providers think differently about children of color, initiate discussions of skin color, and teach acceptance and respect for differences. I realized the potential for cross programming when I addressed a need expressed by members of the DCMCC to benefit a new audience, childcare providers.

Head Start agencies have unique educational needs addressing the economic diversity of the families they serve. These agencies provide low-income families with comprehensive services for healthy child development and prepare pre-school children for school. Central Wisconsin Head Start requested UW-Extension family living staff to address issues related to poverty during two days of in-service training in August 2002 for employees in four counties. To acquaint the staff with the frustrations of poverty, I planned and presented the framework of poverty following Dr. Ruby Payne’s research, *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. The report I wrote and shared with Head Start directors and administrators summarized changes Head Start staff wanted to make after they became more sensitive to the needs of their families and changes they actually did make one year later (**exhibit 26**). As I visited Head Start classrooms three years after the initial educational program, I observed several permanent changes. Resource materials are now located outside of the classroom to ensure confidentiality as family members browse the information, non-perishable grocery items are collected throughout the year and redistributed to families, and family service workers have continued to be employed and are seen as staff members instead of part-time or temporary employees.

Contributions to the University

I highlighted the Minority Health Mini-Grant and other early successes of the DCMCC in a poster exhibit I prepared for the UW-Extension Outreach Scholarship Conference in Madison in October 2003 (**exhibit 27**). Sharing the work of the DCMCC and receiving positive feedback from colleagues nationwide emphasized its importance and uniqueness.

I co-presented the results of the Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment to UW-Extension colleagues at the 2003 UW-Extension Family Living State Conference, the 2004 Joint Council of Extension Professionals Conference, and the UW-Extension Diversity Think Tank in May 2004. As part of the UW-Extension Southern District team, I played an instrumental role in expanding our materials to reach nationwide audiences. I was a co-presenter of “Engagement Kicked Up a Notch” at the National Outreach Scholarship Conference held at Penn State in 2004 and will present the same at the National Extension Association of Family and Consumer Sciences Annual Conference in Philadelphia in September 2005. The PowerPoint presentation Lesly Scott and I prepared for the Outreach Conference detailed the engagement process, the time commitment, and the complexity of resources needed for qualitative research with the Latino population (**exhibit 28**). To accompany the national presentations, I organized a team of three colleagues, and we collectively wrote the Wisconsin Five-County Latino Needs Assessment Project Summary Report (**exhibit 29**). In Wisconsin Walworth and Green County colleagues have utilized this summary report with community partners.

The UW-Extension Family Living Program invited me to attend the July 2005 Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication in Portland, Oregon. There I identified my learning styles, communication styles, and interaction patterns to further develop my intercultural sensitivity. I plan to share what I learned with county and Extension colleagues, and use the information to help create a more inclusive climate locally as cultural differences become a resource and opportunity for development and learning.

Future Directions

By incorporating multifaceted educational programming and outreach into the family living program, I achieved a broader impact when addressing the two high-priority goals of promoting child development and respecting diversity. I will continue to provide leadership for the Dodge County Early Childhood Care and Education Task Force. Building on the work already accomplished to promote quality care for children, I have positioned myself to pilot Acting to Build Our Children's Future (ABC) to the Beaver Dam School District. The purpose of ABC—a joint project of UW-Extension Family Living Programs and UW-Madison Human Development and Family Studies Department Project—is the development of a Wisconsin community system that ensures that all young children (prenatal through age 5) receive the early health, family, and learning experiences they need to enter school healthy and ready to succeed. I arranged a couple of meetings with the mayor of Beaver Dam to discuss the project. He quickly recognized the potential of ABC to make a difference for future generations. Eight Beaver Dam community organizations are supporting the project as sponsors, and we are currently recruiting planning team members. The year-long planning process will begin in September 2005. I invited UW-Extension Dodge County community resource development agent, Dave Neuendorf, to serve as co-chair for this comprehensive planning effort. We will act as planning coordinators, with primary roles that include project manager, educator, facilitator, leadership developer, and evaluator of the planning process. By integrating a research-based systems planning process with child development research, Neuendorf and I will be facilitating a change process that will lead to transformational education on behalf of children in the Beaver Dam community.

As DCMCC co-chair, I will continue to utilize the strengths of our diverse population and community resources to establish a countywide service center for Latinos. I approached the leaders of St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Parish and they agreed to commit facilities for a service center for the next year. I am exploring opportunities to partner with several organizations, and I have written community grants to staff the facility.

In the more distant future, I will utilize the comprehensive UW-Extension planning process to determine future programming. I hear the frustrations of community leaders trying to solve recurring problems from one generation to the next. Financial instability, parenting concerns, inadequate education, stress, leadership, and lack of personal responsibility and goals are frequently mentioned. I will conduct both community focus groups and informal interviews with key community members and policymakers to direct our resources towards the most pressing needs.

As individuals gain the skills and confidence to determine the most effective course of action for their families, they inspire the next person to also change. My experiences with the people of Dodge County have taught me to recognize and cultivate leadership potential. Teaching keeps me directly rooted to the lives of families. It is a continual reminder of why I'm here and how important my work is to level the playing field and build bridges for families. By forming strategic alliances with community leaders and organizations, developing new programs, and strengthening existing ones, I will help family members themselves to become educators and leaders to accomplish their own personal and community change.