Responsiveness to Intervention

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In May, we graduated our latest class of students in the several disciplines that make up Peabody College of education and human development. Well over 500 students at all levels walked across several stages at Vanderbilt to receive their diplomas, including 37 newly-minted Ph.D.s. Sixteen students, representing the first cohort of the college’s redesigned Ed.D. program for educational leaders, also earned their degrees. We anticipate that all of our graduates will exercise valuable influence on their chosen areas of scholarship or practice.

Our anticipation is born out by the latest report from Arthur Levine’s Education Schools Project. Educating Researchers focuses on the current state of education research and the preparation of future scholars. While the report presents a largely negative picture of our field, Levine and colleagues singled out Vanderbilt Peabody’s doctoral program in special education as a model for research preparation of education scholars.

Our lead feature in this issue of Ideas in Action focuses on one area of special education research that is quite topical: Responsiveness to Intervention, an alternative means of identifying students with learning disabilities. Through Peabody’s National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, Professors Doug and Lynn Fuchs, Dan Reschly, and Donald Compton have contributed to developing and testing this model over several years. It shows promise not only for reducing the number of students assigned to LD categories but also for getting additional help to students who genuinely need it much sooner.

Helping students achieve, of course, it what our work is all about. With all the attention being given to math and science of late, one might be forgiven for thinking that we must have solved the writing problem by now. Needless to say, this is not the case. In the fall, Professor Steve Graham introduced a new set of strategies for improving writing, under the auspices of the Alliance for Excellent Education. We share these strategies in this issue.

Successful learning is also contingent on stability in others areas of life. A new faculty member at Peabody, Andy Finch, has been building a program of research on recovery schools—schools for adolescents and teens who have been treated for addiction problems but who can benefit from a continuum of care that bridges the gap between rehab and the classroom. As Professor Finch is discovering, these schools are a diverse lot.

Finally, Professor Bahr Weiss has been collaborating with peers in Vietnam to establish the country’s first clinical training program in psychology. As Weiss has seen, longstanding cultural sensitivities demand creative thinking about how best to develop successful therapies.

As always, Ideas in Action offers only a snapshot of some of the research underway at Peabody. The framing of the photo is necessarily selective, but we hope you will find its content of interest.

With best wishes,

[Signature]
Among the top ten schools, Peabody's mean GRE scores for doctoral students were the second highest. The high scores allowed the college to be very selective, with a doctoral applicant acceptance rate of just 10.3 percent—the second lowest of all 50 ranked schools.

Also of note: Peabody had the third lowest student-to-faculty ratio among the top ten.

Detailed information on the rankings can be found on the Peabody Web site at peabody.vanderbilt.edu/x7269.xml

and on the U.S. News Web site at usnews.com/sections/rankings/index.html

Peabody Ranked First in Productivity in Educational Leadership and Special Education

A new measure of scholarly productivity ranked Peabody College’s doctoral programs in educational leadership and special education first among similar programs at research universities in the United States, according to a new report. The report, the Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index, was released by Academic Analytics, based in Chester, Pa., in January, using data from 2005.

“These rankings affirm the college’s high reputation in several disciplines,” said Camilla Benbow, dean. “Our faculty in each of these areas is outstanding, and the data backs it up.”

Peabody’s educational psychology program was ranked No. 2 and its teacher education and professional development program was ranked No. 6.

Vanderbilt jumped overall to No. 7 in the large research university category from No. 54 last year.

The Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index, developed by Lawrence Martin, dean of the graduate school and professor of anthropology at Stony Brook University, measures the intellectual contributions of faculty based on publications, citations and financial and honorary awards.

Martin, who is also chief scientific consultant at Academic Analytics, said, “One of the greatest challenges for academia has been finding a way to measure and evaluate scholarly – as distinct from teaching – productivity. The FSP Index allows university leadership for the first time to get a clear picture of the comparative scholarly strength and vitality of their doctoral programs relative to others on an annual basis.”

The 2005 Faculty Scholarly Productivity Index now includes information from nearly 200,000 faculty members at 354 institutions, a significant expansion from the 2004 edition. That could partly account for jumps in the list such as Vanderbilt’s move from No. 54 to No. 7, said Academic Analytics spokeswoman Stephanie Altman.

Academic Analytics ranked Harvard University as the top large research university in its index for 2005, followed by California Institute of Technology, the University of California-San Francisco, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Yale University, Carnegie Mellon University, Washington University in St. Louis, Vanderbilt, Johns Hopkins University and Duke University.

A PDF file of the Chronicle of Higher Education’s article on Academic Analytics is available at www.academicanalytics.com/CHEArticle1-07.pdf

Supreme Court Briefs in K-12 Integration Cases Cite Vanderbilt Researchers

Peabody College faculty are poised to influence what could be the most significant school integration Supreme Court cases since Brown v. Board of Education.

Research by Ellen Goldring, Claire Smrekar, Mark Berends, James Guthrie, Pearl Sims and former graduate student Debra Owens was included in amicus briefs submitted to the Supreme Court in cases about school choice and the use of race as a deciding factor in Seattle, Wash. and Louisville, Ky. The briefs mark only the fifth time in its history that the court has considered social science research during its deliberations, beginning with Brown in 1954.

“As school choice is increasingly part of the landscape of student assignment policies, the outcome of these cases will help determine the extent to which the nation’s schools are segregated or integrated,” Goldring, professor of education policy and leadership, said. “Our research suggests that geographic proximity to school does not translate into supportive community contexts for children. Black children are much more likely to be assigned to schools in high-risk neighborhoods. School choice provides an avenue to decouple neighborhood segregation and school segregation.”

The first case, Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1, went before the court Dec. 4. It began when a student was denied admission into the public school of their choice based on their race. While the school system gave students an option to request a
specific public school, it used a “racial tiebreaker” in final placement decisions. The school district explains that race was considered to diversify schools and to cut down on unintentional segregation. The plaintiff, Seattle-based parent group Parents Involved in Community Schools, argues that school assignment should be race-blind.

The Vanderbilt research supports the school district’s use of race in making placement decisions by demonstrating the benefits students gain from an integrated educational environment.

“We are pleased that Peabody research on magnet schools, student achievement and Department of Defense-sponsored schools will contribute to the court’s deliberations in what could be two of the most significant racial integration cases since Brown v. Board of Education,” Smrekar, associate professor of public policy and education, said.

Goldring and Smrekar’s research on magnet schools in urban areas and Berends’ research on how changes in families and schools are related to trends in the black-white test score gap were included in a “social science statement” compiled by The Harvard Civil Rights Project for the Seattle case. Research by Smrekar and fellow Peabody Center for Education Policy members James Guthrie, Debra Owens and Pearl Sims on Department of Defense schools was also featured in a separate brief prepared by the Washington, D.C. law firm Fulbright & Jaworski.

The briefs were also submitted in support of the school district in a similar case originating in Kentucky, Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education, also argued in December.

Learning Sciences Institute Makes Local Connections for National Impact
Seventy-six million dollars in grants. Fifty-two research projects. One hundred investigators. Three national research centers.

These are just some of the accomplishments the Learning Sciences Institute has racked up since its launch in 2003. Not bad for three-and-a-half years’ work.

“We are defining the learning sciences and selling our definition as the national definition,” said Andrew Porter, director of the institute and Patricia and Rodes Hart Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy. “As the only university with three national education research centers – the National Center on School Choice, the National Center on Performance Incentives and the Temporal Dynamics of Learning Center – Vanderbilt and its Peabody College are very visible and in a true position of leadership.”

How we learn is studied by researchers in some way nearly everywhere on the Vanderbilt campus, from how our brains work and process information, to how best to teach middle schoolers math, to how we can teach robots to “learn” and work for us. However, bringing these diverse researchers together has always been a challenge, one that the LSI was designed to meet.

“Everyone is fascinated with how the brain works. I think a study of the learning sciences with a connection to medical, education, biomedical engineering and computer science is the way of the future for us,” said Virginia Shepherd, LSI’s co-associate director and a professor of pathology and medicine. “The major function and advantage of the LSI is creating a connection between researchers that they wouldn’t have otherwise. We’re trying to stimulate as many cross-connections as possible.”

“We are always seeking to identify boundary-crossers – people willing to work at the borders of their own work and cross borders into other areas of work,” Porter said. “It’s not easy, but when it does work, it’s spectacular.”

One such collaboration is under way between Norbert Ross, assistant professor of anthropology, LSI co-associate director Thomas Palmeri and former Vanderbilt computer scientist David Noelle on a project that combines computer modeling, psychology and anthropological field work to better understand cultural and conceptual change. The LSI facilitated both the collaboration and the National Science Foundation grant that funds the project.

Some of the ways Porter and his staff have worked to facilitate these collaborations are by bringing people together for a colloquium series and a visiting scholar series, through their award-winning newsletter and Web site, and through interdepartmental opportunities for investigators and graduate students.

“We created an affiliation category for faculty called LSI Investigators,” Porter said. “The investigators hail from five Vanderbilt colleges and 18 departments. The goal is to build a true community of scholarship in the learning sciences.”

The institute also has been working on a variety of fronts to recruit graduate students.

“The LSI started a topping-up award program to help recruit high-quality graduate candidates. It offers additional funding on top of departmental stipends,” Palmeri said. “It has allowed us to successfully recruit the students we really want to be part of the Vanderbilt learning sciences community.”

Looking forward, LSI leaders hope to establish a learning sciences minor for doctoral students, add more senior faculty and become more active in education reform efforts.

Though he is stepping down as LSI director to become dean of the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education in the fall, Porter said he is...
Developing Our Brightest Minds: The Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth at 35 Years

Who will be the next Albert Einstein? The next Stephen Hawking? A new report from Vanderbilt University reveals the complex mix of factors that create these intellectual leaders: cognitive abilities, educational opportunities, investigative interests and old-fashioned hard work.

“The talent and commitment necessary to develop as a scientific leader require both personal attributes and learning environments that are truly beyond the norm,” study authors Camilla Benbow, Patricia and Rodes Hart Dean of Education and Human Development, and David Lubinski, professor of psychology, wrote. “Not surprisingly, the personal attributes of future science, mathematics, engineering and technology leaders reveal that it takes much more than exceptional abilities to truly develop exceptional scientific expertise.”

The report is based on 35 years of research from the Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth, a 50-year study that tracks individuals identified as exceptionally gifted at a young age across their lifespan. Begun at Johns Hopkins University in 1971, the study is now based at Peabody College and is led by Benbow and Lubinski. The current report reflects data collected from over 5,000 study participants. It was published online Dec. 18 by the journal Perspectives on Psychological Science.

The report indicates that reach far beyond the classroom, as the United States and other nations race to cultivate bright minds to compete in an information-based global economy.

“These findings come at a time when our nation is gathering its diverse resources to ensure that we are positioned to compete in a flat, technology-driven world,” Benbow said. “Supporting and cultivating our most intellectually gifted students is critical to maintaining our economic competitiveness globally. This research will help educators identify those students who have the most potential to become exceptional professionals and leaders in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.”

“We found that mathematical gifts and a variety of aptitudes have a significant impact, but that special educational opportunities and commitment can dramatically increase this impact,” Lubinski said. “These students are intellectually gifted, and those gifts are best fully realized when they have the full support and understanding of their teachers, their parents and their social network.”

Benbow and Lubinski found that while this group of students as a whole had exceptional mathematical ability it was far from homogenous, with a great diversity of talent and interests. These differences have a direct impact on participants’ future career choices and success, some of which were outside of traditional scientific and mathematical fields.

“Exceptional verbal ability is characteristic of participants whose favorite courses, college majors and occupations were in the social sciences and humanities, whereas higher levels of mathematical and spatial abilities characterize participants whose favorite courses, college majors and occupations were in engineering and math or computer science,” the authors wrote. “Given the ever-increasing importance of quantitative and scientific reasoning skills in modern cultures, when mathematically gifted individuals choose to pursue careers outside engineering and the physical sciences, it should be seen as a contribution to society, not a loss of talent.”

The researchers also found that differences in ability exist even among this elite group. The findings contradict a widely held belief in educational literature that there is an “ability ceiling,” in other words, that differences are moot among the very top students.

Lubinski and Benbow found this not to be the case. The study compared groups scoring progressively higher on the SAT – from the low to mid-500’s to above 700 – at age 12 or 13. By age 33, 50 percent of the top scorers had earned a doctorate, compared to 30 percent of the group scoring closer to 500. (Only one percent of the general American population earns a doctorate).

“Individual differences in the top 1 percent do make a difference,” the authors said. “More ability is always better, other things being equal.”

The study identified another, perhaps obvious, factor of these students’ success – a willingness to work extremely hard. A majority of the highest performers at age 33 indicated a willingness to work over 65 hours a week.

Laced throughout the report are differences revealed by the study between men and women. Though they found no differences in overall ability between the sexes, they did find marked differences in types of ability and interests. The report found female participants more likely to prefer organic subjects and careers, such as the social sciences, biology and medicine, and men more likely to prefer inorganic subjects and career paths, such as engineering and the physical sciences.

The research was supported by funds from the Templeton Foundation, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development and the Strong Research Board.

New Susan Gray Endowed Chair Awarded to Kaiser

Special education and psychology professor, Ann Kaiser, was named the first holder of an endowed chair established to honor one of Peabody’s most influential faculty members, the late Susan Gray. Kaiser also is deputy director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center’s Research Program on Families.

“Ann Kaiser excels in her roles as professor, scholar and colleague, and has established a record that deserves the high recognition involved with a chaired appointment,” Dan Reschly, former chair of the Department of Special Education, said. “Professor Kaiser is a superb scholar in the area of language interventions for children with developmental delays and disabilities. She is an unusually perceptive
Ellen Brier, assistant dean for student affairs, has been appointed associate editor of the Journal of General Education. Brier has served on the journal’s editorial board for more than 10 years.

Anne Corn, professor of special education, was named to the Enrichment Committee for 2006-07 for the National Center for Leadership in Visual Impairment at Pennsylvania College of Optometry. As Vanderbilt’s primary representative to the NCLVI University Consortium, Corn serves as adviser to Vanderbilt students Heather McDonough and Tessa Wright, fellows in the NCLVI’s doctoral program in blindness and visual impairment education.

H. Carl Haywood, professor of psychology, emeritus, and a member of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development, attended the annual meeting of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies held in Washington, D.C. A member of the IOM’s interest group on maternal and child health, Haywood participated in discussions about that topic during the Section 11 Social and Behavioral Sciences meeting. He also participated in the IOM’s public day, which was devoted to stem cell research. Haywood was elected to the Institute of Medicine in 1972 and is Vanderbilt’s longest-tenured member.

Craig Kennedy, professor of special education, associate professor of pediatrics and an investigator at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development, has been selected the incoming chair of the Department of Special Education. Kennedy succeeded Dan Reschly in the position beginning with the spring 2007 semester. Kennedy directs the Vanderbilt Kennedy Behavior Analysis Clinic, which includes the state-funded Community Inclusion Project, and serves as director of training for the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center’s University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

Dayle Savage, lecturer in leadership, policy and organizations, has been named director of the Peabody Career Center. As director, Savage is responsible for career planning and development activities for current Peabody College students and alumni.

Georgene Troseth, assistant professor of psychology, participated in a panel discussion on interactive television for preschoolers at the Conference Media Jeunes, organized by the Alliance for Children and Television, held in Montreal. Also on the panel were Daniel Anderson of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and Chris Gifford, the creator and executive producer of the top-rated preschool television programs “Dora the Explorer” and “Go Diego Go!” Troseth also gave a talk at the Centre for Research in Human Development at Concordia University in Montreal.

Sharon Weiner, director of the Peabody Library, was selected to attend the National Center for Education Statistics Cooperative System Fellows Program held in Washington, D.C. She was among 25 fellows who learned about the programs, surveys and data offered through the NCES in order to provide training in their home states.
In 2002, the National Assessment of Educational Progress tested writing skills in 4th, 8th and 12th grade students. Using newspaper articles, photographs, cartoons, letters and poems to stimulate writing, the NAEP asked students to write for three main purposes: narrative, information, and persuasive. The test was administered to 139,000 4th graders, 119,000 8th graders, and 19,000 12th graders.

The results indicated that only 28 percent of 4th graders, 21 percent of 8th graders, and 22 percent of 12th graders scored at or above the proficient level. While both 4th and 8th graders demonstrated small improvement from scores taken in 1998, the difference in scores for the high school seniors was statistically insignificant.

In an information-based economy, having a workforce unskilled in written communications is costly. In 2005, the College Board’s National Commission on Writing estimated that private companies spend more than $3 billion each year to teach employees how to write.

Motivated by a desire to strengthen the writing skills of U.S. students, a new report co-authored by Steve Graham, Currey Ingram Professor of Special Education, has identified 11 strategies to improve the writing skills of the nation’s adolescents. The report was presented at a briefing Oct. 19 in Washington, D.C. Graham’s co-author is Dolores Perin, associate professor of psychology and education at Teachers College, Columbia University.

“We undertook this research to determine what we could do to change writing achievement and writing instruction in this country,” Graham said. “We’ve identified 11 strategies as being effective at teaching students how to write and improve their achievement.”

The report, Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High School, is designed to address this critical shortfall in student learning and achievement. It was released by the Alliance for Excellent Education and commissioned by Carnegie Corporation of New York. The report is a companion publication to the Alliance’s 2004 report, Reading Next: A Vision for Action and Research in Middle and High School Literacy.

“Reading proficiency is just half the literacy picture,” Bob Wise, former governor of West Virginia and Alliance president, said. “We have to widen the literacy spotlight to include writing as well as reading. Increasing students’ writing abilities increases their literacy abilities, which in turn, increases the likelihood that they will stay in school and graduate. And that means they have a much better chance for future success.”

Graham and Perin conducted a meta-analysis of existing experimental and quasi-experimental research on a variety of writing instructional methods and were able to glean from this comparison data the most effective strategies. The last such comprehensive review of the research literature was conducted by George Hillocks 20 years ago, Graham noted.

“We have to widen the literacy spotlight to include writing as well as reading.”

Bob Wise, former governor of West Virginia and Alliance president

“In our meta-analysis we always compared a treatment versus some control or comparison treatment. So there were always at least two treatments in the study,” Graham said during remarks at the National Press Club. “We were looking for big ticket effects: what kind of interventions changed the overall quality of what students do.”

Graham and Perin identified 11 instructional practices that Writing Next recognizes as holding the most promise to improve students’ writing skills, in order of statistical strength. The two most powerful procedures involved the explicit teaching of process, Graham said.
“The first one was teaching writing strategies to kids. This basically meant teaching kids how to plan, how to revise, how to edit, how to regulate the writing process, or a combination of those. By doing that the teachers were initially modeling how do this, and then students were given assistance as they applied this, working toward independence in the use of those strategies. So it was systematic. It was explicit,” Graham said.

“The second procedure that also had a very strong effect was teaching kids directly how to summarize written material,” he said.

The third finding was that having students collaborate around process, planning, revising, and editing in some combination also was very effective. Graham cautioned, however, “I’m not talking about throwing kids together and saying, ‘You guys go off and work together.’ These were structured procedures where kids had a clear idea of what they were to do. So, for example, if it was revising, they were provided or taught how to carry through on giving feedback to their peers on very specific aspects of their writing.”

In addition to writing strategies, summarization, and collaborative writing, Graham and Perin offered the following strategies:

**Specific Product Goals:** Specific, reachable goals for the writing assignment they are to complete.

**Word Processing:** Using computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments.

**Sentence Combining:** Teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences.

**Prewriting:** Engaging students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition.

**Inquire Activities:** Engaging students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task.

**Process Writing Approach:** Interweaving a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction and cycles of writing.

**Study of Models:** Providing students with opportunities to read, analyze and emulate models of good writing.

**Writing for Content Learning:** Using writing as a tool for learning content material.

In closing his remarks, Graham emphasized that *Writing Next* is not a curriculum for teaching writing. “These are things that can enhance what we already do. There’s a delivery issue here.”

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**The Importance of Penmanship: Handwriting a Valuable Skill, Influences Learning**

Did you know there is a National Handwriting Day? Given the low emphasis placed on handwriting in many schools, you can be forgiven. Though the significance of this obscure day might be lost to many, the skill of handwriting shouldn’t be, according to Professor Steve Graham, an expert not only on writing but on handwriting.

“Handwriting is one of the basic building blocks of good writing and plays a critical role in learning,” said Graham. “Young children who have difficulty mastering this skill often avoid writing, and their writing development may be arrested. They also may have trouble taking notes and following along in class, which will further impede their development.”

Graham suggests that a return to consistent handwriting instruction, with an understanding of the challenges different children face, would not only result in more legible papers but also support overall learning across subjects.

“Teachers need to continue to teach their students how to properly form and join letters. We found that this sort of instruction takes place for 10 minutes or less a day in most schools, down from two hours a week in the 1950s,” he said.

“At home, there are many things that parents can do to help their young children improve their penmanship. Activities such as identifying and tracing letters, forming letters from memory, copying words and playing timed games to see how quickly they can accurately produce written letters and words all go toward building this skill.”

Steve Graham’s research has focused primarily on identifying the factors that contribute to the development of writing difficulties; the development and validation of effective procedures for teaching planning, revising and the mechanics of writing to struggling writers; and the use of technology to enhance writing performance and development.

He is the editor of *Exceptional Children* and the coauthor of the *Handbook of Writing Research, Handbook of Learning Disabilities, Writing Better, and Making the Writing Process Work*. He is a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development investigator.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a Washington, D.C.-based policy, research and advocacy organization that works to make every child a graduate, prepared for post-secondary education and success in life. To learn more about the Alliance, visit www.all4ed.org.

*Writing Next* is available online at www.all4ed.org/publications/WritingNext/index.html
Nationally, more than two million students meet the generally accepted criteria for specialty treatment for drug or alcohol abuse or addiction. Each year, fewer than 200,000 of these students receive the treatment they need. But what happens when a high school student with a drug or alcohol addiction gets out of treatment? Seventy-five to 80 percent of teenagers relapse within the first year following treatment. Many will be offered their previous drug of choice on their first day back in school.

To help support sobriety and prevent relapse, a new type of school has sprung up to offer students a continuum of post-treatment care. They are called recovery schools, and Peabody College's Andrew Finch has been studying them. Currently, there are about 30 recovery schools in 10 states. "Recovery schools are not treatment centers, but they support treatment gains," says Finch, assistant clinical professor of human and organizational development. "These schools benefit recovering students by enabling them to test increasing levels of responsibility and leadership gradually."

Secondary students in recovery schools, sometimes known as sober schools, face a number of common issues following treatment. These include working a recovery program and balancing that with school or remediation; continuing problems dealing with impulsivity; coping with co-occurring mental health problems, ADD, depression or anxiety; cross-addictions like gambling, sex or eating disorders; developing basic living skills; and becoming accountable and responsible.

As one of the founders of a recovery school in Nashville, Finch has close-up experience with these issues. In 1996, he helped establish Community High School under the auspices of Nashville’s Oasis Center. As a school counselor who earned his master’s degree at Peabody, he and the school’s teaching principal largely designed a program typically enrolling 20-25 students. When Oasis’s start-up grant ran out, the school went independent. From 2003 to 2006, Finch served as director.

His involvement with establishing and running an independent high school led Finch to return to Peabody as a doctoral student in educational leadership and policy. "Robert Crowson, Steve Heyneman and Claire Smrekar," professors in the Department of Leadership, Policy and Organizations, "were incredible assets to me," he says. Finch’s dissertation dealt with recovery schools.

In 2002, Finch was contacted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The agency was interested in the phenomena of recovery schools and wanted to learn more about them. They offered to host a meeting if he would do the legwork in identifying them. One outcome was the establishment of the Association of Recovery Schools, with Finch as its executive director. He plans to transition out of the position as the association builds its board of directors and begins raising funds.

Along with Paul Moberg, a professor at the University Wisconsin-Madison, Finch is trying to flesh out the picture of recovery schools. In 2005, the two received a grant from...
the National Institute on Drug Abuse to do a descriptive study of recovery schools in locations across the U.S.

"We had hoped to do an evaluative study," Finch said. "But on the advice of people at NIDA, we realized that was premature. There's a lack of an evidence base. So instead, we're trying to answer a more basic question: what is a recovery school? We're seeing some pretty wide differences."

Through site visits, surveys of staff and students, and review of secondary data, Finch and Moberg have studied 18 different schools in seven states. Their descriptive analysis examines organizational and fiscal structure, institutionalization, educational programming, therapeutic/recovery programming, student characteristics, and contextual settings.

"Rather than a few typical models, what we're discovering are a number of aspects around which we can begin to build a picture of what recovery schools look like," Finch said. For example, all but one of the 18 schools studied have public funding at some level. Most are co-located within or near another school. All are day schools. Most use a Twelve Step or Minnesota Model and include daily group meetings as well as one-to-one counseling.

Beyond these commonalities, the picture gets fuzzy. Therapeutic and counseling orientations employed by recovery schools range from variations on cognitive-behavioral therapy to family systems and psychopharmacology for mental health issues. Some schools enroll students who have been through the juvenile justice system while others prefer only students who have a genuine desire to be there. Some accept students who are not yet in active recovery while others do not. Several frame their mission as transitional; others encourage students to remain enrolled for as long as it takes to build life skills and finish a degree.

In academics, some schools offer teachers for each core subject while others may use a modular curriculum and feel more like a one-room schoolhouse, with a single teacher guiding students along at various levels. Some do drug screening and some do not. Several are moving towards offering treatment as well as education.

The student surveys Finch and Moberg have gathered suggest considerable progress in students' substance use behaviors. Weekly substance use dropped from 90 percent to 8 percent. For students enrolled 90 days or longer, when compared with the 90 days prior to treatment or enrollment, alcohol use dropped from 34 days to 3.5 days; cannabis use from 47 days to 4 days, and the percent of days abstinent increased from 32 percent to 83 percent. Sixty-nine percent reported no alcohol use since starting recovery school, and 75 percent reported no cannabis use.

Finch says that he and Moberg have not lost sight of their longer-term objective of evaluating the effectiveness of recovery schools. They hope their descriptive study will enable them to develop an outcome research design and build an evidence base for what works and what doesn't in the growing number of such schools. "Ultimately," Finch said, "we'd like to be able to offer models others can use to meet the growing need for educational alternatives for students with histories of abuse and addiction."
It’s a fortunate person who is able to combine both his personal and professional passions. Vanderbilt Peabody psychologist Bahr Weiss is one such man. Weiss is in the midst of creating the first clinical psychology program in Vietnam, a country and culture that has shaped his life at home and in the laboratory. Weiss and his former wife are the parents of two daughters, Nina and Lila, whom they adopted in Vietnam in 1993 and 1997.

“I became fascinated with the culture after visiting Vietnam for a conference and after adopting my daughters,” Weiss, associate professor in the Peabody Department of Psychology and Human Development, said. “I wanted to combine my personal and professional interests, and the need for research-based mental health services in Vietnam gave me the perfect opportunity.”

With Peabody’s support, Weiss won two grants totaling more than $1 million from the National Institutes of Health in 2001 and 2006 to develop Vietnamese mental health research capacity.

“Our ultimate goal is to permanently increase research capacity in Vietnam to develop culturally appropriate research-based treatments for children’s mental health problems,” Weiss said. “Our work with our Vietnamese colleagues will increase their ability to plan, design and conduct intervention trials to evaluate these treatments, and to share their results to improve mental health services.”

Mental health awareness and treatment are limited in Vietnam, in part because the psychological underpinnings of problems such as drug abuse and depression are not widely recognized.

“The stigma associated with mental health concerns in Vietnam is even greater than in Western countries,” Weiss said. “We are hoping to help people understand that mental health problems can result from one’s life circumstances, and that the habits you develop about what you think affects what you do and feel. We’re also starting a dialogue that moves away from characterizing issues such as drug abuse as ‘social evils’ and frames them more as mental health problems.”

While awareness is growing, the lack of research-based training and treatment is resulting in services that can do more harm than good.

“Most clinicians in Vietnam have little or no training. People have good intentions – they’re trying to address a social need – but they are setting up clinics with no training and no basis for judging their effectiveness,” Weiss said. “As a result, some treatments likely are completely lacking in efficacy. The governmental drug addiction treatment system, for example, has been estimated to have a 90 to 100 percent failure rate.”

After four years of surveying professionals and testing training strategies, Weiss and his colleagues in Vietnam and in the United States decided the most sustainable way to increase Vietnamese mental health services research capacity was to develop a Ph.D. program to train students to develop and evaluate research-based methods for treating mental health concerns.

The program will get fully under way in fall 2008, when two doctoral candidates and four post-doctoral Vietnamese researchers will come to Nashville to study at Peabody in the Vanderbilt Clinical Sciences program. The Vietnamese researchers then will return to Vietnam to serve as core faculty in the new clinical psychology program at Vietnam National University in Hanoi.

Weiss and his colleagues also will provide training to approximately 10 Vietnamese fellows via two-week summer seminars in Vietnam.

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“The people we train will be remembered one day as the forefathers and mothers of Vietnamese clinical psychology. It is a tremendous opportunity for these individuals and for Vanderbilt to have a lasting positive impact on global health.”

the forefathers and mothers of Vietnamese clinical psychology,” Weiss said. “It is a tremendous opportunity for these individuals and for Vanderbilt to have a lasting positive impact on global health.”

In addition to this program, with support from Peabody College, Weiss is developing a National Institute on Drug Abuse grant proposal to establish and evaluate a research-based drug treatment program in Vietnam, where heroin is a gateway drug. Addiction treatment in Vietnam has largely consisted of sending addicts for up to two years to “rehabilitation camps.” Weiss, one of the first Westerners to receive permission to visit the camps, said, “With their barbed wire-topped walls, these ‘camps’ bear an uncanny resemblance to prisons.” However, he has been assured by his Vietnamese colleagues that they are not.

“We were approached by local authorities to set up a drug treatment program in collaboration with the Danang Psychiatric Hospital,” Weiss said. “Almost all of the research on drug abuse and prevention has been conducted in Western countries, yet much of the world’s drug addiction problem exists in collectivist countries where there are quite different challenges.

“In Vietnam, young adults stay with their parents until they marry, usually around age 25, and they are still under their parents’ authority. Culturally, one of the discipline techniques parents use is shame and the threat of humiliation, which can inadvertently lead to an increase in drug use,” he continued. “Young people also often have unrealistic expectations; they come back from the camps expecting their families to unconditionally welcome and trust them, which is not realistic given the cultural embarrassment the family has experienced. Both sides need help balancing their expectations, and that is one of the things our program is working to do.”

Weiss believes both projects will benefit their American partners as much as they will the Vietnamese.

“The collaborative relationships with the Vietnamese researchers will give us long-term opportunities to share and learn perspective on human behavior from a significantly different culture,” he said.

“As members of the most affluent and most privileged country in history, we feel we have a moral imperative to assist in reversing the ‘brain drain’ in mental health resources,” Weiss said. “The World Health Organization has reported the inequity in the distribution of mental health resources in the world is ‘unfathomably large,’ and as a faculty member at Vanderbilt, it is both an honor and a moral imperative to try to help address this inequity.”

In addition to being a Peabody faculty member, Weiss is an investigator in the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development and a member of the Vanderbilt Institute for Public Policy Studies.

Researchers Find Type of Health Care System Affects Caregiver Stress

Vietnamese parents and families are not the only ones who struggle with how to cope with an illness or addiction in their offspring. Caregiver strain is the subject of a new study by Craig Anne Heflinger, associate professor of human and organizational development, and Ana María Brannan, a research associate. They have found that the type of stress one experiences may depend on the type of health care system with which one is dealing.

The two surveyed more than 600 families in Tennessee and Mississippi to determine factors related to caregiver strain. Caregiver strain is defined as the stress and problems that people experience when caring for a family member with health issues. The study focused on parents who were caring for children with emotional and behavioral disorders. The research is funded by the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Heflinger and Brannan chose to study Tennessee and Mississippi because the two states operate different forms of Medicaid. In Tennessee, Medicaid participants enroll in TennCare, a managed care system that operates sort of like an HMO. Mississippi operates a fee-for-service system where patients have more freedom about where, when and from whom they will receive their health care.

The authors found that under both systems, the severity of a child’s problem was the most significant stressor. However, they also found notable differences between the two. Under managed care, caregiver strain was related to provider/payer-related barriers to care. In the fee-for-service system, strain was linked to family perceptions about the care they were receiving and inconvenient appointment locations and times.

“We have learned that caregiver strain is related to system performance,” Brannan said. “Barriers to care and poor service coordination have been found to be associated with caregiver strain.” Heflinger added, “As our health care systems seek to reduce hospital and residential care and provide more community-based services, attention to caregiver strain will be critical.”
Over the 35-year history of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the number of students identified as having learning disabilities has increased dramatically. Prior to 1970, students with learning disabilities were rarely identified. Now they comprise nearly 50 percent of all children with disabilities, or 5 percent of the total school population. The apparent increase in the prevalence of learning disabilities has raised concerns about the methods by which these children are identified. Because learning disabilities are defined as an unexpected failure to learn, the discrepancy between intelligence and achievement has been the conceptual and procedural keystone in their identification. Yet, use of IQ tests and discrepancy (between IQ and achievement) scores have proved problematic both for political and technical reasons and have prompted calls among academics, policymakers, and practitioners for alternative identifi-
that a successful separation of those truly disabled from those who appear disabled but are not will reduce special education enrollments and costs. RTI, then, should encourage serious and sustained early intervention with at-risk children, leading to stronger school performance and to fewer special education referrals, all of which enhances the validity of the disability-identification process.

“At the same time,” says Fuchs, “important questions are being asked about whether teachers will indeed implement scientifically validated instruction with fidelity and whether they and their support staff will correctly identify at-risk students.” Whether school districts will use more intensive, best-evidence, “second tier” instruction for the children unresponsive to first-tier instruction; whether their performance will be monitored at this second tier; and whether these many activities will lead to reductions in special education enrollments and cost are also questions, he adds.

To help answer questions about the effectiveness of RTI, the Fuchses and Compton, associate professor of spe-

Quick Facts on RTI

What is RTI?
A model of collaborative and special education processes addressed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. RTI provides increasingly intensive interventions in a three-tier system to students who are not achieving to academic expectations.

- Tier I addresses the core curriculum and is preventative and proactive. Interventions focus on groups of students, addressing the instructional, curricular, and structural variables in the classroom.
- Tier II efforts are still focused on groups, but incorporate targeted, in-depth intervention services to increase student skills.
- Tier III uses intensive, individual intervention to help students achieve specific skill targets. Once the target goal is reached, the level of intensity is adjusted.

Who benefits?
Children in need of instructional intervention in reading, math and science, grades K-12.

Why RTI?
Traditionally, children with learning disabilities were not identified until later grades, at which point many had ingrained problems which required more time and resources to address. An additional problem has been the methodology for LD screening using the IQ Discrepancy model believed to have been responsible for widely misdiagnosing LD students.

How is RTI initiated?
Students are tested in the first month of the school year for general academic competence.
ial education, are currently conducting two, large-scale, school-based randomized control trials (one in reading and another in math) in the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. The reading and math studies both began with about 250 at-risk students in 40 first-grade classrooms. A portion of each sample was assigned randomly to receive first-grade tutoring (in reading or math) as a supplement to their general education program or to continue in their general education program without tutoring.

The three researchers assessed how much the tutoring contributed to the children’s academic development in first grade and are following them through fifth grade in reading and through fourth grade in math to determine long-term outcomes. They also looked for best methods of identifying young children at risk for later development of severe academic difficulties and what the early cognitive markers may be for academic development.

According to Donald Compton, “Results to date suggest that tutoring can be effective in promoting better academic results for these at-risk children.” Lynn Fuchs adds, “In math, for example, children who received tutoring for 20 weeks, 3 times per week, developed much stronger skills for solving computation problems, concept application problems, and word problems than their non-tutored at-risk peers. Many fewer tutored children were identified as having a math disability.” She notes that the reduction in number was evident more than one year after tutoring was completed. Such results, says Compton, may be seen as support for RTI’s multi-tier structure of increasingly intensive instruction.

In another series of center studies, the researchers seek to redefine conventional thinking about RTI in terms of dynamic assessment. Dynamic assessment is based on the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vgotsky and uses a test-teach-test sequence to determine how much support a child needs to solve a task successfully. The index of interest becomes the level of support necessary to facilitate task completion. Center researchers are exploring whether dynamic assessment may be a more efficient form of RTI.

“RTI has been a useful notion to help researchers like myself and my colleagues at the LD Center re-think methods of identifying children at risk for severe reading and math problems,” says Lynn Fuchs. “And if we can identify them more quickly, we can help them sooner.”


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In the spring of 2005, Professor Douglas Fuchs, co-director of the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, was asked by the Tennessee Department of Education about professional development possibilities for Tennessee’s teachers. Professor Fuchs suggested collaborating with Vanderbilt’s IRIS Center to develop a series of modules on Responsiveness to Intervention (RTI).

The IRIS Center for Faculty Enhancement (IDEA ‘04 and Research for Inclusive Settings), based at Peabody College, is a national center that provides free, online, interactive resources about students with disabilities for college and university faculty and professional development providers. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the IRIS staff work with nationally recognized experts to translate research about the education of students with disabilities into practice.

The result of the collaboration between IRIS, Fuchs and the state of Tennessee is four RTI modules now accessible on the IRIS Center’s Web site at http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/onlinemodules.html. The modules take educators through a theoretical RTI assessment and possible teaching strategies.

More than 20,000 visitors have accessed the modules online, and they are being used in both preservice and inservice trainings, an impact far greater than originally envisioned.

Two additional modules are being created and will be posted during the summer of 2007. RTI: A Guide for Administrators will address many of the questions posed by school leaders who are considering implementing the RTI approach in their schools. RTI: Tier 3 will provide information on the options within the RTI approach for the services to be provided at Tier 3, which provides more intensive and individualized interventions than those in Tiers 1 and 2.

According to Naomi Tyler, Co-Principal Investigator, IRIS Center Director and Research Assistant Professor at Peabody, “States and local school districts are currently in the awareness stage of RTI adoption. Although the IRIS RTI modules were originally developed for Tennessee, OSEP is now directing educators nationwide to them because they provide a good overview as well as technical practice on how to implement the tier assessments.”

Tyler continues, “Many of the practices used in RTI have been used for years by special educators but now RTI asks regular teachers to use them. We’re excited that the IRIS modules are being disseminated broadly to help this process.”

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Focus on Grants

Initiative with Texas Education Agency Will Evaluate Teacher Performance Incentive

Vanderbilt University and the Texas Education Agency have teamed up to evaluate the largest performance-based incentive initiative for educators in the nation. The National Center on Performance Incentives, based at Peabody College, won a competitive bid process to perform the five-year study.

“The signature activity of our evaluation will be analyses of performance-based incentive programs at approximately 1,200 Texas schools and their impact on student achievement; teacher turnover; mobility and quality; teacher behavior; and institutional and organizational dynamics,” NCPI Director Matthew Springer said.

“The incentive program allows us to recognize and reward thousands of outstanding teachers. We are hopeful that it will help Texas school districts attract and retain highly skilled, effective teachers,” Texas Commissioner of Education Shirley J. Neeley said. “The Vanderbilt-led evaluation will allow us to gauge the impact of the program.”

Texas Gov. Rick Perry started the incentive program in 2005 as part of the Governor’s Educator Excellence Awards Program (GEEAP). The Texas Legislature expanded the program in 2006. By 2008, GEEAP will award $330 million to public school educators.

GEEAP is made up of two different incentive programs. The first, the Governor’s Educator Excellence Grant (GEEG), offers $10 million each year to teachers serving economically disadvantaged children. The second program, the Texas Educator Excellence Grant (TEEG), offers $100 million to educators at 1,160 schools. Schools must serve economically disadvantaged children and meet certain educational performance standards and improvement benchmarks.

In both programs, funds are awarded to the school rather than to individual educators. The final decisions about which educators should receive the grant are made locally. Teachers at each school work with administrators to create the evaluation criteria for individual awards.

“Neither of the incentive award programs is based solely on student performance on state tests,” Springer said. “Teaching excellence also takes into account such factors as mentoring of other teachers, teaching in subject areas that face a shortage of teachers, an individual’s level of education and experience, and whether the teachers are working in schools that are considered difficult to staff.”

In accordance with the program’s statutory requirements, NCPI will evaluate the GEEG program over the next three years and the TEEG program over the next five years.

“Our evaluations will focus on who receives the awards, as well as how those awards affect the recipients and the schools,” Springer said. “We are also interested in understanding whether differences exist between schools that receive the grants every year and schools that only receive the grants every once or twice.”

NCPI investigators will present their results to TEA annually over the next five years. Researchers from the University of Missouri, Texas A&M University and the Texas-based Corporation for Public School Education K-16 also are involved in the multi-year project.

TEA and NCPI hope that the information gathered during this evaluation project will help improve future incentive systems, both in Texas and nationwide.

To learn more about the National Center for Performance Incentives, visit www.performanceincentives.org.

SELECTED GRANTS J U L Y - D E C E M B E R , 2 0 0 6

As reported by the Vanderbilt Office of Sponsored Research. (Does not include grants of less than $25,000.)

Mark Berends, Leadership, Policy and Organizations, $7,259,875 by the Department of Education for “National Research and Development Center on School Choice, Competition and Achievement.”

Leonard Bickman, Center for Evaluation and Program Improvement, $174,135 from the Public Health Service for “Children’s Mental Health Services Research Training – Year 13.”

Donald Compton, Special Education, $199,934 from the Department of Education for “Leadership Training Program in LD: Randomized Intervention Research, University-School Partnerships and Cultural Diversity.” Douglas H. Fuchs, Lynn S. Fuchs and Naomi Tyler are co-principal investigators.

David S. Cordray, Psychology and Human Development, $1,495,133 by the Department of Education for “Assessing Intervention Fidelity in Randomized Field Experiments.” Dale C. Farran and Mark W. Lipsey are co-principal investigators.

Anne L. Corn, Special Education, $102,956 from the Department of Education for “Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO).”

William R. Doyle, Leadership, Policy and Organizations, $200,000 from the Lumina Foundation for Education for “Making the Connection: Improving Student Completion Through Improved State and Institutional Policies.” John Braxton and Michael McLendon are co-principal investigators.

Stephen N. Elliott, Special Education, $229,302 from the Department of Education for “University of Wisconsin Coordination, Consultation and Evaluation Center.”

Dale C. Farran, Teaching and Learning, $280,340 by the Department of Education for “Scaling up TRIAD: Teaching for Early Mathematics for Understanding with Trajectories and Technologies.” Mark W. Lipsey, co-principal investigator; $261,431 from the Wayne County Board of Education for “Wayne County Early Reading First Evaluation.” Mark W. Lipsey, co-principal investigator; $75,000 from the Tennessee Department of Education for “Pre-K Summer Institute 2006.” David K. Dickinson is co-principal investigator.
Douglas H. Fuchs, Special Education, $700,000 from the Department of Defense for “Center for Research on Learning Disabilities,” Daniel Reschly, Lynn S. Fuchs and Donald Compton, co-principal investigators; $121,058 from the Department of Education for “Scaling Up Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies to Strengthen Reading Achievement.” Lynn S. Fuchs, Mark Berends and Anthony Rolle are co-principal investigators.

Lynn S. Fuchs, Special Education, $717,293 from the Public Health Service for “Understanding/Preventing Math Problem-Solving Disability,” Douglas H. Fuchs, Donald Compton and Carol Hamlett, co-principal investigators; $231,993 from the Public Health Service for “Cognitive, Instructional and Neuroimaging Factors in Math.” Douglas H. Fuchs is co-principal investigator.

Ellen Goldring, Leadership, Policy and Organizations, $109,761 by the Department of Education for “Assessing the Impact of Principals’ Professional Development: An Evaluation of the National Institute for School Leadership.”

Rogers Hall, Teaching and Learning, $112,692 from the National Science Foundation for “Program Evaluation of the Math and Science Projects Program.” Kay J. McClain is co-principal investigator.

Craig Anne R. Heflinger, Human and Organizational Development, $268,928 from the Public Health Service for “Rural Child/Adolescent Mental Health Service Use.” Ana Marie Brannan is co-principal investigator.

Mary Louise Hemmeter, Special Education, $999,950 from the Department of Health and Human Services for “Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning.”

Craig Kennedy, Special Education, $200,000 from the Department of Education for “Collaborating with General Educators to Improve the Education of Students with High-Incidence Disabilities.” Carolyn Hughes and Robert Hodapp are co-principal investigators.


Andrew Porter, Leadership, Policy and Organizations, $81,902 from the National Science Foundation for “System-wide Change for All Learners and Educators (SCALE).”

Dan Reschly, Special Education, $248,920 from the Department of Education for “National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.”


Leona Schaubale, Teaching and Learning, $1,350,000 by the Department of Education for “Collaborating with General Educators to Improve the Education of Students with High-Incidence Disabilities.” Rich Lehrer, Kefyn Catley and Deborah Lucas are co-principal investigators.

Virginia L. Shepherd, Peabody Dean’s Office, $60,493 from the National Science Foundation for “Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning.”

Matthew G. Springer, Leadership, Policy and Organizations, $149,972 from the Texas Education Agency for “Evaluation of the Governor’s Educator Excellence Award Grant Program.” James W. Guthrie is co-principal investigator.

Naomi C. Tyler, Peabody Dean’s Office, $1,350,000 by the Department of Education for “IDEA and Research for Inclusive Settings (IRIS II): The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements.” Deborah Deutsch Smith is co-principal investigator.

Joseph H. Wehby, Special Education, $2,148,586 from the Department of Education for “Reducing Severe Problem Behavior in Schools.” Craig Kennedy is co-principal investigator.

Bahr H. Weiss, Psychology and Human Development, $312,293 from the Public Health Service for “Sources of Bias in the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) for African Americans.” Victoria Ngo is co-principal investigator.

Mark Wolery, Special Education, $250,000 from the Department of Education for “Reducing Severe Problem Behavior in Schools.”

Ruth Wolery, Special Education, $459,100 from the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation for “DMRS Early Intervention.”

Paul J. Yoder, Special Education, $349,382 from the Public Health Service for “Effects of Intensity of Early Communication Intervention.”