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New Partnerships: CDLC and Diverse Language Communities



By Sherry Meeks

Imagine leaving your home. You relocate to another part of the world where the language and culture are different, and you worry about the welfare and education of your children. You are intelligent and hardworking, but you are not always certain about how to navigate this new territory and its society. These are the experiences of many people in Greensboro, which has served as a federal relocation center for refugees and the new home of many immigrants. A committed partner in this endeavor is UNCG's Coalition for Diverse Language Communities (CDLC). The CDLC works to enhance the educational opportunities and socio-cultural wellbeing for children, youth, and families from diverse language communities.

The CDLC was founded over two years ago by Professors Micheline Chalhoub-Deville, Colleen Fairbanks, and Barbara Levin with the aim of being a catalyst for innovative, relevant, and collaborative work in the areas of community-engaged research, outreach and advocacy, policy work, and professional development. The CDLC leverages the resources of UNCG to work with diverse language communities locally, nationally and globally. The CDLC includes faculty, staff, and students from departments across campus, but primarily from the School of Education (SOE). Members have backgrounds from countries such as Canada, China, Columbia, Lebanon, Korea, Mexico, and Peru.

“Community Voices” is one CDLC research project. Through focus groups, the project is listening to community members from China, Burma, Iraq, Iran, Liberia, Mexico, Sudan, Vietnam, and to speakers of American Sign Language, to learn about the ways in which UNCG may better support them, especially in relation to their educational aspirations. Chalhoub-Deville says that a goal of this project is to “help the children

of these communities fare better in schools and transition to higher education more seamlessly.” Involved in the project are Professors Silvia Bettez, Colleen Fairbanks, Belinda Hardin, Ye He, Barbara Levin, and Amy Vetter, plus doctoral students from various departments in the School of Education.

Information gleaned from the “Community Voices” focus groups will be used to produce instructive videos explaining diverse language community members’ rights and responsibilities with regard to schooling. Also, a professional development program will be created to help teachers learn more about how to effectively reach and teach children from refugee and immigrant families.

Another undertaking by CDLC is the “College Access” project, which started last year with a panel discussion led by first-generation college students at UNCG and was held at Ben L. Smith High School. The panelists shared information and experiences to help future college students and their parents understand the challenges faced by first-generation college students and how they can be overcome. The production of virtual recordings based on the panel is planned to more widely disseminate strategies for college access and success.

“Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)” is a professional development (PD) program that was started with funding from the Reynolds Foundation. This online PD program helps teachers learn how to better serve English learners in their classrooms. CDLC is looking to expand the offering of this online PD to school districts across the state.

The CDLC faculty has developed a new doctoral-level course about “Community Engaged Research and Practice.” The course is co-taught and cross-listed in several SOE departments. In Spring 2013, the course, ELC and SES 770, will be co-taught by Professors Bettez and Hardin.

Graduate students not only support the work of CDLC, but also shape plans. Claire Lambert, a third-year doctoral student, became involved as a graduate assistant to Professor Fairbanks. Lambert reflects on her experience with CDLC and says, “They listened to my ideas and they allowed me to participate fully with the group, and I felt like...they really took me seriously.” She adds that the CDLC’s research takes a “different angle,” considering “the child...as part of the family and part of the community, not only as a student in school.” Lambert further explains that CDLC does this exceptionally well because it “interacts directly with people from immigrant communities, and it honors what they do bring...(including) the resources...and the questions that they have.”

Of children in North Carolina, 16% were born outside of the U.S. or live with parents who were born outside of the U.S. CDLC is committed to working with this population and to providing mission-oriented products and services. Chalhoub-Deville says, “We are looking for partners; we are looking for funding.” This is essential for all CDLC projects. Visit the CDLC website, <http://cdlc.uncg.edu/>, receive updates and get involved <http://tiny.cc/cdlcguestbook>, or send an email cdlc.uncg@gmail.com.