



SHERMAN CENTER

for Early Learning
in Urban Communities

Director's Message

In this issue, we bring you a Center Update section highlighting the Diverse Books Project and our two main summer events, the Teacher Summer Institute and the inaugural Sherman Center Research Conference. In this update, we also share our shifts in staff and personnel, and our plans to expand our research focus during the 2022-23 academic year, as well as report on our most recent presentations at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), and the Maryland Early Childhood Conference (MDECC).

In our Featured Article, Dr. Angelique Jessup shares her reflections on the Teacher Summer Institute professional development workshop she facilitated for our partner early childhood educators, on the topic of Family Engagement for Diverse Students. Later, Louise Corwin updates us on the Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program's most recent events and the successes of their Fellows, as well as highlighting their most recent and largest cohort to date, Cohort IV. Lastly, Dr. Karrie Godwin shares the progress on the Sherman Center Program Evaluation Study she is leading to evaluate the impact of three of our programs: the Diverse Books Project (DBP), the Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program (ELP), and the Teacher Summer Institute (TSI). With this research study, we hope to provide evidence of the benefits our programming has had for teachers, families, and students during the past five years.

As our initial funding period ends, we reflect on all the Sherman Center has accomplished. We also look with excitement to the future as we solidify opportunities to continue supporting learning for urban children through research, professional development, and community partnerships. The generous gift from the [Sherman Family Foundation](#) propelled a transition period starting this fall, with the goal of establishing a new comprehensive George and Betsy Sherman Center. Thus, we have paused most of our programs to focus on research, evaluating our programming, and reimagining our initiatives to maximize our impact in promoting best instructional practices for children. It is my hope you will enjoy reading about our summer and fall 2022 accomplishments and the shift we are making as we move into the spring semester.

Jennifer Mata-McMahon

Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon is Associate Professor of Education and Director of the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Community at UMBC.

Sherman Center Update

by [Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Director and Associate Professor of Education](#)

During summer 2022 we delivered our fifth iteration of the [Teacher Summer Institute \(TSI\)](#), with keynote speaker René Colato Laínez, kindergarten teacher and author of "René has two last names", as well as other children's books focused on issues of diversity, immigration, and equity for young children (see Figure 1). Twelve participating teachers experienced a powerful professional development workshop, delivered by Dr. Angelique Jessup, who shares her impressions of the event in our Featured Article below. The workshop focused on working with families of diverse students, highlighting the importance of family engagement in the early childhood classroom.

Figure 1



We also hosted our inaugural [Sherman Center Research Conference \(SCRC\)](#) in August, with an introduction by Dr. Antonio Moreira, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, and a keynote presentation by Dr. Gilda Martinez-Alba, Assistant Dean and Professor in the Department of Educational Technology & Literacy at Towson University. Her presentation, "Research, Innovation, and Outcomes: Goal Oriented Achievement", highlighted how research can be accessible to practitioners by engaging in action research and reflective practice in their classrooms (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



Interesting paper presentations, workshops, and flash talks from our Faculty Research Awardees, graduate research assistants, faculty researchers, partner school teachers, and MECLP Fellows, were

Featured Article: Family Engagement - Building Trust, Activating Equity, and Fostering Collaborative Relationships

by [Dr. Angelique Jessup, Founder and Principal Consultant of The Connectus Group](#)

During the 2022 Sherman Center Teacher Summer Institute (TSI), just a few weeks before the official start of the 2022-23 school year, early childhood teachers came to talk and learn about family engagement and its interconnectedness with racial equity. They came with open minds and anticipation

shared at the SCRC and provided us with ample food for thought and discussion on early childhood education research and future collaborations. We captured the event in a [video](#) shared on our social media accounts.

Later in the spring our Program Coordinator, Melissa Bailey, transitioned out of UMBC, as did Liran Laor, MECLP Program Director, in August. We are excited for Dr. Patricia Young, one of our Campus Advisory Committee members, who stepped down from her committee role as she became the Chair of the Education Department. Dr. Shana E. Rochester, our Assistant Director and Research Associate, also transitioned into a Research Scientist role outside UMBC. In the fall we welcomed Shahin Hossain as our full-time Graduate Research Assistant, and Eliza Triolo and Priyal Shah as MECLP part-time student workers.

We resumed our Diverse Books Project (DBP) in the fall with the participation of 24 teachers from our five partner schools. Teachers requested 179 copies from a selection of 15 books from our diverse books collection. Teachers shared that they chose these books to support their instruction on topics that promote diversity and inclusion, and to provide windows and mirrors for their students.

Figure 3



In the fall, we began the design of a Program Evaluation Study, led by Dr. Karrie Godwin, to assess the impact three of our programs have had over the past five years. Dr. Godwin expands on the evolution of this study in the Research Notes section. Also, at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Annual Conference in Washington, DC, we presented "Maintaining Mutually Beneficial Partnerships in Early Childhood Education: The Sherman Center Model" to a national audience of early childhood practitioners and center directors (see Figure 3). And, at the Maryland Early Childhood Conference (MDECC) in Hagerstown, MD, we engaged statewide early childhood educators in a rich discussion about, "A Community-Based Approach to Engaging Linguistically Diverse Families in their Children's Literacy Development".

of starting a new school year that would not be marked by the tumultuous unexpectedness of COVID-19 closures. Teachers arrived hopeful that this would be a school year with consistency and an opportunity for a fresh start and a new year of growth.



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Research Notes

Sherman Center Program Evaluation Study

by [Dr. Karrie Godwin, Research Faculty and Assistant Professor of Psychology](#)

We are excited to share that three initiatives the Sherman Center for Early Learning in Urban Communities created are being evaluated this year to better understand their potential impact on teachers, students, and families. This work will help guide future modifications to the Sherman Center's programming to enhance our offerings and strengthen our community partnerships. The program evaluation is being led by Dr. Karrie Godwin, Assistant Professor in Psychology and Sherman Center Research Faculty, in collaboration with two graduate research assistants, Anika Aquino (Psychology) and Shahin Hossain (Language, Literacy, and Culture), Dr. Linda Baker, Sherman Center advisory committee member, and Dr. Jennifer Mata-McMahon, Sherman Center Director.

The research team is evaluating three programs: the Teacher Summer Institute, the Diverse Books Project, and the Families, Libraries, and Early Literacy Program. You can learn more about each of these programs on our [website](#). Participants from each of the programs will be invited to complete an online survey. Each program has been running for multiple years which will allow for multiple cohorts to offer rich insights about the programming, factors that contributed to their participation, the impact of key program components on teachers' pedagogical practices, children's academic readiness and growth, and caregiver-child practices to promote learning at home. In addition, participants will be encouraged to help identify areas for improvement and growth in the Center's programming. The research team is currently developing the surveys and plans to launch the study in the winter of 2023.

For more information, please contact Dr. Karrie Godwin (kgodwin@umbc.edu).

This school year would also mark a fresh start to engaging with families. Positivity was also felt for a year that would resume activities and events where families could attend and be involved. School closures and virtual learning gave families a window into instruction and learning in a way that was never accessible before. During the pandemic virtual learning, teachers, and families both saw their daily lives up close in real-time. Importantly, families got a front-row seat to observe instruction in ways that were unprecedented. With this reality and context, we gathered for the professional development on family engagement. Through the two-day workshop, we learned together the importance of building strong and effective family engagement. Teachers from the five Sherman Center partner schools were open and receptive and displayed a deep commitment to ensuring that family engagement in their classrooms is rooted in trusting relationships and partnerships to strengthen academic outcomes.

The professional development focused on three core themes: (1) understanding the impact of strong relationships between families and school communities, (2) gaining strategies to magnify family voice and elevate their needs as stakeholders, and (3) understanding the connectivity between equity and family engagement (see Figure 4).

Figure 4



On day one, teachers were introduced to developing an authentic definition of family engagement that reached beyond family involvement (i.e., showing up and participating in events). Teachers unpacked the differences between family engagement (relationship based) versus family involvement (attendance based) and discussed why the differentiation matters. Together we shared

what makes for a trusting relationship and why maintaining an asset-based mindset is critical when working with families. We concluded by discussing what family engagement means, which we defined as the collaboration between families and educators that accelerates student learning and includes respectful partnerships between families and school staff. At the end of day one, teachers had a stronger grasp on the components of family engagement, what it looks like, and why trust and respect set the foundation for a true partnership between teachers and families.

On day two, we took a deep dive into the history of race and schooling in Baltimore and worked on action plans. It was important to situate this work with a rich understanding of how systemic racism has operated in education. We acknowledged that a barrier to cultivating trusting collaborative relationships with families is discomfort around acknowledging the role that race and racism played and continue to play in education. The teachers took the call to action to recognize that authentic family engagement can be a tool to push back against systemic racism. Building authentic relationships with families rooted in respect and trust, regardless of race or zip code, helps cultivate deep engagement between teachers and families on what is needed for their child to be most successful. We ended day two with action plans. Teachers got to work on determining what they wanted to enhance or develop in their partnerships with families in their classrooms (see Figure 5).

It was a full two days marked by curiosity, reflection, and commitment to students and families in Baltimore. Family engagement is equity work in action.

Figure 5



The Maryland Early Childhood Leadership Program (MECLP) Update

by [Louise Corwin, Co-Chair, MECLP Advisory Committee](#)

During the summer, [MECLP](#) staff and Advisory Committee reviewed applications from early childhood practitioners and educators eager to become Cohort IV members. Finalists were interviewed and 19 early childhood professionals were invited to become the largest MECLP Cohort to date. These Fellows represent ethnic and geographic diversity and the variety of settings that are part of Maryland's early childhood landscape. A Summer Retreat brought together Advisory Committee members for a day of reflection on MECLP's progress including a What is Your Wildest Dream exercise and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis to clarify MECLP's future path. An August Gathering connected Fellows from Cohorts I, II, and III, Advisory Committee members, and guests for an event that featured networking, sharing, and an outstanding keynote - "Dreaming Together Imagining an Antiracist Future for Early

Childhood Education", by Dr. Fabienne Doucet, Executive Director, NYU Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools. Her keynote resonated with many fellows prompting them to choose the topic of equity in early childhood as their capstone projects. Funding from the Trust for Learning gave MECLP the opportunity to host three webinars as part of the series - "Becoming a Leader in Early Childhood Education at the Time of Equity". The webinars' themes of equity and leadership in early childhood education provided opportunities for former and current MECLP Fellows to engage in conversations with leaders in the field from around the country. A December event featured the Capstone Project presentations from Cohort III and the Orientation of Cohort IV. MECLP is excited to continue activities to assist the leadership journey of its Fellows supported by its Advisory Committee, faculty, funders, and colleagues.

For more information, please visit <https://meclp.umbc.edu>, or email Louise Corwin (lcorwin@umbc.edu), Co-Chair of the MECLP Advisory Committee