

**Chairs' Corner -- April 2010**  
**Experimental Education Unit (EEU) and the Norris & Dorothy Haring Center for Applied Research and Training in Education**

TO: UW Foundation, Deans/Chancellors, University Advancement Staff

FROM: Daniel J. Evans, Chair, UW Foundation  
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Dear Friends,

What does the University do for society? How do its knowledge, its theories, its expertise play out in the world? Of course there are scores of good answers to those questions. But if you're looking for a case that's especially vivid and engaging, you might pay a visit to the UW's Experimental Education Unit (EEU) at the Norris and Dorothy Haring Center for Applied Research and Training in Education. Few things are more concrete and immediate than a roomful of very young children learning how to be in the world, and that's the business of the EEU.

The program began life some forty years ago as a pilot school for children with neurological injuries. Then as now, its focus was on using UW research and skills to help young children make the most of lives that had begun with bad luck and impairment. Tucked in behind the Medical Center along the Ship Canal, the EEU is now jointly run by the College of Education (specifically, the Special Education area) and the Center on Human Development and Disability (CHDD). It serves about 250 children from birth to age 7, roughly half of whom have a developmental disability—Down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, fetal alcohol syndrome, language or motor disabilities, challenging behavior, or problems with no official diagnosis.

Whatever image you may have of a school for children with disabilities, you will not find it at the EEU. The most striking thing about the school, if one arrives knowing its mission, is how hard it is to see the disabilities. The preschool class sitting in a story circle, the kindergarteners getting ready for lunch, the children swarming over brightly colored playgrounds (one designed by UW architecture students) or filing carefully through the halls, the cheerful parents arriving or departing with kids in their arms—the whole scene is scarcely distinguishable from any other early childhood center. What you see is children—bright-eyed, upbeat, lively.

This is not an accident. “The EEU is unique in integrating disabled children with their typically developing peers,” says special-education chair Ilene Schwartz, who has been the school's director for 3 years. “What you're seeing here is the power of good models—the ‘normal’ kids—which is why we believe in inclusion and work really hard to achieve it. The disabled kids rise to the occasion—they look better here, and they look more disabled in segregated classrooms. It's like tennis: if you're trying to learn the game, it really helps to have someone there who can volley with you.”

But of course there's more going on in EEU classrooms than immediately meets the eye. Dr. Schwartz points out the casually-dressed adults mingling with the children in any given room: the head teacher with a master's degree in special education, the assistant teacher who's a UW graduate student, the occupational or physical therapist, the speech and language pathologist, the classroom aides (undergraduates in early childhood education), and perhaps a visiting psychologist. Unobtrusively, children are getting highly specialized and individualized therapy in the midst of regular classroom

activities and social play. Behind the scenes, meanwhile, parents have their own support and counseling services, starting with home visits and play groups for infants and continuing through the transition to “regular” school after kindergarten.

Years of educational research, much of it conducted at the school itself, underlie the curriculum, methods, and philosophy of the EEU. It is indeed “experimental.” When the school opened its doors, many people believed that children with Down syndrome could not learn. Today, these children are being educated in classrooms all over the country with an approach that was developed at the EEU. “We did the seminal work,” says Dr. Schwartz. “It is now recognized that people with intellectual disabilities can lead fulfilling lives.”

The urgent issue now is autism, which some are calling an epidemic. The current rate of diagnosis, says Dr. Schwartz, is one in a hundred eight-year-olds. School districts are mandated to provide appropriate education for these (and all disabled) children, and in 2008 there were 6,025 autistic children in Washington public schools.

“What we are demonstrating at the EEU,” says Dr. Schwartz, “is that children with autism can succeed in school settings.” Her own Project DATA (Developmentally Appropriate Treatment for Autism) gives autistic children small-group or individual instruction in addition to their time in a regular EEU class. “We have to *teach* many of these kids to play,” she says. “It’s critical, because play is the medium in which children learn.” For parents, the EEU is an alternative to the kind of intensive, home-based autism therapy that can overwhelm family time and resources. Most of the Project DATA children (and indeed of all EEU disabled students) gain enough independence and social skills to go on into blended public-school classrooms. Some succeed spectacularly, like the boy who entered Seattle’s gifted program and is now first-chair trumpet in his middle-school orchestra.

But not all have such happy outcomes. Much remains to be learned about autism, and it is a subject of intense study by UW scientists, along with other aspects of human development that pertain to the EEU. As part of the UW and CHDD, the school has a direct line to these researchers, many of them national leaders in their fields. “We don’t do the basic science,” says Dr. Schwartz, “but we learn from people all over campus, and sometimes they do research right here.” The EEU draws on the science to understand and attack practical problems in the classroom, doing what Dr. Schwartz calls “translative research.”

The UW funds only 10-20 percent of the EEU (the building and two salaries), but the school’s campus location, its ties to both the College of Education and CHDD science, are crucial to its work. Most funding comes from contracts with Seattle Public Schools and other agencies, which in effect hire the EEU to teach disabled students (those aged three and over), to develop model programs, and to train people who work in the field. These contractual arrangements, and the program’s many grants, mean that the parents themselves pay nothing. (The program even includes two Head Start classrooms, which work with both disabled and “normal” children from low-income families.) Hundreds of observers spend time at the EEU every year and take new ideas and expertise back to their own schools and agencies across the country.

A year ago, the EEU learned of a planned bequest that will likely augment still further its work and influence. Norris Haring, the school’s founding director, and his wife Dorothy have established an endowment that will ultimately bring the school more than \$4 million. The gift will fund 15 graduate fellowships every year in special education, as well as supporting other aspects of the work of the new Norris and Dorothy Haring Center for Applied Research and Training in Education.

Meanwhile, you will find no greater fans of the EEU than the parents whose children have learned there. “It’s world class,” says Tracy Brown. All three of her children, the middle one with Down syndrome and

the other two without disabilities, have been EEU students. “I’ve been astounded by the professionalism of the staff but also by their personal qualities—their understanding and compassion, their encouragement and willingness to try anything, to work on whatever you want, academics, social skills, anything. It’s really a family. I’ve so appreciated the parents who brought their typically developing kids there, because the disabled kids really do learn by mimicking. But the typical kids also learn—the EEU breaks down those walls of fear about relating to people who are different. This school is a hidden gem.”

So when people ask you what the University contributes to the larger world, remember the EEU.

Dan, Lyn, and Orin

#### Looking Back

- **Contributions July 1, 2009 through March 31, 2010 total \$211,510,606.**
- The **March 2010 Report of Contributions** is attached and contains fundraising details.

#### Looking Ahead

- **Friday, April 23, 2010.** UW Foundation Board of Directors Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting.
- **Saturday, September 11, 2010.** Joint Meeting of UW Foundation Board of Directors and UWAA Board of Trustees, 8:00 a.m. coffee; 8:30-10:30 a.m. meeting.