

## HIV prevention program implemented in South Africa

### School-based Alcohol and HIV Prevention in South Africa

**Co-PIs:** Sonja Feist-Price, College of Education; Rick Zimmerman, College of Communication; Pamela Cupp, College of Communication

**Funding Agent:** NIH/National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

**Funding:** \$1.5 million

A team of researchers from the University of Kentucky developed a school-based alcohol and HIV prevention program for adolescents in South Africa. This research is based on a funded school-based project in the U.S. that showed promise in delaying sexual initiation and enhanced condom use among adolescents. Alcohol and HIV prevention efforts were made

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*Dr. Feist-Price with community members who enthusiastically support the research.*

## Projects link assessment to curriculum in pre-schools

### Project Play

**Co-PIs:** Jennifer Grisham-Brown, University of Kentucky  
Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, Kent State University

**Funding Agency:** US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs

**Funding:** \$700,000 over four years

### Project Link

**PI:** Jennifer Grisham-Brown, University of Kentucky

**Funding Agency:** The Administration of Children and Families, Headstart Bureau

**Funding:** \$800,000 over four years

The measurement of success in children’s learning environments across traditional grade levels has long been a subject of intensive research and study. In the last five years, however, educational programs that serve pre-kindergarten age children have become much more accountable to back their claims with evidence of educational success.

The University of Kentucky is involved

in two research projects to help early education programs assess needs and demonstrate success.

Jennifer Grisham-Brown, Ed.D, associate professor at the UK College of Education, and Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, Ph.D., an associate professor at Kent State University, direct Project Play, a model demonstration grant that trains early childhood education teachers to work with students with disabilities. In later years, Project Play has broadened its scope to include all children.

Pre-kindergarten programs are admitting more children with disabilities and teachers need special preparation on how to integrate these new students into the program. During summer professional development sessions, Drs. Grisham-Brown and Pretti-Frontczak show teachers how to conduct meaningful assessments of these children’s developmental skills. They then show how teachers can use these assessment techniques to shape their instruction to address students’ needs and provide a basis upon which teachers can measure and track the progress of individual students.

Project Play has been an ongoing program since 2001. In Kentucky, it is being carried out in two school systems – the Jessamine Early Learning Village in Nicholasville and the Franklin County Public Pre-School program.

With regard to the research, Dr. Grisham-Brown said that it has been advantageous to work with these two school systems because they present different types of educational environments. The Jessamine Village operates its preschool classrooms out of one location. Franklin County’s pre-school, on the other hand, is offered at every elementary school in its district.

“We are demonstrating a method of authentic assessment that links directly with Kentucky’s Early Learning Standards and can be used for curriculum development and program evaluation. It’s a more accurate measure of a child’s progress at that age level than standardized testing,” commented Grisham-Brown.

With the enhanced scope of Project Play, it shares some basic similarities with another research project Grisham-Brown has been

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# Improving Learning Environments for Health Education

## Improving School Learning Environments in HIV and Pregnancy Prevention

**PI:** Eric Anderman, UK College of  
Education

**Co-PI:** Rick Zimmerman, UK College of  
Communications

**Funding Agency:** NIH/National Institute  
of Nursing Research (NINR)

**Funding:** \$2,086,866 over five years

In the global effort to control the spread of HIV infection, even successful education programs need to be improved. Researchers from the University of Kentucky, for instance, are in the middle of a five-year-long project to enhance the success rate of a highly regarded educational curriculum known as “Reducing the Risk”(RTR). The RTR program has a proven track record of encouraging young people to avoid behaviors that put them at risk of contracting

HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. UK is helping make that curriculum better.

Eric Anderman, associate dean for research and graduate studies at the UK College of Education, and Rick Zimmerman, professor in the UK Department of Communications and a specialist in HIV prevention research, have both served as co-principal investigator and principal investigator in the research study since its initial funding in 2001. Anderman described the effort as a highly effective collaborative project between the UK Colleges of Education and Communications. The five-year research project is funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR), a branch of the National Institutes of Health.

Richard Barth, Ph.D., developed “Reducing the Risk” (RTR) and put it into successful practice at numerous schools across the United States in the early 1990s.

The research effort that UK mounted has been to test new ideas and educational strategies that may increase the effectiveness of this program. Several urban and suburban Kentucky high schools have participated in the project.

“We used the RTR curriculum as a control for measuring the value of the enhancements we implemented in our test groups. What we want to do is test our ideas for making the program better against its usual rate of success,” Anderman commented.

All schools participating in the study benefit from using the RTR curriculum.

The RTR curriculum teaches students the value of abstinence by educating them on the consequences of unwanted pregnancy and the risks to life and health of infection from sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV. For students who have not engaged in sexual behavior, the program can help delay the  
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involved in: Project Link.

Project Link, created by a partnership grant between the UK College of Education and the Community Action Council for Lexington-Fayette, Bourbon, Harrison, and Nicholas Counties, is a research project in the Council’s Headstart Program.

Like Project Play, Link is a professional development program for caregivers in Headstart programs. It is also an all inclusive program, designed to train Headstart teachers to link assessment and curriculum for all children in their classrooms. But beyond those two facets, Project Link involves a greater level of professional development and is much more of a classical research study, said Grisham-Brown.

Eighteen classes are involved. Nine serve as the project’s control group. The other nine have teachers attend an intensive professional development program and receive on site technical assistance from project staff. Therefore, a significant part of Link’s program is to develop assessment skills in Headstart’s employees and then teach them how to link assessment to the development of an effective educational program.

“There have been several positive outcomes from both projects. We see a great deal of potential to apply our findings in pre-

K programs across Kentucky,” Grisham-Brown commented.



*Kristie Pretti-Frontczak (center) from Kent State University, and Jennifer Grisham-Brown (standing) from the University of Kentucky College of Education, discuss a project with “Project Play” participants.*

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culturally relevant for adolescents in South Africa. The project is supported by a grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

Sonja Feist-Price, professor in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Counseling, and Rick Zimmerman, professor in the UK Department of Communications, are nationally recognized specialists in the field of HIV, STD, and pregnancy prevention research.

The school-based HIV prevention efforts were initially developed in 1995 under Zimmerman and Lewis Donohew, a former UK professor in the College of Communications and Information Studies. Feist-Price came aboard in 1996 to build on their program with a minority supplement to the research. At that time, the knowledge and skills-based intervention targeted adolescents in urban high schools in Cleveland and Louisville.

“From our initial work, we expanded our focus to include community-based research and focused on adolescents at highest risk for becoming infected with HIV. One of the three target groups were adolescent females in urban settings. Using an empirically sound research design, one of the primary aims of our research was to assess the impact of an enhanced skills-focused, classroom-based intervention to meet the special needs and characteristics of adolescents on perceived risk of HIV, behavior intentions, and sexual risk-taking.” Feist-Price said regarding their research.

“Some kids don’t always have many positive role models to emulate, and many have yet to develop the maturity or the skills to appropriately navigate relationship issues they face.”

Much of the research the UK team has done deals with more than providing knowledge about the risks of HIV and other STDs. They seek to develop behavioral skills that encourage adolescents to have self-pride, make responsible choices, delay sexual initiation, develop effective communication skills, avoid putting themselves in risky situations, and understand behavioral risks.

“We also try to teach young people to critically view media messages targeted to them. Popular entertainment presents false messages about lifestyle and male-female

relationships. By making them aware of the illusion of such images, they can be more critical and inquisitive about the reality of what they see.”

The research team’s HIV prevention work led to additional funding from the NIAAA. It allowed UK researchers to expand their efforts toward adolescents in school-settings in South Africa.

In the formative phase of the new study, Feist-Price recalled how the research team found that African adolescents were inundated with HIV prevention messages and were not interested in another health program dealing explicitly with the subject. If their work was going to reach teens, they would have to use a new approach.

“We targeted alcohol use because it is an existing social problem that leads to high risk behaviors. We obviously can’t go into another country and think that we can duplicate the interventions the way they were implemented in other communities. It

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initiation of sexual contact. For students who are already sexually active, RTR encourages them to reconsider their behavior.

In their studies, UK has tested new ideas designed specifically to influence either attitudinal or behavioral change in students.

“We hope to find that our additions to RTR result in even more students choosing to abstain from initiating or responding to sexual contact. We also want to see if our ideas help students develop the personal confidence to say ‘No’ and delay the initiation of sexual activity,” Anderman said.

For students who had already engaged in sexual activity prior to the RTR program, researchers wanted to see if their approaches effected their attitudes. If students are determined to be sexually active, the researchers hope their work may guide those students toward behaviors that will lessen the risk of health problems or pregnancy.

The research has tested at least six different techniques and involved approximately 3,000 high school students.

“Because health classes are offered once per semester in high school, we have been able to gather a large amount of data. Initial results of our studies look promising,” said Anderman. “We are analyzing data on what new approaches were most successful and added more value to the program.”

wouldn’t work in the U.S. and it doesn’t work in South Africa. We won’t succeed if we operate from our own cultural values.”

“Throughout all of our research projects we focus on individual difference variables that place adolescents at greatest risk for engaging in risky behaviors: The high sensation seekers and the impulsive decision makers,” Feist-Price explained.

The international project is being conducted in collaboration with a team of HIV prevention researchers in South Africa. Members of the UK research team travel to the country several times throughout the year to assist with research efforts. “We hope the work we are doing leads us to new opportunities to collaborate with researchers in other countries to address HIV prevention needs. Any success we have to reduce the numbers of new infections will help us in the ultimate goal of bringing the HIV/AIDS pandemic under control.”

### OTHER SELECTED RESEARCH:

#### Appalachian Math Science Partnership (AMSP)

**Co-PI:** Ron Atwood, College of Education

**Funding Agent:** National Science Foundation

**Funding:** \$22 million over 5 years

#### National Assessment of Educational Progress, Secondary Analysis

**PI:** Xin Ma, UK College of Education

**Co-PI:** Edward Kifer, UK College of Education

**Funding Agent:** US Dept. of Education

**Funding:** \$96,878

#### Partnerships for Preventing Farm Injuries to Rural Youth

**Co-PI:** Joan Mazur, UK College of Education

**Funding Agent:** Center for Disease Control and Prevention

**Funding:** \$237, 519

#### Expansion of Content Literacy in Middle and High School Classrooms

**PI:** Susan Cantrell, Collaborative Center for Literacy Development

**Funding Agent:** KY Council on Postsecondary Education

**Funding:** \$200,000

## UK receives funding for preschool reading program

### Jumpstart Program

**Co-PIs:** Katherine McCormick, College of Education

Sharon Stewart, Associate Dean, College of Health Sciences

**Funding Agencies:** Starbucks Foundation and AmeriCorps

**Funding:** \$150,000

The Starbucks Foundation and AmeriCorps approved a grant to the University of Kentucky to fund a pre-school reading program called Jumpstart at The Booker T. Washington Academy (BTWA) in Lexington, Kentucky. Jumpstart identifies pre-schoolers who are having difficulty reading and matches them to college students who serve as their mentors.

Dr. Katherine McCormick, an associate professor in the College of Education and a specialist in early childhood education, and Sharon Stewart, associate dean of the UK College of Health Sciences, are the faculty investigators for the Lexington Jumpstart program.

“Jumpstart is excellent for two reasons. First, it is a sound, research-based literacy curriculum for pre-school students. It uses an assessment component, sets goals in collaboration with the pre-school teachers and families, and incorporates measures to determine if those goals are achieved. That aspect adds to its quality because it provides information to families about the progress of their child and ways to support their growth and development at home,” McCormick commented.

For aspiring early education teachers, Jumpstart provides a solid career experience prior to their student teaching.

Sue Strup, Director of UK’s

Experiential Education and Career Services at the James Stuckert Career Center, echoed those sentiments.

“Jumpstart provides career experiences we encourage UK students to explore,” said Strup.

Tracy Meehling is the manager of Jumpstart at UK. Her responsibility is to recruit students from the UK campus. Fortunately, AmeriCorps’ participation provides a financial incentive for college students to participate.

UK students who become members of the “Jumpstart Corps,” as the program refers to them, will receive a \$1,000 AmeriCorps grant if they meet their obligations. This is money students can apply to their education.

UK and BTWA will implement this early reading curriculum as outlined except for one aspect. Jumpstart is organized as a “pull out” program. Pre-school students leave their class to meet with their college student mentor. Kentucky’s state-funded preschool programs, however, are based on an all-inclusive model, McCormick said. Therefore, the Jumpstart program will be tailored to fit that model. “We won’t be singling out kids and asking them to leave their classroom,” McCormick said.

Credit for obtaining this grant is shared by the UK Colleges of Education, Health Sciences, and Social Work and the Department of Experiential Education and Career services.



*Students at The Booker T. Washington Academy read with their teacher and their mother.*