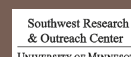


ConnectU: Long Term Evaluation of a Professional Development Program



Using Assessment Results

In the spring of 2010, the SWROC and Extension sought to find out what the program has meant for the region. A two-part evaluation was conducted focusing on programs within the last five years attended by participants from the 24 Minnesota counties indicated on the map. Survey data was gathered from 26 phone interviews and 31 online responses, for a total of 57 participants representing a variety of agencies and institutions.



- Participants responded to questions about
- work and professional background
 - usefulness of information/resources acquired
 - quality of the workshop experience,
 - relevance to professional development needs, and
 - recommendations for future sessions.

- Usefulness of information/resources**
- 82% of all participants reported actively using ConnectU information and resources in their work. Examples include: completing care plans for children; assessments resulting in earlier identification and referral; greater sensitivity to individual needs; assistance in writing Individual Education Plans (IEP); better behavior management in classrooms; and on-going work with children and families.

- A high number share what they learn with agency colleagues. Much of the sharing is informal through one to one conversation but also formally through staff meetings, reflective consultations, family health team meetings, community collaboratives, board meetings and Interagency Early Intervention Committees. Participants also share information with parents and caregivers as appropriate to their job through Women, Infants & Children clinics, early childhood classes, pregnancy centers, IEP meetings, and others.
- More than 80% of respondents said ConnectU helps to improve their agency's ability to serve clients. In many agencies, a particular service may be provided only by 1-2 individuals on the staff. As a result, some survey participants articulated a more personal benefit than a benefit to their agency as a whole. However, one participant expressed in this way, "My effectiveness helps the school district."

Quality of the workshop experience

- ConnectU is highly valued for its quality; participants offered much praise and few comments about needed improvements. An early childhood professional summed up the general consensus: "It gives me insight on how to address issues and approach problems when dealing with students and parents. I like to learn more about new methods and the latest research to assist me in my job. I am able to apply what I learned."

Relevance to professional development needs

- 98% positive score, highlighting the opportunity to earn Continuing Education Units, meet re-certification and/or licensure requirements, and enhance their day-to-day work.
- Nearly 60 percent of evaluation participants said ConnectU helps meet challenges in their work environment their job responsibilities had shifted within the last few years. One individual said, "My work has changed in different ways. The complexity of issues makes it much harder. There are more programs which means having to wear many more hats."
- Nearly 50 percent of agencies and schools have sent participants more than once in the past 5 years.

In responses to open-ended questions, ConnectU survey participants overwhelmingly appreciated the opportunity to hear from and interact face to face with University faculty and researchers who speak about cutting edge research in their field and assist practitioners in the application. A majority of participants also said the location and low cost made their attendance possible.



ConnectU Topics

ConnectU continues to explore key issues and seek regional partners to offer practical approaches to meeting the critical needs of our region's children, youth, and families. Topics are identified through ongoing conversations with communities and family care professionals.

Brain Basics: Stress on Young Children / Making Early Care & Education Effective (2006)
Megan Gunnar, PhD
Arthur Reynolds, PhD
Institute of Child Development

Identification, Epidemiology, Treatment (2008)
Robin Rumsey, PhD
Department of Pediatrics
Michael Reiff, MD
Autism Spectrum Disorders Clinic

The Teen Brain: Linking Development to Behavior (2010)
Monica Luciano, PhD
Department of Psychology
Katherine Murray, MD
Pediatrics Family Center and Amplatz Children's Hospital

Brain Development in Adolescence: Implications for Teen Mental Health (2007)
Sanjiv Kumra, MD
Department of Psychiatry
Nimi Singh, MD, MPH
Adolescent Health & Medicine

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (2009)
Judith Eckerle Kang, MD
International Adoption Clinic
Christopher Boys, PhD
Department of Pediatrics

Childhood Obesity (2010)
Ellen Demerath, PhD
School of Public Health
Sarah Jane Schwarzenberg, MD
Department of Pediatrics

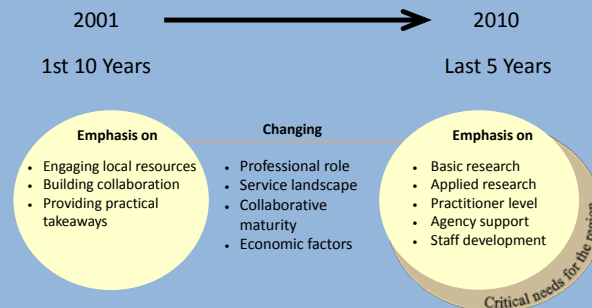
Classroom Behavior Management: What To Do When "Best Practices" Aren't Enough (2007)
Jennifer McComas, PhD
Frank Symons, PhD
Educational Psychology Dept.
Overview of Autism Spectrum Disorder:

Nutrition and the Developing Brain (2009)
Jamie Stang, PhD, MPH, RD
School of Public Health
Michael Georgieff, MD, Director
Center for Neurobehavioral Development

A Look Ahead

Future ConnectU offerings will continue to benefit from this energetic, multi-disciplinary approach to workshop planning and delivery.

ConnectU Moving Model



About ConnectU

The mission of ConnectU is to support those who work with children, youth and families in southwestern Minnesota.

Coordinated by the Southwest Research and Outreach Center (SWROC) and University of Minnesota Extension, ConnectU offers busy service providers easy access to excellent professional development face to face opportunities without leaving the region, saves agencies and institutions time and expense, and minimizes any interruption of services to families in southwestern Minnesota.

Each year since the year 2000, 80-100 participants from a wide range of disciplines have brought their questions and experience to the ConnectU discussion. They consistently give ConnectU programs high marks for increasing their understanding and providing a new idea or practice they can adopt in their ongoing work with children and families. Since 2006, ConnectU has focused on strengthening professional networks throughout the region.

Authors:

Colleen Gengler, University of Minnesota Extension

Pauline Nickel, University of Minnesota SW Research & Outreach Center