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Introduction

University Housing’s Eagle’s Wing is a child development and early learning program for University Apartments’ community children and a teaching and research facility for University students, faculty and staff.

Eagle’s Wing first opened its doors in August 1992 with two classrooms located in an apartment building. In 1998, the program was moved into the current space in the Eagle Heights Community Center. Throughout the years, additional programs have been added to Eagle’s Wing to meet community child-care needs while remaining committed to semester scheduling to meet the unique needs of enrolled student families.

Eagle’s Wing is a State Licensed and City of Madison Accredited program with capacity for 107 children between the ages of 6 weeks and 8 years old. Year-round enrollment is available with full-time (7:30-5:15), half-day morning preschool (7:30-12:00) and before and after school care options and full-day summer school-age programming.

Some other highlights of Eagle’s Wing include:

- A very international staff who speak many languages and have global experiences they share in the classroom
- A focus on anti-bias and peace education
- Placement site for: University of Wisconsin SoHE, School of Ed, Rehab Psych, Communicative Disorders and Madison College internships, practicums, student teaching and service learning
- Volunteer opportunities
- Located in the vibrant University Apartments Community Center at the center of an 83-acre apartment community surrounded by green space, community gardens and the UW Lakeshore Nature Preserve.
Read All About It: Literacy and Multiculturalism Come Together

It’s a story that fits right in at Eagle’s Wing—a Muslim family figuring out the nuances of American birthday parties—because it addresses a common theme for bicultural families: the younger generation essentially guiding the older generation in assimilating to their new culture.

Written by Pakistani author Rukhsana Khan, *Big Red Lollipop* is just one of many books to earn the Charlotte Zolotow Award, administered annually by the Children’s Cooperative Book Center at the UW-Madison, that has been put into the hands of children at Eagle’s Wing and the other campus child care centers courtesy of the CCBC and funding from an Evjue Foundation grant.

According to KT Horning, Director of the CCBC and writer of the grant, working with Eagle’s Wing and the other campus centers was just a natural fit since both organizations fall under the School of Education umbrella. The CCBC supports educators by providing informational and educational services based on its non-circulating collection of current, retrospective and historical books within children’s and young adult literature. Through their commitment to identifying exceptional children’s and young adult literature, they ensure a deep connection between young children and literacy.

Charlotte Zolotow was a student at UW-Madison from 1933-1936, studying under Helen C. White. After leaving Madison, she went on to write multiple children’s books published under Harper Publishing which, in turn, approached the CCBC upon Zolotow’s retirement, asking them to honor her because of her alumnus status and how endeared she was to UW-Madison.
The award is given for outstanding writing in a picture book intended for children ages birth to seven, with an emphasis on read-aloud quality. A committee of five people—a CCBC librarian, a public librarian, a K-2 teacher, an early childhood representative and an elementary school librarian—receive review copies of eligible books, read them with the children they work with in either a group setting or one-on-one, and then give their opinions about the literary merit of the story as well as their experiences with the children’s interaction with the books.

“The best review from a child is always ‘Read it again,’” says Horning.

Since 1998, one titled has earned the award annually, while up to five are given an honorary award and another selection of titles make it onto a list of highly commended books, all in all accounting for about fifteen books each year. The grant made it possible for each of the campus centers to receive all of the current year’s awarded books as well as a solid collection of past winners.

“Each of the campus child care centers has a really good collection of children’s books,” says Horning. “[Charlotte] would have been so pleased to hear about the books being put into campus child care centers.”

Eagle’s Wing Director Debb Schaubs expressed her appreciation in a note to Horning: “There aren’t enough words to say thank you for writing the grant for these amazing books!!!! It’s only been a couple of days now and I’m seeing them put to very good use. High quality literature is so important for children - in spite of all the drool and gob!”
Promoting Teachers of English Language Learners

For Beth Graue, Sorenson Professor of Childhood Studies and Chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction for the School of Education, having the ability to consistently place her students at Eagle’s Wing Early Childhood Program has been essential to the success of her department’s Early Childhood/English as a Second Language (ESL) certification program, which prepares teachers to work with English Language Learners (ELLs) ages birth to eight.

Each semester, Graue’s students come together for group discussions with a wide berth of experiences since placements range from PreK to 3rd grade in sites that can be campus child care, Head Start, community sites or 4K programs within the elementary schools.

“[Eagle’s Wing is] just a perfect place for us to collaborate,” says Graue in reference to the ESL design. “We tried to place Teacher Ed students particularly with the 4 year-old classrooms so that they can see high quality practice with ELLs.”

Graue also appreciates the fact that placement in a campus child care program like Eagle’s Wing means teachers have a chance to get to know children individually as well as in relation to their families.

“...unlike a lot of the school-based programs, they actually let parents in the building and they value teachers and parents talking to each other every day, and so a lot of the assumptions that preservice teachers come in with can be stretched in a way that I think is really important,” says Graue.

And this benefit becomes especially crucial at a center like Eagle’s Wing, with a high volume of international families.

“It’s different when you’re working with international families, because it gives the preservice teacher some sense of what it’s like not to be able to communicate and trying to understand how kids then get put in the middle of communication in a lot of ways,” says Graue.
Eagle’s Wing adds another dimension in educating international students who are pursuing degrees on campus in that it allows them a chance at teaching in United States schools and truly understanding our model of early childhood education. Graue says these students are often unable to get teaching positions in the public schools because, while they may have been fully employed in their home country, their credentials are not recognized under Wisconsin state standards.

Graue adds that a number of students who start their master’s program decide they like where they are and want to go on to earn their PhD.

“Having experiences at places like Eagle’s Wing makes it an attractive place to do more than one grad degree in,” says Graue.

In fact, Graue firmly believes that campus child care centers consistently make a positive impact on the university and the greater community abroad.

“I think the collaboration between the university and the university child care centers is really important, for teacher education reasons, for research reasons, for discussions about what quality is in education,” says Graue.
Building the Perfect Language Assessment Tool

Needing a partner site with young children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds to aid in development of a new language assessment tool, WIDA—an organization run through the Wisconsin Center for Education Research, committed to advancing developmentally appropriate language development and academic achievement for linguistically diverse children and students—found Eagle’s Wing was a natural fit.

“Our end goal was to develop a suite of assessments that were culturally and linguistically and developmentally appropriate for young children who are learning multiple languages,” says Erin Arango-Escalante, Director of Client Relations and Early Years at WIDA. “Eagle’s Wing was actually our first site that we had ever worked with on this project.”

Arango-Escalante also cites the center’s reputation for fostering strong relationships with families as well as ensuring best practices are happening in the classrooms as reasons why the collaboration with Eagle’s Wing worked so well.

While onsite at Eagle’s Wing, WIDA staff conducted classroom observations, interviews with parents and teachers, and worked with children one-on-one, both in and out of the classroom.

“I can’t tell you how many hours we spent there,” says Arango-Escalante, “but the information that was provided really gave us a solid understanding of the direction that we wanted to take with this suite of assessments.”

WIDA had an initial draft of the assessment tool, known as the Early Years Language Album, but Arango-Escalante says the time at Eagle’s Wing really helped tighten up the family questionnaire piece and led to complete revision of the portrait and snapshot pieces, both observational protocols.

The Early Years Language Album, set to launch nationwide in Fall 2016, will truly be a cross-sector assessment useful to child care centers, family child care programs, Head Start, PreK and Kindergarten programs, home visitation programs and
pediatricians’ offices. Arango-Escalante says it will look different and be used differently depending on requirements by states and local agencies.

According to Arango-Escalante, the data on identified K-12 English Language Learners (ELLs) shows the buzz term, achievement gap, continues to exist, and the goal at WIDA is to have children start kindergarten with foundational language skills in their home as well as English languages, thus prepared to learn in school.

Arango-Escalante says the Early Years Language Album will actually serve as a form of professional development for practitioners and parents who are using the tool, an important element as the amount of families speaking multiple languages in the home is increasing. Practitioners need to know how to support language development, and parents need guidance in supporting language development in the home, oftentimes thinking they should only be using English, a common misnomer.

That reciprocal learning aspect of the tool is key, which was evident at Eagle’s Wing, where the staff and parents were very open to letting WIDA into the program but were also curious to learn what they could from the development and research that was taking place.

“It was a great opportunity both ways,” says Arango-Escalante. “It was the perfect collaboration.”
A Bridge from Drawing to Learning

Once a week, for about two hours, magic was happening at Eagle’s Wing and it was all because of drawing. DrawBridge, a graduate course designed by Lynda Barry, Cartoonist, Artist and Assistant Professor, to get students out of their “comfort zone” and revert to their “childish” ways, was a unique opportunity for UW-Madison students and preschool students to work as co-researchers.

Directed to take the preschoolers’ lead, graduate students worked side by side with them on drawing, but they also did a lot of pretending and playing games. Barry’s instructions were that they not be a student, or a teacher, but “kind of be that in-between space,” says Ebony Flowers, the graduate student who oversaw the program. “The whole idea was to get grad students to experience how kids think and borrow that state of mind and apply that to their own work and the questions that they have in their research.”

Flowers, whose own dissertation is on DrawBridge, interviewed all of the graduate students about their experiences and saw a trend in how much enjoyment they got from their time with the kids and the deeper learning that was happening because students were able to loosen up and play.

“Spending time at Eagle's Wing was a fun way to get out of my science-y, academic brain and into fully exploring the world with all of my senses, as the children do. I noticed, for example, that children are always moving and touching things so I started to incorporate more movement into my own workday,” says Environmental Science student Hannah Stern. “At the time of taking the class, I was writing my proposal and I used some of the drawing activities I had done with the children to help me brainstorm ideas for my writing. I think my experiences there ultimately inspired me to do more interdisciplinary research for my thesis.”
The students that participated in DrawBridge were from all different fields of study—math education, literacy and digital media studies, printmaking (also a former lawyer for a federal agency) and Spanish—and were at different stages in their degree programs.

Students’ final project for the DrawBridge course was all handmade, including their own pictures along with pictures the kids made, and some sort of narrative or written component. Students incorporated stories the kids had told them, or narratives about the things that they did with the kids. The students had to combine all of their DrawBridge material with their own research in some way, working it into their artist’s statement and artist’s question.

According to Flowers, one of the unexpected outcomes of DrawBridge was how it changed the graduate students’ perspectives on teaching. The way they are told to teach contrasted greatly with how the Eagle’s Wing teachers approached learning. “They said it was like a breath of fresh air to see how the PreK teachers went about their day, and they adopted their styles in their collegiate teaching,” says Flowers.

KC Councilor, who still visits Eagle’s Wing and is studying rhetoric through the Communications Arts program, believes DrawBridge had a profound impact on both his learning and teaching.

“Being with the kids—sometimes drawing, often not, depending on what the class is doing—is an experience of pure joy for me,” says Councilor. “It has helped me to be a better teacher to my undergraduate students—looser and, in some ways, less serious. I think too often, we think that once people are grown up, they don't have the same needs as kids, which translates into less dynamic learning environments, less play. Being at Eagle's Wing helps remind me that all students, all people, want to be engaged and acknowledged.”
In Summary

Eagle’s Wing is a vital campus resource, having served thousands of children and families while contributing to the academic mission of the greater University since 1992. As a part of the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s campus child care system, faculty, staff and student families seek high quality early care and education for their children with a convenient location, allowing them to thrive in their academic and professional careers while being physically close to their children.

Hundreds and UW-Madison and Madison College students complete thousands of hours in practicums and observations to learn best practice from the exceptional, multicultural early education program and experienced staff, ultimately leading many into successful careers after graduation. Eagle’s Wing also serves students and faculty by providing numerous and diverse options for research and hands-on learning experiences.

Finally, and most importantly, families who enroll at the site state the “added value” from student practicums and research opportunities as well as the diverse programming and support of experienced, skilled staff who are peerless in their ability to answer a multitude of questions related to child guidance, development and parenting. As one parent comments: “[Eagle’s Wing is] a really great and diverse early learning environment for little kids, close to campus and University Housing. Debb, the director, is amazing…the teachers are really supportive and always try their best to help kids and families from all over the world! I truly feel the great love of Eagle’s Wing teachers [for] my kids!!”
Thank you to the following contributors:

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