

## CCF-Affiliated Research Spotlight



Dr. Raúl Rojas


Dr. Raúl Rojas is an Assistant Professor in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences at UT Dallas, Director of the Bilingual Language Laboratory, and CCF faculty affiliate. He completed his BA at Grinnell College in Psychology and Latin American Studies, and his MA and PhD in Communication Sciences and Disorders at Temple University. “I became interested in studying bilingual development as soon as I was immersed in a primarily English monolingual environment in college,” Rojas said. “The roles of identity and language stood out when I was away from the bilingual, bicultural environment that I grew up in along the Mexico-U.S. border.” As a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), Dr. Rojas has provided bilingual (Spanish-English) SLP services in multiple settings, including public schools and early intervention, and led various teams of bilingual SLPs. From 1999-2003, Dr. Rojas co-developed the ability for the Systematic Analysis of Language Transcripts (SALT) software program to analyze bilingual language samples in Spanish and English. Rojas believes that two of the many important reasons for studying bilingualism include the fact that the proportion of bilingual children and young adults in the U.S. is growing exponentially, and also because bilingual speakers offer researchers unique opportunities to study the dynamic interactions of two languages within the same participant. Dr. Rojas’ research focuses on child language from a longitudinal and processing perspective, specifically bilingual language development in typically developing children and in children with language impairment(s). In two simultaneous, multi-cohort longitudinal studies, Dr. Rojas is currently studying a range of aspects of dual language development in bilingual Latino children, starting at age 3, across distinct educational contexts throughout Dallas. “This work is important as it allows us to uncover not only the dynamics of bilingualism across multiple domains of speech and language before children typically enter school, but also the potential co-developmental roles of related factors such as maternal education, home language use, and self-regulation skills,” Rojas said. Dr. Rojas received the Outstanding Contribution Award in Speech-Language Pathology from the ASHA Leader in 2010 and his work has been supported by UT Dallas as well as research grants from the ASH Foundation and the Timberlawn Psychiatric Research Foundation.



The Center for Children and Families will celebrate play at our *Juega Conmigo* program all-site celebration at the Latino Cultural Center in Dallas on **Saturday, June 4th from 10am - 1pm**. Games, activities, and a puppet show provided for children and parents. *Free and open to the public*. Join us!

### Summary points from Dr. Shayla Holub’s 2016 Spring Lecture on “Promoting Family Health Through the Parent-Child Feeding Relationship”

- ▶ **Trust** - parents should trust children to determine when they are hungry and full, and children should trust parents to provide healthy foods.
- ▶ **Don’t try to control** - when parents use pressure, food as a reward, or restriction, it undermines children’s self-regulatory abilities and changes attitudes about the target food in undesirable ways.
- ▶ **Use sensitive and responsive parenting** - parenting styles are related to child eating outcomes. When parents are sensitive and responsive to their children’s needs, healthy eating habits can develop.
- ▶ **Respond positively** - feeding children can be stressful, but parents in strong parent-child feeding relationships provide positive emotional responses to feeding challenges and encourage healthy eating.
- ▶ **Focus on health** - successful parent-child feeding relationships are focused on the long-term goal of developing healthy habits. Parents and children should focus on health, not weight.



A video of Dr. Holub’s talk and all spring lectures conducted by the Center are available to view on the CCF website.



Blanca Lerma (left) celebrates a *Juega Conmigo* program graduation with a family and facilitator

## Partner Spotlight: Blanca Lerma, Vickery Meadow Youth Development Foundation

In the Fall of 2013, CCF staff trained 6 local women to deliver our *Juega Conmigo* (Play With Me) program at new program sites in the Vickery Meadow and Pleasant Grove neighborhoods of Dallas. The Vickery Meadow Youth Development Foundation (VMYDF) was instrumental in this expansion, providing support for our program facilitators, assistance with program recruitment, and help in securing space in the community to hold the program. Blanca Lerma is the lead facilitator in the Vickery Meadow class and a VMYDF paid staff member. “Through this program, I have been greatly impressed with the positive changes that occur in children when parents understand that every moment they spend with their children counts,” Lerma said. “Many of the things children do and don’t do depend in large part on the interactions and quality time parents devote to them.” Over 30,000 people live in the 2.86

square mile Vickery Meadow neighborhood of northeast Dallas, representing a variety of cultures, ethnicities, homelands, and languages. “Programs like *Juega Conmigo* bring hope to the children in Vickery Meadow,” said Lerma. “There is a lot of work to do in this community but *Juega Conmigo* is a great start for helping parents build a foundation for healthy and happy children.”

## Selected Recent Research from CCF Faculty-Affiliates



“How do children weigh competence and benevolence when deciding whom to trust?”

Recent research by **Dr. Candice Mills** and colleagues in the journal *Cognition* examined how 3- to 5-year-olds weigh competence (i.e., how much someone knows) and benevolence (i.e., how nice or mean someone appears) when deciding whom to trust for new information. Across 3 experiments, they found that although children sometimes trust knowledgeable adults over less knowledgeable (but nice) ones, they do not always do so. More specifically, if children have to determine how knowledgeable someone is from observing that adult’s answers to other questions, they struggle to recognize how competent that person is. These findings emphasize the importance of considering *how* children find out about other people’s knowledge when they seek out information from others.

“Child reactivity moderates the over-time association between mother-child conflict quality and externalizing problems.”

**Dr. Jackie Nelson** recently published a study of mother-child conflict in the *International Journal of Behavioral Development*. Researching 5- to 7-year-old children and their mothers, she found that constructive parent-child conflict interactions that teach children to problem-solve and negotiate can enhance children’s social adjustment. Constructive conflict quality was related to decreases in children’s externalizing problems, but only among children who were low in negative reactivity.

“Self-esteem in children and adolescents with hearing loss.”

Along with her colleagues, **Dr. Andrea Warner-Czyz** recently reported on children with hearing loss in the journal *Trends in Hearing*. Examining the influence of generic factors unrelated to hearing loss (e.g., age, gender, temperament) and specific factors associated with hearing loss (e.g., age at identification, communication skills), her team found that children with hearing loss rated their self-esteem slightly but significantly more positively than hearing peers. Higher self-esteem ratings correlated with greater desire for closer relationships, better ability to focus and shift attention, and fewer depressive mood symptoms.

## 5th Screening Fair Highlights Collaboration

CCF partnered with the Family Literacy Center at J. Frank Dobie Elementary School in February to once again conduct hearing, language, and developmental screenings for young children. The Callier Center for Communication Disorders' audiologists and speech language therapists provided the hearing and language screenings while CCF screened the children for developmental delays. CCF student volunteers, including members of the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity at UT Dallas, provided playful learning activities for the children while they waited to be screened. "The RISD Family Literacy Program feels very fortunate for our ongoing partnership with CCF," said Debbie Cotton, director of the program. "Their expertise as well as their ability to connect with families is an invaluable asset to our program. Because of the services they provide to our families, together we have helped numerous young children get the support they need to be successful in school and beyond." The Center conducts Screening Fairs 3 times per year in high-need Dallas areas.



Dobie Elementary School's Family Literacy Center partnered with CCF and the Callier Center for Communication Disorders to provide screenings for their students

## Juega Conmigo Group Developmental Screenings

New to the *Juega Conmigo* (Play With Me) program this Spring, all children enrolled in the program received a developmental screening in February. *Juega Conmigo* serves children ages 0-3 together with their parents through playful-learning activities. Parents were always offered a developmental screening for their child if interested but this Spring, all children were screened for delays at all 5 *Juega Conmigo* program sites. Using a group screening model, developmental specialists worked through the 5 domains of the screening (communication, problem-solving, gross motor, fine motor, and socio-emotional) with the parents in a group setting, providing guidance and information about their child's development throughout the course of the screening. With this process, 63 children were screened and 25% of them were referred for further evaluation and therapy services. All parents received follow ups after the screening to ensure their connection with services and recommendations to promote their child's optimal development.



Parents worked through the 5 domains of the screening with their child, guided by CCF's developmental specialists



Group developmental screenings at a *Juega Conmigo* class



## From the Director

This Spring's lecture series, 'Empowering Parents and Children Together', went beyond our usual lineup of CCF faculty speakers by including child and family researchers

from Southern Methodist University (one from its Department of Psychology and the other from the Department of Teaching and Learning), the director of our *Juega Conmigo* program, and one CCF faculty member. All the lectures drew large and appreciative crowds, with record numbers from many community programs. If you missed out, you can view this year's and previous years' lectures on our website. Another exciting activity in early June is taking us back to the Latino Cultural Center for our 2nd annual celebration of playful learning. Last year's event brought families together from our *Juega Conmigo* programs and featured a bilingual puppet show, a performance by some program children and their mothers, and many play activities led by our student volunteers. With a similar format, this year's celebration should be lots of fun, and it's open to all. We hope you're able to join us.

- Margaret T. Owen, Ph.D., *Robinson Family Professor, Director, Center for Children and Families*

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The Center for Children and Families was established in 2008 with a generous grant from the Meadows Foundation. Our heartfelt thanks are extended to the individuals, foundations and organizations that have given and aided us in our vision.

## How to Give

As we work to promote optimal family and child development, our community outreach programs and our child and family research need your support.



To learn more about giving to the Center for Children and Families or how to designate your gift, contact Pagett Gosslee, CFRE at [pgosslee@utdallas.edu](mailto:pgosslee@utdallas.edu) or 972-883-2837.

We are an important resource for children and families with your support.