Council for Exceptional Children Division for Research honors Patricia Snyder with distinguished research award

UF Distinguished Professor and Director of the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies Patricia Snyder was recognized with the Kauffman-Hallahan-Pullen Distinguished Research Award by the Council for Exceptional Children Division for Research.

The Kauffman-Hallahan-Pullen award recognizes those who have made significant contributions to the field of special education that have improved or enhanced services and education for exceptional individuals. A champion for early intervention and early learning for more than 40 years, Snyder embodies what it means to be a distinguished scholar.

Through professional and personal experiences, she recognized early on a calling to foster inclusive practices and improve outcomes for young children, birth to age five with or at risk for disabilities or learning delays, and to identify effective strategies for supporting them and their families.

She began her career as a speech and language therapist working with children under five and their families as part of a transdisciplinary team. She quickly realized the power and opportunity in early prevention and intervention efforts, particularly embedded instruction practices.

“I didn’t want to take children down the hall to the therapy room or work with them while their caregiver watched me,” Snyder said. “I wanted to support children’s development and learning, working alongside other team members in classrooms or with caregivers in their homes — places where all children interact and learn in their everyday activities and routines.

This, however, was a novel idea at the time. Many practitioners did not understand the principles and practices of embedded instruction nor the value to young children's development and learning. In fact, in the 1970s, families whose children had more significant disabilities might have been advised to consider institutional care for their children.

"I'll never forget a mom I met when her daughter was 12 months old," Snyder said. "Her child had cerebral palsy and the doctor had advised her that 'she might never walk, she might never talk — you might want to think about where you're going to have her live when you can no longer care for her.'"

A short time after meeting this mom and interacting with her and her child, Snyder and the early intervention team knew this prediction was wrong.

> "The mom was a nurturing and responsive caregiver and she had our early intervention team supporting her and her child in their everyday activities and routines," Snyder said. "We celebrated when her child took her first step, when she said her first words, and so much more!"

"And, in the years that followed early intervention, I received holiday cards with updates about taking dance lessons alongside her peers, going through school with them, and, as many years went by, attending college," Snyder continued.

This is just one of many thousands of stories she could share about why early intervention matters and why practices in the field should be evidence-based.

These experiences, and many more, solidified Snyder's passion and commitment to this work, becoming a pioneer for embedded instruction and a lifelong advocate for early intervention, for inclusion and for effective practices.

Today, Snyder's research agenda is as robust as it is enduring. Through an implementation science lens, she is dedicated to improving practices and supports for young children with or at risk of disabilities, their families, and the practitioners from many different disciplines who work with them.

"Dr. Snyder is a pillar of early childhood research, a veritable icon in the field," said College of Education Dean Glenn Good. "The University of Florida is privileged to have her among its ranks."

She has been instrumental in developing and gathering evidence for a range of practices in the field, including assessment practices; embedded instruction practices; social-emotional and behavioral practices; evidence-informed professional development practices; and the 3Rs of Early Learning: Relationships, Repetitions, Routines. The field recognizes Embedded Instruction for Early Learning and the Pyramid Model as two frameworks of effective practices for use with all young children. Practice-based coaching, developed by Snyder and her colleagues, is an evidence-based approach designed to support practitioners' and caregivers' implementation of effective practices.

Erica McCray, director & associate professor in the School of Special Education, School Psychology, and Early Childhood Studies nominated Snyder for the Kauffman-Hallahan-Pullen Distinguished Research Award, and she was unanimously selected by the committee.

"She is an internationally recognized scholar at the top of her discipline, whose influential scholarship and federally-funded research have transformed the field of early intervention and childhood special education," McCray said. "I feel fortunate that she and I joined the faculty here at the same time and remain in awe of her relentless pursuit of excellence on behalf of children and families."

Snyder shared that this award is a career capstone and reiterated the importance of her colleagues with whom she has conducted research and those who have supported her research agenda. Along with her research, Snyder hopes her teaching and service has created a legacy for the students, postdoctoral fellows and younger faculty she has the opportunity to mentor.

"I hope my work inspires the next generation and they will see further — just like I saw further because I stood on the strong shoulders of my mentors," Snyder said. "They taught me why it was important to do the research we do and to do it well."

The CEC-DR also recognized Nicholas Gage, associate professor of Special Education, with the Martin J. Kaufman Distinguished Early Career Research Award. Their awards will be presented during the CEC-DR's General Business Meeting and Awards Reception, held virtually on March 12, 2021.

Read the full story here.