

Paula J. Thompson, Ed.D
University of Nebraska at Kearney
Teacher Education – Early Childhood Inclusive Education
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EDUCATION

Ed.D. Educational Studies-Special Education. University of Nebraska Lincoln (2019)
M.A. Education-Early Childhood Education. University of Nebraska Kearney (2002)
B.A. Elementary & Early Childhood Education. University of Nebraska Kearney (1993)
A.A. General Education Academic Transfer. Central Community College (1990)

CERTIFICATION

Nebraska Teaching Certificate (Birth-Grade 3 & K - Grade 6) (1993 - 2028)
RCR - Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research (February 2025 – 2028)
Human Research - IRB - Social & Behavioral Faculty (June 2024 – 2027)

EXPERIENCE

Cille and Ron Williams Chair of Early Childhood Education: University of Nebraska at Kearney (2025-present)

Buffett Early Childhood Institute Community Chair: University of Nebraska at Kearney (2025-present)

Associate Professor: University of Nebraska at Kearney (2022-present)
*Tenure (2023-2024)

Assistant Professor: University of Nebraska at Kearney (2013-2022)

Lecturer: University of Nebraska at Kearney (2011-2013)

Literacy Coach: Early Reading First, University of Nebraska Lincoln (2008-2010)

Adjunct Professor: University of Nebraska at Kearney (2006-2011)

Mentor Coordinator/Competency Assessor: University of Nebraska at Kearney (2005-2007)

Adjunct Professor: Central Community College, Grand Island, NE (2004-2009)

Assistant Director: Central Nebraska Community Services, Early Childhood Programs (Head Start, Early Head Start, and Public School Preschool) (2003-2011)

Professional Development Coordinator: Central Nebraska Community Services, Early Childhood Programs (Head Start, Early Head Start, and Public School Preschool) (1996-2003)

Preschool Teacher/Center Coordinator: Central Nebraska Community Services, Early Childhood Programs (Head Start) (1993-1996)

COLLEGE TEACHING

University of Nebraska Kearney Student Evaluation of Teaching

Additional data available upon request
Grand Mean (2013-2024) = 4.52

University of Nebraska Kearney

TE 241	Foundations of Early Childhood Education
TE 242	Literacy Methods for Ages Birth through Five
TE 249	Supporting Young Children Through Family and Community Involvement
TE 248	Math, Science, and Social Studies for Ages Birth through Eight
TE 323	Partnerships with Families
TE 338	Infant and Toddler Mental Health
TE 339	Infant Toddler Curriculum
TE 339L	Practicum Experience: Infant Toddler Curriculum
TE 341	Introduction to Early Childhood Education
TE 342	Literacy Methods for Preschool Teachers
TE 343	Methods of Inclusive Education Ages Birth through Three
TE 343L	Practicum Experience: Early Childhood Unified: Birth through Three
TE 344	Methods of Inclusive Education Ages Four through Five
TE 344L	Practicum Experience: Early Childhood Unified: Ages Three through Five
TE 346	Early Childhood Administration
TE 347	Literacy Methods Ages Birth through Three
TE 348	Math, Science, and Social Studies for 0-8
TE 349	Supporting Young Children through Family and Community Involvement
TE 899P	Special Topic: Early STEM
TE 400	Student Teaching Supervisor
TE 816A	Practicum: Early Childhood Education

Central Community College (Grand Island, NE)

ECED 1050 Expressive Arts
ECED 1060 Observation, Assessment & Guidance
ECED 1110 Infant/Toddler Development

ECED 1120 Preschool Child Development
 ECED 1130 Literature for Young Children
 ECED 1150 Introduction to Early Childhood Education
 ECED 1250 Infant/Toddler Practicum
 ECED 1260 Safety/Health/Nutrition
 ECED 1270 Responsible Parenting
 ECED 1520 Preschool Practicum
 ECED 2070 Family & Community Relationships
 ECED 2450 Administration of Early Childhood Education

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

2025: Revised course syllabi and content for TE 241 and TE 249
 2024: Created course syllabi and content for TE 337
 2023: Major revisions to course content for TE 339/339L, TE 347, and TE 349
 2022: Major revisions to course content (1 to 3 credits) for TE 346
 2022: Created the course syllabi and content for TE 899P - Early STEM
 2020: Created the course syllabi and content for TE 499 - Early EdU Project
 2019: Member of writing team working on ECI degree program renewal
 2013: Created course syllabi and content for TE 338, 339, 343L, 344L, 347, and 349
 2012: Created course syllabi and content for TE 346 and TE 348
 2007: Member of the writing team that created the Getting a Head Start on Energy Curriculum

RECOGNITION

2024: UNK Mortar Board Faculty Appreciation (Emma Kehler, undergraduate student)
 2022: Region VII Head Start Association, Nebraska State Children's Champion Award
 2009: Nebraska Head Start Administrator of the Year Award
 2002: Nebraska Head Start Leadership Award

GRANTS (Funded Projects)

Nebraska Department of Education Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant, \$518,000 (2025-2026). *Teacher-Child and Family-Child Interactions: Fostering Oral Literacy from Birth Through Kindergarten Entry*. Primary Investigators: Daro, A., Thompson, P.; Co-Investigators; Sutton, K., Moulton, S., Gemar, N., Schmidtke, A., Colling, M., Pierson, N., Nareyka, N., & Partridge-Nelson, K.

Nebraska Department of Education Grant, \$870,998.00 (2024-2026). *Reading Instruction Strategies for Educators (RISE)*. Primary Investigator: Adkins, M.; Co-Investigators; Feusner, C., Hansen, M., Thompson, P., Kracl, C., Lilienthal, L., Hollar, J.

Early Educator Investment Collaborative, \$2,159,125 (2024-2025). *Responsive Equitable System for Preparing Early Childhood Teachers (RESPECT) across Nebraska: Proposal to Transform Early Childhood Education Lead Teacher Preparation Programs*. Primary Investigator (UNL); Torquati, J., Knoche, L.; UNK Subaward Year 3: Primary Investigator: \$230,367.00; Thompson, P.; Co-Investigator Jane Strawhecker.

- U.S. Department of Education, \$2,000,000.00 (2024-2026) *Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Education Workforce (KNEW)*. Primary Investigator: Lai, P.; Co-Investigators: Obasi, S., Rech, J., & Thompson, P.
- Nebraska Professional Development Grant UNK Subaward \$32,918.20 (2022-2024). *Nebraska Head Start Workforce Needs Assessment*. Primary Investigator: Thompson, P.; Co-Investigators: Gallagher, K., Daro, A., Sutton, K., Roberts, T., & Boyer, M.
- University of Nebraska Kearney Technology Grant \$1,964.70 (2023) *Coding with Young Children*. Primary Investigator: Thompson, P.
- Women Investing in Nebraska \$86,375.00 (2021-2022) *A Head Start on STEM*. Primary Investigator: Thompson, P.; Co-Investigators: Strawhecker, J. & Harshbarger, D.
- University of Nebraska Kearney Research Services Council \$5,922.00 (2016-2017) *Supporting Knowledge and Competencies in Nebraska's Early Childhood Workforce: Accessibility in UNK's Online and On-Campus Undergraduate Program*. Primary Investigator: Gallagher, K.; Co-Investigators: Mollenkopf, D. & Thompson, P.
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services \$20,000.00 (2007-2008) *Central Nebraska Community Services---, Loup City, NE for Cultural Responsiveness and Dual Language Education (CRADLE)*. Grant Writer: Thompson, P.
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services \$32,000.00 (2007-2010) *Central Nebraska Community Services---, Loup City, NE for Strengthening Partnerships and Resources in Communities (SPARC)*. Grant Writer: Thompson, P.
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services \$134,000.00 (2004-2013) *Central Nebraska Community Services---, Loup City, NE for Annual Head Start Continuation Grant T/TA Funding*. Grant Writer: Thompson, P. (non-competitive)

PUBLICATIONS (Peer Reviewed)

- Daro, A.M., Cunningham, K.M., Sutton, K., Thompson, P., & Gallagher, K. (revise and resubmit). Beyond compensation: Burnout, intent to leave, and ECE workforce wellbeing.
- Thompson, P., Strawhecker, J., Harshbarger, D., & Yungdahl, L. (2025). A head start on stem: Investigating the relationship of early childhood educator knowledge and self-efficacy. *The Dialog: A Journal for Inclusive Early Childhood Professionals*, 28(2), 50-71.
- Strawhecker, J., Knoell, C., Thompson, P., Shundoff, N. & Bardell, A. (2023). Parents' perceptions of STEM: The use of STEM materials for preschoolers in the home environment. *National Association of Professional Development Schools: Bridging Research and Practice*, 18(3), 177-190.

Thompson, P., Marvin, C. & Knoche, L. (2021). Practices and reflections of experienced, expert early childhood coaches. *Infants and Young Children*, 34(4), 337-355.

Thompson, P., Strawhecker, J., Sinnett, E. & Shundoff, C. (2021). Building a vision for STEM instruction: Preparing early childhood teacher candidates. National Association of Professional Development Schools: *Bridging Research and Practice*, 16(1), 34-38.

Thompson, P., Marvin, C. & Knoche, L. (2018). Program enrollment options and teacher self-efficacy for promoting partnerships with parents in preschool programs. *National Head Start Association NHSA Dialog*, 20(1), 69-82.

PUBLICATIONS (Editorial Reviewed)

Harshbarger, D., Thompson, P., & Strawhecker, J. (2025). Early childhood educator self-efficacy for implementing early stem experiences. *The Dialog: A Journal for Inclusive Early Childhood Professionals, Research to Practice*, 28(2), 104-109.

Thompson, P., Marvin, C. & Knoche, L. (2018). Promoting partnerships with parents in preschool programs: Does the number of classroom sessions a day matter? *National Head Start Association NHSA Dialog*, 20(1), 112-116.

REPORTS

Thompson, P., Daro, A., Sutton, K., & Gallagher, K. C. (2024). “Worthy and good”: Supporting the Head Start workforce in Nebraska. Buffet Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska.

PRESENTATIONS

National (Peer Reviewed)

Daro, A., Cunningham, K., Sutton, K., Thompson, P., & Gallagher, K. C. (2025). *Early childhood educator compensation, wellbeing, and turnover: New evidence from three state contexts*. Paper symposium presentation at the Society of Research in Child Development 2025 Biennial Meeting. Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Daro, A., Sutton, K., Cunningham, K., & Thompson, P. (2024). *Beyond compensation: Burnout, Intent to leave, and Head Start professionals’ experiences of well-being*. Poster presentation at the Administration of Children and Families National Research Conference on Early Childhood. Arlington, VA.

Harshbarger, D., Strawhecker, J., Thompson, P., & Felton, H. (2023). *Getting a Head Start on STEM Instruction*. Presentation at the National Association of Professional Development Schools Conference. Jacksonville, FL.

- Mollenkopf, D., & Thompson, P. (2022). *Preparing early childhood teachers to work in inclusive classrooms*. Virtual presentation at the National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education Conference.
- Macy, M., Mollenkopf, D., Thompson, P., & Bartling, C. (2022). *Environmental design that supports playful encounters*. Poster presentation at the Society of Research in Child Development Conference. St. Louis, MO.
- Strawhecker, J. & Thompson, P. (2020). *Building PK-6 Teachers' Vision of STEM Instruction*. Presentation at the National Association of Professional Development Schools Conference. Atlantic City, NJ.
- Mollenkopf, D., Gallagher, K., & Thompson, P. (2017). *Beyond Access: Building Individualization in Early Childhood Teacher Education*. National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education; San Francisco, CA.
- Gallagher, K., Mollenkopf, D., & Thompson, P. (2017). *New Frontiers in Early Childhood Teacher Education: Online and Traditional Access to Knowledge and Competencies*. National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education; San Francisco, CA.
- Thompson, P. & Marvin, C. (2016, October). *Teacher efficacy for promoting partnerships and parent-teacher relationships in preschool programs*. Poster presentation at the CEC Division for Early Childhood's 32nd Annual International Conference on Young Children with Special Needs and their Families. Louisville, KY.
- Marvin, C., Thompson, P., Sarver, S. & Jayaraman, G. (2015, October). *Training and job experiences of early childhood teachers from "blended" inclusive programs. Nebraska's ten-year reflection*. Presentation at the CEC Division for Early Childhood's 31st Annual International Conference on Young Children with Special Needs and their Families. Atlanta, GA.
- Mollenkopf, D. & Thompson, P. (2012, November). *We're Online. Now What? Creating the infrastructure, mentoring, and supports to help students successfully complete BA Early Childhood degrees*. National Association for the Education of Young Children; Atlanta, GA.
- Thompson, P. & Mollenkopf, D. (2012, October). *Weaving Together Online Programs with Quality Field Based Experiences*. National Network for Educational Renewal. Denver, CO.
- Mollenkopf, D. & Thompson, P. (2012, June). *ECU Online: Creating a Comprehensive System of Supports for Online Students in Early Childhood Teacher Education*. National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education; Indianapolis, IN.
- Thompson, P. & Peed, M. (2010, May). *Putting the SPARC Back into Parent Involvement*. National Head Start Association; Dallas, TX.

Regional (Peer Reviewed)

- Daro, A., Thompson, P., Sutton, K. (2025, June). *Navigating burnout in early childhood education: Exploring work-life balance across age, role, and experience*; Region VII Head Start Conference: Overland Park, KS.
- Daro, A., Thompson, P., Sutton, K., Cunningham, K., & Gallagher, K. (2024, June). *Beyond compensation: Burnout, intent to leave, and ECE workforce wellbeing*; Region VII Head Start Conference: Overland Park, KS.
- Thompson, P., Strawhecker, J., Knoell, C., Shundoff, N. & Bardell, A. (2023, June). *Parents' Perceptions of STEM: The Use of STEM Materials in the Home Environment*. Region VII Head Start Association Conference. Overland Park, KS.
- Thompson, P., Strawhecker, J., & Harshbarger, D. (2022, October). *A Head Start on STEM Instruction*; Region VII Head Start Conference: Overland Park, KS.
- Mollenkopf, D. & Thompson, P. (2012, May). *Pursuing Online Early Childhood Bachelor's Degrees: A High-Quality Option*; Region VII Head Start Conference: Kansas City, MO.

State (Peer Reviewed)

- Daro, A., Thompson, P., Sutton, K., Cunningham, K., & Gallagher, K. (2024, April). *Beyond compensation: Burnout, intent to leave, and ECE workforce wellbeing*;]; 2024 Children Youth, Families and Schools Summit on Research in Early Childhood: Lincoln, NE.
- Thompson, P. (2021, November). *My Early Childhood Research Agenda*. Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families, and Schools Networking Session. Virtual via Zoom.
- Harshbarger, D., Strawhecker, J., & Thompson, P. (2021, October). *Early Childhood STEM*. Presentation at the 5th Annual UNK Early Childhood Conference. Kearney, NE.
- Thompson, P., Strawhecker, J., & Harshbarger, D. (2021, August). *STEM for Preschool: Part 2*. Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership Early Childhood Programs; Loup City, NE.
- Thompson, P. (2021, June). *Every Brilliant Thing Panel Moderation*. Educational Service Unit # 10; Kearney, NE.
- Thompson, P., Strawhecker, J., & Harshbarger, D. (2021, May). *STEM for Preschool: Part 1*. Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership Early Childhood Programs; Loup City, NE.

Thompson, P. (2021, May). *The Role of Play on Learning and Development*. Loup Valley Childhood Initiative; Ord, NE.

Thompson, P. (2021, March). *Superhero Play*. Adams County Childcare Group; Hastings, NE.

Thompson, P. (2021, February). *What do you do with a Problem, an Idea, and a Chance?* Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership Early Childhood Programs; Aurora, NE.

Thompson, P., Hunt, R. & Niemeyer, S. (2009, November). *Get a Head Start on Energy Curriculum Overview and Facilitator Training*. Nebraska Head Start Association; Grand Island, NE.

Local (Invited)

Schmidt, M., Small, E., Harsh, L., Braise, T., Thompson, P., & Dillon, A., (2024, December). *Kearney Public School Early Childhood Career Pathways*. Kearney Public School High School Group; Kearney, NE.

Schmidt, M., Small, E., Harsh, L., Braise, T., Thompson, P., & Dillon, A., (2024, March). *Kearney Public School Early Childhood Career Pathways*. Kearney Public School High School Group; Kearney, NE.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children (NeAEYC)

National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Education (NAECTE)

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

University Level Service

Nebraska Academy for Early Childhood Research (NAECR) Advisory Board (2025-present)

Nebraska University & Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Systems Advisory Board-

RESPECT GRANT (2024 to present)

UNK Plambeck Early Childhood Education Center Advisory Committee (2019 to present)

UNK Plambeck Early Childhood Education Center Director Search Committee Member (2020)

Nebraska University System Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education Faculty Institute (2016 to 2017)

College Level Service

College of Education-Knowledge Network for Early Childhood Education Workforce (KNEW)

Search Committee Member (2025)

RESPECT Grant-Planned Learning Assessments Committee Member (2024 to present)

RESPECT Grant-Competency Based Assessments Committee Member (2024 to present)

RESPECT Grant-Steering Committee Member (2024 to present)

College of Education-Department Chair Search Committee Member (2023 to 2024)
 College of Education-Early Childhood Faculty Search Committee Member (2024 to 2025)
 College of Education-Early Childhood Faculty Search Committee Member (2022 to 2023)
 Student Teaching Professional Review Committee (2022 to 2024)
 Counseling, School Psychology, and Family Science Faculty Search Committee Member (2022)
 UNK Early Childhood Committee Member (2016 to present)
**Leadership:* UNK Early Childhood Conference Chair (2017 to 2022; 2024 to present)
**Leadership:* UNK Early Childhood Committee Chair (2024 to present)

Department Level Service

Early Childhood Inclusive Program
**Leadership:* Program Lead (2024 to 2027)
 Tenure Committee Member-Mike Teahon (2024)
 Scholarship Selection Committee (2017 to 2024)
 Early Childhood Inclusive Education Online Coordinator Search Committee Member (2024)
 Peer Review Committee Member-Jordan Dille (2023)
 Promotion & Tenure Committee Chair-Judy Henning (2023)
 Peer Review Committee Chair-Christine Fisher (2023)
 Peer Review Committee Chair-Kathie Sweet (2023)
 Promotion Committee Member-Alice Cahill (2022)
 Promotion Committee Member-Rebecca Nelson (2022)
 COE Student Welcome Group (2022, 2023, 2024)
 Peer Review Committee Member-Kathie Sweet (2022)
 Peer Review Committee Member-Rebecca Nelson (2022)
 Peer Review Committee Member-Christine Fisher (2022)
 Peer Review Committee Member-Kathie Sweet (2021)
 Cille and Ron Williams Community Chair Search Committee Member (2021)
 Promotion Committee Member-Christine Fisher (2020)
 Promotion Committee Member-Bailey Koch (2019)
 Early Childhood Inclusive Education Online Coordinator Search Committee Member (2019)
 Cille and Ron Williams Community Chair Search Committee Member (2019)
 CAEP Lesson Plan/Unit Plan Committee (2018)
 Cille and Ron Williams Community Chair Search Committee Member (2016)
 COE Field Handbook Committee (2015)

Regional Level Service

Region VII Head Start Association Board Member (2022-2025)
**Leadership:* Region VII Head Start Association Board Committee Chair (2023-2025)

State Level Service

National ECE Workforce Center's Community for Action [Invited] (2025-2026)
 Thriving Children, Families, and Communities Conference Committee [Invited] (2025)
 Nebraska Head Start Association (NeHSA) Board Member [Invited] (2021 to present)
**Leadership:* NeHSA Professional Development Sub-Committee Chair (2022 to 2024)
 Nebraska Professional Development Grant Evaluation Team Member (Invited) (2020 to 2024)
 Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council [Governor Appointment]

(2016 to 2022)

***Leadership:** Nebraska Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council Vice Chair
(2021 to 2022)

Nebraska T.E.A.C.H and Wages Advisory Board [Invited] (2002 to present)

Nebraska Head Start Association Board Member [Invited] (2010 to 2011)

Nebraska Energy Assistance Network Education Committee [Invited] (2007 to 2011)

Local Level Service

Kearney Public Schools Early Childhood Career Pathways Committee (2023 to present)

Buffalo County Early Childhood Workforce Committee Member [Invited] (2022 to present)

Gothenburg Community Engagement Center: Education Committee [Invited] (2022 to 2023)

Central Valley Public Schools Early Childhood Committee Member [Invited] (2020 to 2023)

Central Nebraska Community Action Partnership Consultant (2011 to 2021)

Central Community College Early Childhood Advisory Board [Invited] (2004 to present)

Nebraska Early Learning Connections – Central Region [Invited] (1996 to present)

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Greeley Village Childcare Project Advisory Committee (2025 to present)

Greeley Irish Festival Volunteer (2019 to present)

Greeley County Friends of 4H Coordinator (2010 to present)

Sacred Heart Church Music Ministry (1983 to present)

4H Leader-Greeley Rodeo Wranglers/Tail Twisters (2002 to 2020)

Greeley County 4H Council (2007 to 2020)