

Amy Schmidtke, EdD

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EDUCATION

Doctor of Education, Educational Administration	2020
University of Nebraska at Omaha Specialty: Early Childhood Education, Educational Leadership	
Dissertation: Influences on the Implementation of Guided Play Practices in Kindergarten: A Grounded Theory Study	
Master of Science, Elementary Education	2005
University of Nebraska at Omaha Endorsements: Early Childhood Education, ESL	
Bachelor of Science, Elementary Education	1997
University of Nebraska at Lincoln Concentration: Language Arts	
Nebraska Teaching Certificate: Early Childhood Education (Birth–Grade 3), Elementary Education (K–8), ESL (K–12)	

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

Director of Educational Practice *Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska* 2016–Present

- Principal Investigator for \$31.4 million in externally funded contracts across 11 school districts; leads applied research investigating instructional quality, family engagement, and Birth–Grade 3 systems coherence using qualitative, mixed-methods, and implementation science approaches.
- Lead programmatic translational research examining instructional quality, guided play implementation, family–school–community partnerships, and Birth–Grade 3 systems coherence using qualitative and implementation science methodologies; direct a multidisciplinary team of 14+ professionals across concurrent research–practice projects.
- Collaborate with University of Nebraska faculty (UNO, UNL, UNMC) as co-investigator and co-author on mixed-methods evaluation and implementation studies; serve as content expert on research design and scholarly writing.
- Produce peer-reviewed publications, translational frameworks, and practitioner tools; develop and disseminate the School as Hub framework now adopted by 11 districts and the Nebraska Department of Education Office of Early Childhood.
- Mentor two graduate research assistants on grant-funded projects in literature review and research-to-practice translation; support 20+ early-career practitioners in applying research-informed strategies.
- Develop and lead implementation of large-scale professional learning systems serving 1,200+ educators statewide; build and support a field-based coaching infrastructure of 10+ instructional coaches using observation–feedback cycles, reflective supervision, and implementation science principles.
- Disseminate findings at national refereed conferences and state leadership institutes; advise Nebraska Department of Education Office of Early Childhood on implementation resources and district support plans.

Previous roles at Buffett Institute:

- Director of Professional Learning — designed research-informed professional learning systems; developed facilitator guides, learning modules, and implementation tools (2018–2021).
- Program Specialist / Educational Facilitator — developed implementation frameworks; provided instructional coaching and professional development for Birth–Grade 3 classrooms (2016–2018).

Adjunct Instructor, Teacher Education | *University of Nebraska at Omaha*

2017–Present

- Design and teach undergraduate and graduate courses grounded in 18 years of P-12 experience and active translational research (approximately 65–80 students annually across undergraduate and graduate sections).
- Integrate current research from the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan into graduate coursework, connecting implementation science, guided play theory, and Birth–Grade 3 systems design to real-world district contexts.
- Mentor graduate students in applied research design, literature synthesis, and systems analysis aligned with early childhood leadership and educational practice.
- Courses: TED 2250 Introduction to Early Childhood Education; TED 4290 Inquiry in Early Childhood Science and Mathematics; TED 8200 Social Worlds of Young Children.

Adjunct Instructor, Early Childhood Education | *Metropolitan Community College*

2008–2014

- Taught 8 foundational ECE courses in online, hybrid, and face-to-face formats. Developed syllabi and assessments aligned with NAEYC standards
- (~300 students; avg. 4–6 courses/year).
- Supervised 30+ practicum students in field-based settings providing coaching and reflective feedback.
- Courses: Expressive Arts; Infant/Toddler, Preschool, and Early Childhood Development; Early Language and Literacy; Prepracticum, Infant, Toddler, and Preschool-Age Practicum.

P–12 TEACHING & INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Early Childhood Instructional Coach | *Omaha Public Schools*

2013–2016

- Provided job-embedded coaching and professional development to 50+ preschool and early primary teachers in high-poverty, multilingual settings.
- Developed expertise in observation-feedback cycles, reflective practice, and differentiated adult learning—approaches now central to university teaching and research.

Teacher, Pre-Kindergarten & Kindergarten | *Omaha Public Schools*

2004–2013

- Designed and implemented play-based curriculum supporting diverse learners; differentiated for ELL students and varied abilities.

Teacher, ELL & Title I Reading | *Omaha Public Schools*

1998–2004

- Delivered targeted literacy instruction to emergent readers; developed individualized plans grounded in assessment data.

Infant & Toddler Teacher | *Williamsburg Village Child Development Center*

1995–1998

- Implemented developmentally appropriate activities at NAEYC-accredited center; conducted developmental assessments.

RESEARCH AGENDA

Research examines how early learning systems support high-quality instructional practice, guided play, child-centered learning, and family-school-community engagement from Birth through Grade 3, across three integrated lines:

- **Implementation of Guided Play in Preschool and Early Elementary Settings** — how educators learn, adopt, and sustain guided play practices and the leadership, professional learning, and collaborative conditions that shape implementation.

- **Birth–Grade 3 Systems Coherence** — organizational structures, leadership practices, and system-level conditions enabling coherence across early learning environments.
- **Family–School–Community Partnerships** — how schools design and sustain meaningful partnerships, including two-generation approaches and relationship-based models supporting children's learning and family well-being.

Methodological approach: qualitative, mixed-methods, and community-engaged research, including grounded theory, process evaluation, and implementation science. Translational and implementation scholarship, including framework development, professional learning system design, and the creation of practitioner tools tested through iterative cycles with district partners.

PUBLICATIONS

Books & Edited Volumes

Schmidtke, A. (Ed.). (2025). *The intentional teacher: Choosing the best strategies for young children's learning* (3rd ed.). NAEYC.

Book Chapters

Schmidtke, A., Snyder, K., Jolley, T., & Wells, M. (2026). Building and sustaining powerful family and community partnerships using a School as Hub approach [In press]. In N. M. Edwards & G. E. Miller (Eds.), *Promising family-school-community partnerships in early childhood settings (Birth–8)*. Information Age Publishing.

Schmidtke, A. (2023a). Counting collections in community. In P. Brillante et al. (Eds.), *Casebook: Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood classrooms birth through grade 3*. NAEYC.

Schmidtke, A. (2023b). Prioritizing listening to and learning from families. In P. Brillante et al. (Eds.), *Casebook: Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood classrooms birth through grade 3*. NAEYC.

Peer-Reviewed Research Journal Articles

Schmidtke, A. (2026). Creating the conditions for guided play: How leadership, professional learning, and collaboration sustain practice in kindergarten [In press]. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*.

Schmidtke, A., Jolley, T., Telford, K., Cleaver, M., & Snyder, K. (2025). Building child-centered classrooms: a process evaluation of the development of an experiential professional learning series. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2025.2582170>

Schmidtke, A. (2023). A qualitative study of kindergarten teachers' perceptions about the influences of professional learning on their implementation of guided play. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 37(1), 49–76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2022.2064013>

Peer-Reviewed Professional Journal Articles

Schmidtke, A., Morris, G., & Pistillo, M. B. (2026). Leading from the classroom: How teachers help classrooms—and schools—thrive [In press]. *Young Children*.

Manuscripts Under Review

Schmidtke, A. (2025). Growing with play: Guided play in the primary years [Revise and resubmit]. *Young Children*.

Snyder, K., Dinkel, D., Dong, J., Jolley, T., & Schmidtke, A. (2025). Exploring the feasibility of the Smart Start Backpack program [Revise and resubmit]. *Early Education and Development*.

Snyder, K., Schmidtke, A., Wells, M., Jolley, T., & Jabdoobirsingh, A. (2024). Exploring perceptions of social support [Manuscript under review]. *Child & Youth Services Review*.

Dissertation

Schmidtke, A. (2020). Influences on the implementation of guided play practices in kindergarten: A grounded theory study (Publication No. 3692) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska at Omaha]. DigitalCommons@UNO.

PRACTICE-BASED SCHOLARSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CURRICULA

- Schmidtke, A., Telford, K., Cleaver, M., & Jolley, T. (2025). *Early learning through the Lens of the Child: Experiential professional learning series* (3rd ed.; 1st ed. 2019; 2nd ed. 2022). Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska. Professional learning curriculum developed for educators in Birth–Grade 3 systems. Schmidtke authored the conceptual framework and written content; Telford, Cleaver, and Jolley designed and implemented professional learning activities and facilitation structures.
- Schmidtke, A. (2024). *School as Hub for early learning action planning guide and implementation tools* (2nd ed.; 1st ed. 2022). Omaha, NE: Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska. Planning framework and implementation tools used by district and school leaders to guide continuous improvement efforts within the School as Hub approach.
- Schmidtke, A. (2022). *School as Hub for early learning: Literature review of framework architecture (impact areas, target zones, and strategies)* (2nd ed.; 1st ed. 2019). Omaha, NE: Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska. Research synthesis linking evidence to the School as Hub impact areas, target zones, and implementation strategies.
- Schmidtke, A. (2022). *School as Hub for early learning: Literature review of guiding principles*. Omaha, NE: Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska. Research synthesis summarizing evidence supporting the principles of connected systems, developmental progressions, child-centered priorities, family partnerships, community engagement, and collaborative professional learning.
- Schmidtke, A. (2020). *School as Hub for early learning: Framework architecture practice brief series*. Omaha, NE: Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska. Nine practitioner-oriented briefs translating the School as Hub framework architecture into accessible guidance for district and school leaders, synthesizing research aligned to the framework’s impact areas, target zones, and implementation strategies.
- Schmidtke, A. (2017–2019). *Advancing purposeful play in kindergarten* (multi-session professional learning series; Omaha Public Schools). Omaha, NE: Buffett Early Childhood Institute, University of Nebraska. Professional learning curriculum, facilitation materials, and implementation tools designed for kindergarten teachers to strengthen guided play implementation within standards-based expectations.

EXTERNALLY FUNDED RESEARCH

Total Direct Funding as Principal Investigator or Content Lead: \$31,917,509

Principal Investigator — Multi-Year Renewable Awards

Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan (SECP) 2022–2025; Renewed 2025–2029

Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties | Principal Investigator

\$14,037,000 (2022–2025) | \$16,195,858 (2025–2029) | Total across funding cycles: \$30,232,858

Multi-site Birth–Grade 3 research–practice partnership across 11 school districts serving approximately 8,000 children annually; co-funded by \$9,968,062 (Buffett Institute) and \$6,227,796 in school district investment. Directs three core strategy areas: (1) School as Hub programming, (2) customized district assistance, and (3) specialized professional learning. Oversees independent evaluation partnership with UNMC Munroe-Meyer Institute generating implementation evidence and outcome data. Successfully renewed for 2025–2029 based on demonstrated implementation outcomes and district impact.

Principal Investigator — Translational Research to Practice

Omaha Public Schools Intensive Early Childhood Program

2024–2027

Omaha Public Schools / Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties | Principal Investigator | \$956,258

Designs and leads applied research strengthening early childhood systems and Birth–Grade 3 programming in high-poverty Omaha neighborhoods. Directs district-wide investigations of coaching systems, leadership structures, and two-generation strategies; guides independent evaluation partnerships generating data on implementation, instructional change, and family engagement.

Federal Award — Content Leadership

Early Learning Success Center

2024–2029

U.S. Department of Education | Content Lead | \$728,391

Contributes to national initiative developing research-informed tools and services supporting early learning systems. Serves as content lead for briefs, tools, and resources focused on kindergarten transitions and early literacy development for national dissemination to district and state leaders.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE AND SCHOLARLY IMPACT

My work focuses on translating research into scalable systems that strengthen early childhood education from birth through Grade 3. Through partnerships with district leaders, state agencies, and university collaborators, I have developed implementation infrastructure that supports continuous improvement in early learning systems.

The School as Hub for Early Learning framework provides a structure for aligning instructional practice, family engagement, and leadership development across districts. This framework currently supports implementation across 11 school districts serving more than 8,000 children annually and has informed guidance developed by the Nebraska Department of Education’s Office of Early Childhood.

To support implementation, I have led development of professional learning systems and district improvement processes that enable educators and leaders to translate research into daily practice. These efforts include experiential professional learning models, district action planning processes, and practitioner-facing tools that support reflective coaching, collaborative problem solving, and data-informed decision making.

Collectively, this work demonstrates a translational research approach in which scholarship, professional learning, and district partnership operate as an integrated system. Through iterative design cycles with district partners, these tools and learning systems continue to evolve while contributing to both scholarly dissemination and sustained improvement in early childhood systems.

SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS

National Refereed Conference Presentations

Schmidtke, A. (2025, November). The Intentional Teacher: Cultivating child-centered discovery, content-rich learning, and joy. *NAEYC Annual Conference*, Orlando, FL.

Schmidtke, A., Jolley, T., & Snyder, K. (2025, November). Building and sustaining powerful family and community partnerships using a School as Hub approach. *NAEYC Annual Conference*, Orlando, FL.

Schmidtke, A., Jolley, T., Snyder, K., & Marten, D. (2025, November). Collaboration: Enhancing Birth through Grade 3 programming and systems through adaptive leadership. *NAEYC Annual Conference*, Orlando, FL.

Snyder, K., Jolley, T., & Schmidtke, A. (2025, May). Evaluating family and community partnerships within School as Hub sites. Poster presentation at the *Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting*, Minneapolis, MN.

- Dundorf, C., Roy, L., & Schmidtke, A. (2023, November). Better together: Using the fourth edition of NAEYC's DAP book and DAP Casebook in higher education and professional development. *NAEYC Annual Conference*, Nashville, TN.
- Dundorf, C., Roy, L., & Schmidtke, A. (2023, June). Real cases. Real DAP. *NAEYC Professional Learning Institute*, Portland, OR.
- Schmidtke, A. (2022, November). Guided play in preschool and kindergarten. *NAEYC Annual Conference*, Washington, DC.
- Schmidtke, A. (2022, November). The influence of leadership, professional learning, and collaboration on developmentally appropriate practices. *NAEYC Annual Conference*, Washington, DC.
- Schmidtke, A., & Wisneski, D. (2021, March). Promoting guided play practices in kindergarten through focused professional learning and teacher self-assessment. *TASP 46th Annual Conference* (Virtual conference).
- Lopez Anderson, C., Bodensteiner, K., Reinsch, K., & Schmidtke, A. (2019, June). Leading for quality, continuity, and equity in schools as a hub. *NAEYC Professional Learning Institute*, Long Beach, CA.
- Schmidtke, A., & Looper, N. (2017, April). Using the CLASS to coach with impact. *Teachstone InterAct Conference*, Austin, TX.
- Looper, N., & Schmidtke, A. (2017, April). Our collaborative walk with CLASS. *Teachstone InterAct Conference*, Austin, TX.

State and Regional Invited Presentations

- Schmidtke, A., Luebbe, K., & Anson, A. (2024, July). Building the foundation for meeting continuous improvement goals starting in PreK. *Nebraska Department of Education Administrators' Days*, Kearney, NE.
- Schmidtke, A., Daberkow, E., Burk, C., Jones, K., & Anson, A. (2024, September). Early childhood district support plan—systems of support. *NeMTSS Summit*, Kearney, NE.
- Schmidtke, A., & Heller, E. (2021, June). Future ready from the start: Digital literacy in early childhood. *Future Ready Nebraska Conference* (Virtual conference).
- Schmidtke, A., Pistillo, M. B., & Colwell, A. (2020, February). Incorporating an early childhood philosophy into a standards-based world. *ESU 13 Mid-Winter Conference*, Scottsbluff, NE.
- Schmidtke, A., & Parr, K. (2019, November). Early childhood social emotional learning. *Nebraska Paraeducator Conference*, Kearney, NE.
- Schmidtke, A. (2017–2019). Advancing purposeful play in kindergarten (multi-session workshop series). Omaha Public Schools, Omaha, NE.
- Marr, L., & Schmidtke, A. (2018, October). Practicing mindfulness with young children. *UNK Early Childhood Conference*, Kearney, NE.
- Heath, D., & Schmidtke, A. (2018, February). Learning social, emotional, and academic skills with picture books. *Celebrating Young Children Conference*, Omaha, NE.
- Schmidtke, A., & Anson, A. (2017, October). English language learners in kindergarten: A perfect fit! *ESL Fall Conference*, Omaha, NE.
- Schmidtke, A., & Looper, N. (2016, April). Coaching with confidence in early childhood programs. *Celebrating Young Children Conference*, Omaha, NE.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

Service and leadership activities reflect engagement at the systems level: advising state and local bodies, directing cross-institutional partnerships, and providing governance accountability for large-scale public investment in early childhood education.

National Scholarly and Policy Leadership

- Volume Editor, *The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning* (3rd ed., NAEYC, 2025) — selected through competitive national process to lead revision of a seminal NAEYC text; recruited and coordinated 15+ contributing authors; synthesized research across developmental domains and curriculum content areas.
- Content Lead, U.S. Department of Education Early Learning Success Center (2024–2029) — named subject matter expert in a federally funded national initiative; develops research-informed tools and research and practice briefs on kindergarten transitions and early literacy for dissemination to state agencies and district leaders nationwide.
- Cohort Member, AASA Early Learning Cohort (2022–Present) — participate in national superintendent cohort advancing research-informed early childhood policy; contributes to cross-district dialogue and shared learning around Birth–Grade 3 systems strategies.

State and Regional Systems Leadership

- Coordinating Council Liaison, Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy Counties (2022–Present) — represents the Buffett Early Childhood Institute to an 12-member elected governing body overseeing local education childhood funding; presents updates, negotiates contract scope and renewal, and ensures program accountability aligned with public investment priorities.
- Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan Workgroup Lead, 11 Metro Omaha School Districts (2022–Present) — convenes and facilitates cross-district leadership workgroup of district representatives, university evaluators, and Learning Community leaders; guides collaborative decision-making and translates workgroup priorities into implementation actions.
- State Agency Partner, Nebraska Department of Education Birth–Grade 3 Initiatives (2023–Present) — advises and collaborates with the Office of Early Childhood on district support frameworks and implementation guidance aligned with statewide priorities.
- Workgroup Member, City of Omaha Poverty Elimination Action Plan (PEAP) Early Childhood Working Group (2025–Present) — contributes early childhood systems expertise to citywide cross-sector initiative; advises on early childhood practice priorities within a coordinated anti-poverty strategy.
- Board of Directors, Nebraska Association for the Education of Young Children (NeAEYC) (2019–2022) — provided strategic governance, fiscal oversight, and direction for the state's primary early childhood professional organization.

University and Institute Service

- Direct Buffet Institute Educational Practice team of 14+ professionals; oversee strategic practice partnerships across 11 school districts, the Nebraska Department of Education, and University of Nebraska campuses (UNO, UNL, UNMC).
- Serve as collaborator on evaluation, implementation research design, and interdisciplinary studies around the Superintendents' Early Childhood Plan with University of Nebraska faculty.
- Mentor Buffett Institute program administrators, early childhood specialists, graduate research assistants, and early-career educators in implementation science, scholarly writing, and research-to-practice translation.

CERTIFICATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

Certifications

- CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System), Certified Observer

- ECERS (Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale), Certified Observer
- FAN (Facilitating Attuned Interactions) Model, Certified Facilitator

Professional Memberships

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
- Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD)
- American Association of School Administrators (AASA)
- Learning Forward | Nebraska AEYC (NeAEYC)

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

Qualitative Research Methods (Grounded Theory, Process Evaluation) • Classroom Quality Assessment (CLASS, ECERS) • Early Childhood Systems Design (Birth–Grade 3) • Guided Play • Developmentally Appropriate Practice • Research-to-Practice Translation • Family–School–Community Partnerships • Two-Generation Approaches • Professional Learning Systems • Instructional Coaching • Implementation Science • Continuous Improvement • Distributed Leadership • Large-Scale Grants Management