

College of Health Sciences researchers at Marquette University have received a \$4 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education for a project designed to enhance language and early literacy skills in preschool children in Milwaukee. The project, entitled the "Wisconsin Reading Acquisition Program" (WRAP), will target approximately 600 at risk preschool children, and is aimed at improving language and emergent literacy skills prior to kindergarten. A key feature of the implementation of the project is that it utilizes the linguistic expertise of speech pathologists. "There is a well established



developmental relationship between language and literacy. Since speech-language pathologists are experts in the area of early childhood language development, they are uniquely positioned to help promote the emergence of literacy skills," said Dr. Edward W. Korabic, chair of the department of speech pathology and audiology at Marquette.

Dr. Maura Moyle, assistant professor of speech pathology and audiology and principal investigator on the project, noted that "Current research indicates that early intervention is a key to approaching the problem. The process of learning to read starts at birth with language development – especially vocabulary – and continues with early literacy skills such as recognizing print, learning the alphabet, and developing phonemic awareness, which is the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in words." The project is a continuation of a collaborative effort started several years ago between Marquette researchers and Day Care Services for Children, Inc. "With this grant we will continue to serve children from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds on a much larger scale. We have found that the potential of these children is incredible when they are given high quality instruction," said Sue Berman, clinical instructor in speech pathology and co-investigator. The program also includes a prominent bilingual component for children for whom English is a second language. In addition, much of the effort will be focused on training the day care teachers themselves to be more effective in readying their children to become effective readers. "The WRAP grant represents the largest research award in the history of the college and the largest 3 year research award in the history of the Marquette University," said Dr. William E. Cullinan, dean of the college of health sciences. "This is clearly an exciting project as well an outstanding achievement for our faculty. It represents yet another way in which Marquette faculty members live out our mission -bringing our expertise to bear on a problem affecting underserved members of our community."