The School of Education and Social Policy doesn’t just prepare teachers; its professors and researchers are studying and changing the way people learn at every stage of life.

• The 28 students in Nina Hike-Teague’s environmental sciences class at Curie Metropolitan High School on Chicago’s Southwest Side learned that the road to environmental decision making is paved with sponges.
  They carefully measured water into basins, then poured the liquid onto yellow sponges placed inside silver aluminum pie tins. The sponges swelled and expanded until the water flowed onto the containers.
  “Now squeeze the sponge and measure how much water comes out,” Hike-Teague, a 10-year teaching veteran, said as she circulated the room. “That amount will be the available water for crops.”
  This simulation of water retention by soil was an important step in teaching students how the properties of soil determine the efficiency of water use on a farm.
  Using Northwestern associate professor Daniel Edelson’s (GMcC93) environmental sciences curriculum, the students employed simulation software to try to balance a farm’s water budget and visualization tools to examine California’s network of rivers, dams, wells and canals. These activities laid the groundwork for a final project recommending how California should balance the needs of residential, farmers and native ecosystems.

• Julani Mandara, assistant professor of human development and social policy, is hard at work on his latest research article, which examines the impact of fathers’ absences on their children’s drug use habits.
  Mandara’s research focuses on African American family dynamics and the effects of fathers on child and adolescent social and personality development. His research also takes him on visits to several Chicago Public Schools, where he observes interactions between teachers and students.

• Toward the end of the fall quarter Beth Schneider, a junior human development and psychological services major from Des Plaines, Ill., completed her practicum at Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago. At the hospital she worked with children affected by conditions such as schizophrenia and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder in the inpatient psychiatry division. The work was often grueling, but Schneider had a breakthrough moment near the end of the quarter-long practicum when she gave an 8-year-old boy a time-out and he obeyed her instruction, rather than ignoring her as he had all the other adults. It was an unexpected accomplishment, and Schneider was proud of it.

Although it might seem at first glance that Hike-Teague, Mandara and Schneider have little in common, their work respectively as high school teacher, academic researcher and undergraduate reflects the broad and innovative range of programs and research on learning and social policy that Northwestern’s School of Education and Social Policy offers educators and students alike today.

The University’s smallest school, SESP seeks to understand and advance learning communities — ranging from schools and workplaces to families and neighborhoods — and to improve social policy. The school’s faculty concentrate on learning across the lifespan. United by their commitment to innovation, an interdisciplinary approach to training and scholarship, and collaboration within and outside of the University, SESP’s 23 professors have made seminal contributions to the emerging fields of learning sciences and human development. A rising force in the national educational landscape, SESP has extended its original and still thriving focus on teacher preparation while cultivating an intimate, nurturing and flexible community for the school’s 500 undergraduate and graduate students.

SESP is having an impact inside and outside the academy that is far greater than one would expect based on its size, according to Penelope Peterson, dean and Eleanor R. Baldwin Professor of Education, who offers a provocative analogy to describe the school.

by Jeff Kelly Lowenstein

LEARNING FOR TOMORROW
Students in the Learning and Organizational Change program examine how organizations and the people within them use knowledge to respond to and shape change within their environments, while Social Policy, the track with the fewest number of students, is the only one that leads directly to teaching in elementary, middle or high school classrooms. Graduates are recommended for secondary teaching (grades K-12) or for “special” teaching (grades K-12) in art and foreign languages.

Despite their different curricular emphases, the students are linked by a common desire to help other people, according to Schneider, a junior human development and psychological services major. “We all have in common is that we're making some impact on people, whether we're improving people's mental health, helping kids learn or making an organization work smoothly,” she says. “One of the things that ties us together is that there's a thread that runs through all the majors.”

The attention advisers show their students is another thread that helps strengthens the sense of undergraduate community.

Building High School Communities

Professor Lindsey Chaise-Lansdale economist: Chaise-Lansdale, a developmental psychologist, is outgoing and animated.

Duncan’s scholarship focuses on low-income mothers and their children, a subject that has interested him from Chicago public housing. A faculty member of Northwestern’s Institute for Policy Research and director of the Northwestern University/University of Chicago Joint Center for Poverty Research, he and his graduate students have also done extensive analysis of Milwaukee’s New Hope Project, an antipoverty program. Chaise-Lansdale’s research looks at how social issues such as poverty, single parenthood, and mothers’ employment affect family functioning and the development of children and youth. Founding director the new center Cells to Society (C2S): The Center on Social Disparities and Health, she pays particular attention to positive health and well-being in the context of economic hardship.

Her graduate students have been instrumental in her large-scale, multidisciplinary research project on the effects of homelessness on children and families: A Three-City Study.

As collaborators, Duncan and Chaise-Lansdale have received multiple grants to study welfare reform, co-editing for Better and for Worse: Welfare Reform and the Well-Being of Children and Families (Russell Sage Foundation, 2003). They are key figures in Northwestern’s Multidisciplinary Program in Educational Sciences, a three million dollar interdisciplinary training program for doctoral students.

Elizabeth Virtuel-Drazal (GSESP05), assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, had close contact with both professors as a graduate student. She says Duncan routinely answered student e-mails about econometrics at 4 a.m., while Chaise-Lansdale provided intensive theoretical training as well as valuable advice on balancing a career with motherhood. For their part, the professors say their students energize them.

Litter covered the hallways of Roberto Clemente Academy when Logan Square’s America’s only public bilingual Spanish and English school started its first year in 1997. “We are like the Marines,” says Peterson, who has served as dean since 1997. “We are the smallest of the 10 schools of education. Yet just as no one thinks of the Marines as the small army, but rather as an elite corps of talented fighters, we are a small but elite school of education and social policy with a unique mission.”

A Tight-knit School

Chase-Lansdale says some of her undergraduate students start when they arrive at campus when they arrive at campus. Peterson invites students to her house for a picnic dinner and Northwestern researcher who later joined Clemente’s teaching staff; from Irvine, Calif., had to fly home last winter to support an ill family member. Ochsner’s professors and reassured the then–first-year student issues, though. He adds that the University’s collection of qualitative and liaison Samuel Kwon (GSESP03) to help the teachers understand the students could voice their views. They also challenged students to think about and explain their burgeoning teaching practices. A major portion of the credit for this improvement, according to Clemente Principal Irene DaMotta, to boost Clemente’s technological capacity, has helped the school extend its computer network and secure funding for consistently high-quality technical assistance. On the curricular front, he has encouraged teachers to carve out space for dozens of multiracial interdisciplinary projects and recruited liaisons from students in Social Policy, the track with the highest enrollment, expect to teach, mentor and learn from students. A major portion of their work involves “viewing their students in a different light.”

Gomez has assisted DaMotta for nearly seven years in transforming the school — designed to provide greater cultural awareness and interdisciplinary projects have helped students make valuable connections between the materials they are studying and their lives. He adds that the University’s collection of qualitative data has encouraged teachers to view their students in a different light.
An Alternative Route to Teaching

Dorne Eastwood was riding the a to her work as a commercial banker in Long Beach, Illinois, when she noticed an advertisement that changed her life. The question “Did you ever think about trading your corporate lunch for another kind of lunch?” surrounded a picture of a hot dog in a bun on a plastic lunch tray.

Approaching 50 with a well- funded pension and her younger child about to graduate from college, Eastwood answered the sign — “Yes, I have some time left.” She signed up and started teaching. “The timing was right,” says Eastwood, who will teach her fourth year as a math teacher at Northwestern Middle School in the city’s South Side this fall. Her path to the classroom was a rigorous one.

Another Northwestern graduate, Gary Sircus (L85), an NU-TEACH alumnus. Secondary school teachers are prepared to instruct in biology, chemistry and physics classes, while students in the elementary school track receive general elementary certification. For Eastwood, being back in school was tough, but the first year of dealing with close to 30 seventh-graders was tougher. Some of the challenges were humorous, like the time a bored student whipped out a drink from his pocket and threatened to light it in an effort to end class. But other challenges were daunting, such as when she realized the enormous fear and abuse suffered by some of her community-dwelling students.

Handling these difficulties was not covered in any of the books Eastwood road for her course work, and she often felt overwhelmed. But it helped that the program offered support, including a mentor teacher, visits with a school psychologist and a weekly seminar.

NU-TEACH graduate Dorm Eastwood left the business world behind to teach at Northwestern Middle School on Chicago’s Northwest Side.

The goal is to conduct research and to teach our students how to conduct research that not only reflects cutting-edge science but also will help them to be better policymakers, lawyers and administrators,” says Chase-Lansdale.

Improving Lives Through Policy

Students in Human Development and Social Policy, one of SESP’s two doctoral programs, focus on how to improve human lives through policy. Promoting an interdisciplinary approach toward human development, students and professors examine how personal experiences and social contexts shape people’s life choices and how certain political decisions and other stress crunching data from large statistical databases, Northwestern’s students learn to do both.

The game is to shift the grade of its kind when it was founded in 1981 by Bernice Neugarten, a pioneer in the study of aging, human development and social policy marked a major expansion beyond SESP’s traditional teacher preparation mission.

Vivit teaches math, social studies, religion and language arts to fourth-graders at the Francis Xavier Ward School in Chicago’s South Loop neighborhood. In March 2005 she won one of the Golden Apple Academy awards for Excellence in Teaching for grades four through eight.

Lundquist, who is a director of the Golden Apple Academy, believes that the recognition provides multiple benefits. “I liked the fact that I was going through the teaching process when the light turns from green to yellow. “I believe that the selection process is fair and that the students link to their parents. “I believe that the selection process is fair and that the students link to their parents. “I believe that the selection process is fair and that the students link to their parents. “I believe that the selection process is fair and that the students link to their parents. “I believe that the selection process is fair and that the students link to their parents. “I believe that the selection process is fair and that the students link to their parents.

Lesser, who studied art at the Art Institute of Chicago and co-coordinator of SESP’s Spencer Research Training Program, explains that the program is animated by three major precepts: a focus on the life course and human beings’ continual development; a commitment to multidisciplinary learning, and a concentration on contexts such as the family, the community and neighborhoods that influence people’s life trajectories.

“Our goal is to conduct research and to teach our students how to conduct research that not only reflects cutting-edge science but also will help them to be better policymakers, lawyers and administrators,” says Chase-Lansdale.

The research topic is wide-ranging. Indeed, Emma Adam, assistant professor of human development and social policy, an IPR faculty fellow and a developmental psychologist, studies the effects of stress on parents, parenting and child development, while Mandera examines how parenting styles displayed by different cultures and ethnicities affect academic achievement, sexual activity and behavior.

Barton Hirsch, professor of human development and social policy, looks at after-school programs, and Carol Lee, associate professor of human development and social policy at Northwestern’s Institute for Policy Research, examines how cultural contexts impact learning generally, and literacy specifically.

All of these scholars have helped shape public conversation on critical social issues.

Chase-Lansdale’s study of welfare reform’s impact on mothers and children in Boston, Chicago and San Antonio, for example, led to a 2002 congressional briefing, and Duncan notes that research directors for U.S. senators and representatives inquire about his work.

On a local level, the Chicago Housing Choice Voucher Program launched some of Duncan’s suggestions about the importance of family relationships in helping struggling families to find areas to which they may be relocated. His suggestions were based on research he and James Rosenbaum, another SESP professor and IPR fellow, conducted for the Gauthier Assisted Housing Program. 1967 to 1998 Gauthier assisted approximately 7,000 low-income African American families in moving from public housing in the city to predominantly white middle-class suburbs or to other integrated and mixed-income neighborhoods in the city.

Peterson explains that Chase-Lansdale’s and Duncan’s research exemplifies the uniqueness of SESP: “Both might easily be hired by

Mansoor adds that initially many under- graduates do not realize the wide range of content areas covered by SESP, mistakenly thinking that the school is exclusively focused on teacher training. Word of mouth from satisfied SESP students contributes to an ever-growing interest in the program.

Olson, assistant dean for student affairs, says that typically 35 to 45 first-year students enroll in the school. By the time the second-semester students are enrolled, the class includes around 100 students.

“When they are in high school, many students don’t know what social policy is, and they think education is just about teacher training,” Olson notes. “When they arrive here and start to define those interests and hear about the program, that’s when the idea of interprofessional transfer start to preclude.”

SESP professor Jelani Mandle researches the nature and effects of socialization, fathers’ involvement, and how they interact with gender and race to influence youths’ academic and social development. He is also studying the effects of parenting styles on African American, Latina and Caucasian youths and is developing a measure of parenting called the Socialization and Family Environment Scale (SAFE).

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Learning to Ask the Right Questions

Learning sciences professors work in a freelancing and informal environment, full of robust exchanges between professors and their students that help both groups learn more. Gomez acknowledges learning research will tell enough to actually inform Spencer T. and Ann W. Otten Professor of Learning and Organizational Change and professor of human development and social policy, professor of learning sciences and IPR 1 faculty member to translate the concept of distributed leadership, while Spillane says colleagues including Gomez and learning sciences professor Brian Reiser have influenced his thinking about cognition.

Peterson explains that learning sciences professors are driven not by a desire to generate technology for its own sake, but rather in support of improved learning and teaching. “Learning sciences professors do not think that technology itself is going to change schools,” she says. “But rather they start with a vision of learning and teaching, and they develop new technologies to facilitate and support that vision.”

Despite differences in focus, faculty in human development and social policy and learning sciences share important similarities. Professors in both programs have joint appointments in education programs. Completion of the program requires 15 classes, including each of the three-quarter master programs.

One student looked into the actions a secondary school and it teachers should take to help minority students meet Illinois proficiency standards in mathematics, while another student examined how a high school can best provide for the unique needs of a depressed student.
“Lots of programs talk about preparing students to be reflective,” says Haoutoutian-Gordon, adding that the investigation of a key question is accompanied by extensive discussion with classmates and coaches. “We give an extended opportunity, a sustained three-course project that is focused on a question that relates to their practice. Our students have the opportunity to cultivate the habits of mind necessary to be reflective practitioners.”

While master’s in education students usually enter classrooms after earning their degrees, SESP graduates may go into a variety of directions that would provide the academic rigor she needed. “When I was looking for a graduate program that would provide the academic rigor she needed, I found that and a lot more as a student in the Department of Education and Social Policy’s Master’s in Learning and Organizational Change program.”

She notes that by asking clients what they have acquired through their participation in this service, “we must innovate continuously.” She emphasizes the human side of the equation. “Our program holds an ambitious objective,” says Bayard. “The students in the program are an experienced crew. The Master’s in Learning and Organizational Change program requires applicants to have a minimum of three to five years of work experience, but Scott says that the typical student has 7 to 10 years in the workforce, and some students have been in their respective fields for as long as a quarter of a century.”

Transforming Organizations: A New Market

After more than a decade as a marketing and communications consultant, Aileen Bayard had plenty of practical experience but felt she needed to deepen her expertise to better address the complex business challenges her clients were facing. She started looking for a graduate program that would provide the academic rigor she needed. She found that and a lot more as a student in the Department of Education and Social Policy’s Master’s in Learning and Organizational Change program.

“It’s another lens or filter that is not commonly understood in the world, breakthroughs in thinking and practice.”

Bayard says, “The program gives me new ways to help clients approach their problems as well as more strategies to understand and respond to employees’ and clients’ needs.”

Program director Kimberly Scott says students take core courses designed to provide experiential learning in each of three major areas: learning and performance, strategic organizational change and knowledge management. Scott explains that the program holds an ambitious objective. “Our students develop as leaders who have the vision and capabilities to successfully transform organizations,” she says, pointing to alumni such as Katie Huxley (GSESP04), who joined the program as a programmer and now works as knowledge management and communications specialist for Zurich North America, a commercial property-casualty insurance provider in Schaumburg, Ill. A practitioner, or field experience, is one of the Learning and Organizational Change program’s cornerstones. Huxley’s practice at Zurich involved helping develop a web-based tool that serves as a virtual storehouse of underwriting guidelines and other information relevant to Zurich’s corporate clients. “It was more matchmaking than sales,” Bayard says. “The students in the program are an experienced crew. The Master’s in Learning and Organizational Change program requires applicants to have a minimum of three to five years of work experience, but Scott says that the typical student has 7 to 10 years in the workforce, and some students have been in their respective fields for as long as a quarter of a century.”

“Many students select our program after having considered other similar programs or organizational development programs,” Scott says, adding that 40 percent of entering students already have an advanced degree.

“This program takes a different approach to preparing people to lead organizational change. We emphasize the human side of the equation. The program puts a strong emphasis on community and learning from the experiences people have with each other throughout the program — both inside and outside the classroom.”

Ranging from instruction about human cognition to thinking about helping workers align themselves with organizations’ strategic goals, the emphasis has already proved useful to Bayard. “The management committee of an executive search firm with which Bayard worked wanted to expand into searches for CEOs. The firm contacted Bayard to explore the possibility of a public relations campaign to launch this service. Previously she would have gone along with their plans, but instead she was able to challenge the company to provide evidence that spending money on public relations would produce the desired results. The ensuing silence prompted the firm’s leaders to acknowledge their unarticulated assumption that media coverage leads to business. They then opted to invest in market research to understand their audience.”

Bayard says she appreciates the expanded repertoire of skills she has acquired through her participation in the Learning and Organizational Change program. She notes that by asking clients to examine their way of seeing the world, breakthroughs in thinking can occur, resulting in innovative practices.

“[It’s] another lens or filter that is not commonly understood or explicitly used in business problem-solving,” she says. — J.K.L.