

NEWS RELEASE

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Michael Robb, Ph.D.

FRED ROGERS CENTER NAMES LEARNING NETWORK PROGRAM MANAGER

LATROBE, PA – Dr. Michael Robb has been named program manager of the new Early Learning Network project at the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College, it was announced by Ms. Rita Catalano, executive director.

Dr. Robb was recently awarded a Ph.D. in developmental psychology by the University of California, Riverside for his thesis on *New Ways of Reading: The Impact of an Interactive Book on Young Children’s Story Comprehension and Parent-Child Dialogic Reading Behaviors*. He completed his undergraduate studies at Tufts University.

A 2008 recipient of the Fred Rogers Memorial Scholarship administered by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences Foundation, Dr. Robb’s research interests include cognitive developmental processes in learning from media and the role of interactivity in early literacy.

“Michael’s practical experience in children’s programming through his work with the public television stations in Boston and Los Angeles, combined with his academic credentials and research interests, make him the ideal choice to lead this national initiative of the Fred Rogers Center. We are fortunate and very happy to welcome him to the Center’s staff,” commented Ms. Catalano.

In this newly-created position, Dr. Robb will manage the planning, development, launch and ongoing refinement of the Center’s Early Learning Network – a major national initiative to develop a web-based platform for addressing the informational, professional development, and community building needs of underserved and under-resourced teachers, home-based caregivers and families of young children.

“The project that I will be working on is a virtual, broad-based community for teachers and parents of children 0 to 5 to come together to share resources,” Dr. Robb explained. “Part of the Early Learning Network will involve creating the online presence and the actual website that will be accessible by computer or mobile device. The other part is helping to orchestrate the creation of content that will appear there.”

“We have two strategies for developing content,” Dr. Robb continued. “One is to go to partners who are reputable and trustworthy to get information that will be useful to parents and teachers. We have specifically coalesced around the goal of promoting early oral language, which is something that is really important in early childhood. The value of parents reading to their children has been extensively promoted but lost in the discussion is a broader conversation about everyday interactions being one of the richest ways to teach children, not just language, but also social emotional development, cognitive development and other outcomes.”

Dr. Robb noted that current research has revealed a gap between the language that children experience in higher income homes when compared to the language in lower income families. “By the age of 4, children in affluent homes will have heard about 32,000,000 more words about all kinds of everyday activities and experiences,” he said. “All of that extra talk has broad implications for later school readiness, early literacy, social/emotional development and brain development. We want to encourage language use and everyday conversations in all kinds of contexts.”

The new manager expressed enthusiasm to be involved with the Fred Rogers Center. “I’m really excited about working for the Fred Rogers Center,” Dr. Robb concluded. “I’ve crossed paths with Fred Rogers before as the recipient of a memorial scholarship which funded my dissertation research. My entire career has been focused around issues of children and media and ways we can use media and technology in positive ways for the healthy development of children. This is the perfect place for me to make a contribution to this field.”

Dr. Robb is a native of Columbia, Maryland. He and his wife, Vanessa, live in Los Angeles.

The Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College (www.fredrogerscenter.org) was established in 2003. The Center houses the official archive of Fred Rogers’ work including scripts, videos and set pieces from Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood. In addition to the Early Learning Network, the Center’s national programs to advance the fields of early learning and children’s media include the Fred Rogers Early Career Fellows; the Fred Forward Conference Series; the Learning Lives documentary project; and media literacy projects that engage children and adults as both users and creators of media.

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