



Early Development & Learning Lab Newsletter

Spring, 2014

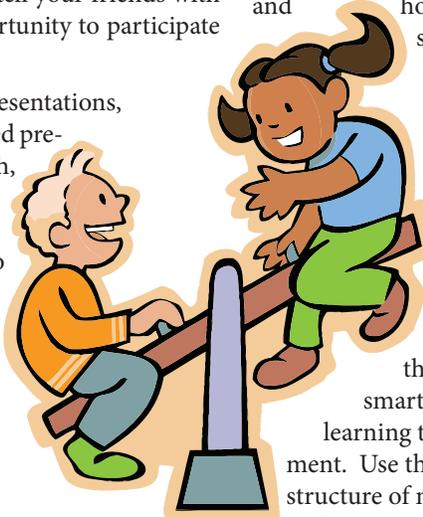
Sleep Study Update

By Amanda Prokasky

After the long and cold winter we've had, we can't help but to be grateful for the (mostly) warmer days and daylight later into the evening. Fresh off of Spring Break, the students in our lab are ready to hit the ground running—and with around 80 children signed up so far with our study, running they will be! As always, we are recruiting participants, so tell your friends with toddlers about our amazing lab and opportunity to participate in our research!

Spring is also the season for conference presentations, and our lab directors have already presented preliminary data at one conference in March, and will present at another conference in April. These presentations wouldn't exist without our wonderful participants, to whom we say thank you!

Amanda is the EDLL project coordinator and a graduate student in Child, Youth, and Family Studies.



The Cycle of Inquiry

Having fun through science investigations

By Carly Champagne

In a conversation with Dr. Soo-Young Hong, a faculty member in the Child, Youth, & Family Studies department at UNL, I learned about her work to encourage early childhood teachers to foster “systems thinking” in science education. Instead of teaching 20 minutes of science here and 20 minutes of social studies there, system thinking integrates all subjects to illustrate how all contexts of our environment work together to create and sustain the world that we live in. Promoting systems thinking involves more than just reading books or watching television programs; kids are encouraged to explore their world in exciting, educational ways.

Many examples of such exploration can be seen at Ruth Staples, an early childhood program at UNL. Through use of

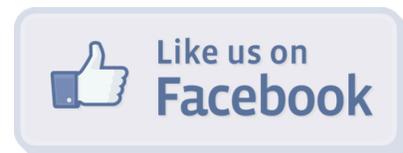
art tables, dramatic play, bird houses, nature walks, and more, the children are engaging in a “cycle of inquiry,” where they are encouraged to talk about their interests, ask questions, make “hypotheses,” collect data to support or reject their predictions, and discuss on their learning.

In warm weather, consider taking your kids outdoors for fun scientific projects. For example, hanging up a birdhouse can not only be a fun art project, but a way to talk about animals and how they interact with the environment we share. The children are encouraged to plan and make decisions about the project. For instance, the kids would be prompted with “Where should the birdhouse or feeder be hung? Well, where do you usually see birds?” to guide their learning.

Technology can be used to foster development, and with the prevalence of smart phones and tablets, common apps and websites can be used to encourage systems thinking. For example, a GPS app on an Ipad or smart phone (e.g., Google Maps) can be a powerful learning tool to inform children about their environment. Use the app to get your kids thinking about the structure of maps (e.g., what the colors mean or what the scale is) or show them what their neighborhood looks like from a birds-eye view.

Using science investigations to promote systems thinking can be as simple as encouraging curiosity, asking your child questions, and guiding them to discover the solutions for themselves. Utilizing technology and going on field-trips (see: Kids Events in Lincoln, page 3) are also great ways to promote the scientific learning and interest in your children.

Carly is a graduate student in Educational Psychology.



www.facebook.com/unl.edl



Early Development and Learning Lab

What is Self Regulation?

By Dr. Kathleen Moritz Rudasill

Self-regulation refers to a person's ability to resist engaging in behaviors that are not appropriate for the situation (such as sitting still rather than wiggling around at the dinner table) and pay attention when necessary (such as during a teacher's instruction). Also commonly referred to as self-control, self-regulation includes children's ability to regulate their emotions as well. With children's advancing cognitive, language, and physical skills, they also experience increased abilities to regulate their behavior and their emotions. Children's self-regulation grows significantly between ages 2 and 7 years, and this is evidenced by children's increasing ability to remember rules, think before acting, watch and learn from others, express language, and just do tasks by and for themselves. Self-regulation is strongly connected to many important child outcomes. For example, children who are well regulated also have more success in relationships with peers and teachers, and they tend to do better academically. Indeed, self-regulation is estimated to be more important than intelligence in predicting children's academic performance.

Parents can promote children's self-regulation by:

1. providing opportunities for children to help with age-appropriate chores around the house (e.g., setting the table, rinsing dishes, sweeping, feeding pets);
2. allowing children to have autonomy in completing tasks by themselves (e.g., putting clothes in low drawers so children can dress themselves; putting child-friendly dishes in low cabinets so children can serve themselves);
3. setting behavioral expectations for specific settings that are very clear (e.g., in the restaurant, we will stay in our seats while we're waiting for the food);
4. modeling behavior that is expected of the child (e.g., when parents yell at a child, the child learns that yelling is an option for managing anger).

Dr. Rudasill is Associate Professor of Educational Psychology.

The Early Development and Learning Lab needs more participants!!

We are currently recruiting toddlers younger than 2½ years for our sleep study. We are also seeking toddlers between 2½ and 3½ for an EEG study. EEG is safe and painless. If you know anyone else who may be interested, please pass along our contact information:

Early Development and Learning Lab
www.cehs.unl.edu/edl | 402.472.8982

Raising a Smart Toddler

By Dr. Victoria Molfese

There are many CD, DVDs, software, books, flash cards and toys available for parents to engage in activities with their infants and toddlers. These products can be expensive and not all of these have evidence to back up claims that they are effective. However, here are some suggestions for activities you can engage in with your toddler that do, in fact, have evidence supporting their effectiveness.

1. Talk to your toddler – In 1995, Hart and Risley published a book detailing their study of “meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children”. What they found was that 3-year-old children's language skills reflected the language skills of their parents. Further, the amount of talking parents engaged in with their children was related to the size of their children's vocabularies. Hart and Risley also found that vocabulary at 3 years of age was related to vocabulary, language, and reading comprehension skills at nine and ten years of age. Talking to young children should include conversations with opportunities for turn taking so that children have an opportunity to initiate conversations and respond to their parents during the conversation. Conversations are inexpensive ways to engage toddlers in activities that are known to contribute in important ways to language development.

2. Use Dialogic Reading – Book reading is an activity that many parents engage in with their children. An important element that can add to the benefits of book reading with children is called dialogic reading. In dialogic reading, the parent encourages the child to become an active participant in the story reading process by becoming a story teller. Dialogic reading includes four elements, called PEER. While reading the book, parent:

Prompts the child to say something about the book.

- e.g., the parent points to a picture and says, “What is this?”

Evaluates the child's response

- e.g., the child says, “A bug”. The parent says, “Yes, that's right.”

Expands the child's response by rephrasing and adding information to it.

- e.g., the parent says, “It is a bug. It is a ladybug.”

Repeats the prompt to make sure the child has learned from the expansion.

- e.g., the parent says, “Can you say ladybug?”

These simple conversations with children during book reading helps to keep children more engaged and gives children more opportunities for conversations.

Dr. Molfese is Chancellor's Professor of Child, Youth, and Family Studies.



Raising Keiki (Children) in Hawaii

By Molly Holmes

Families in the Aloha State are not that different from families on the “mainland” but may look a little different because of Hawaii’s “melting pot” culture. Hawaii’s population is made up of people of Japanese, Caucasian, Chinese, Filipino, Samoan, Tongan, Korean, Portuguese, and of course, Hawaiian, descent, just to name a few. Throughout the generations, these ethnicities and cultures have blended together through intermarriage to create a unique Hawaiian culture. In fact, today almost 60% of marriages in the state of Hawaii are interracial.

The people of Hawaii greatly value the ‘ohana (family) and place a lot of emphasis on raising keiki (children). The concept of ‘ohana refers to ones’ family, but also includes extended family members, neighbors, and close friends, all of whom contribute to raising keiki. Keiki are cherished by their communities, and the rate of child abuse and child neglect in Hawaii is half the national average. Additionally, the average family size in Hawaii is slightly larger. More extended family members live together than on the mainland. Keiki are exposed to many cultures and multiple generations in their daily lives, making growing up in Hawaii a unique experience.

Many families teach their keiki traditional Hawaiian values, which are well known and respected throughout the island state. A connection to the islands and the beautiful physical environment is present in each of these values. The most well known philosophy is aloha, roughly translated as *love and affection between people*, and is used as a way to say hello or goodbye. Aloha also refers to a feeling of respect and reciprocity between people and the natural environment. Another important value is kuleana, duty or responsibility. Keiki are taught that every person has their kuleana and learn to take responsibility for what they ought to do, including care for the environment. A related concept, kokua, refers to help or assistance, and children are encouraged to help others whenever possible. Keiki also learn to be pono, roughly translated as righteous or good, or to do the right thing. This value is found in the Hawaii state motto: “Ua Mau ke Ea o ka ‘Āina I ka Pono” or “The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness.”

The beautiful beaches, mountains, and jungles of Hawaii as well as the blend of cultures and traditions truly make it a special place to grow up.

Molly Holmes is a graduate student in Educational Psychology.

Student Spotlight: Elaina Montague

Hello! My name is Elaina Montague and I am a graduate research assistant in the EDL lab. I am originally from New York City and I recently moved to Lincoln in order to pursue graduate school at UNL. Often times when I tell people that I’m a

“New Yorker”, they ask me what it is about Lincoln that drew me away from such an exciting, urban city. For me, the answer is simple: the outstanding, collaborative research opportunities.

I remember that when I first visited Lincoln I was really drawn to the cross talk and synergy at the university amongst researchers and scholars of different fields of study. Since I came here in August, I feel my experiences lived up to this initial impression. So far, I have learned a great deal about neuroscience methods like Electroencephalography (EEG). EEG is an exciting, kid-friendly tool that records naturally occurring brain waves across the scalp and it can tell us some aspects of how people process information differently.

We actually don’t know too much about the brain processing of toddlers—specifically how changes in the developing brain are related to learning in toddlerhood. That’s why our lab is so invested in working with families to involve them in research and promote awareness of this field of study. There are exciting opportunities at UNL, especially with the expansion of Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior. I look forward to continuing my studies and all of the fun opportunities working with the EDL team.

Elaina Montague is a graduate student in Psychology.

Kids Events in Lincoln - Spring 2014

Morrill Hall - museum.unl.edu

- Titanoboa Exhibit, Feb 22 to Sept 7
- April 26th, 9:30am - 4:30 pm: Astronomy Day with special guest, Astronaut Clayton Anderson
- May 18th 1:30 pm - 4:30 pm: Sunday with a Scientist Family Series: Electric Cars.
 - Entry: Adults - \$6, Children (5-18) \$3, Young children (4 and under) Free!

Hyde Memorial Observatory

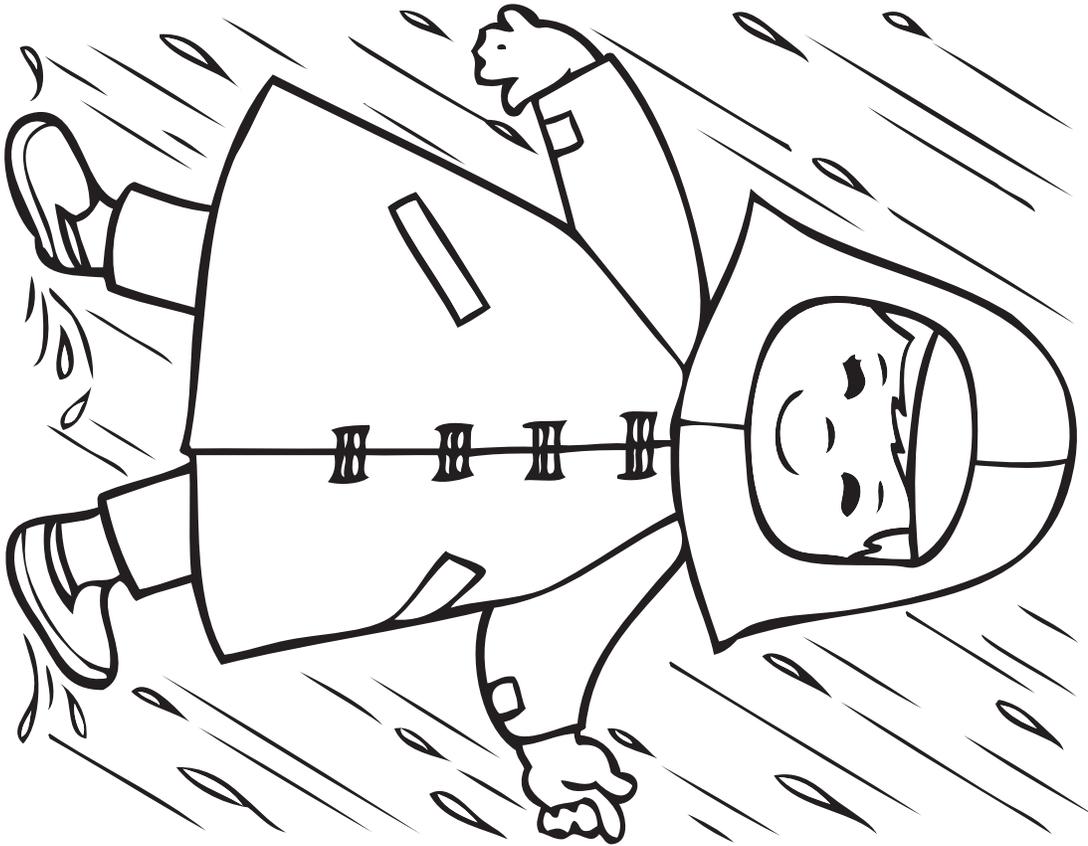
www.hydeobservatory.info

- Open Saturday nights, 8pm-11pm
- Astronomy presentation every Saturday
- Entry: Free!

The EDLL Staff

- Dr. Victoria Molfese** – Co-Lab Director
- Dr. Kathleen Rudasill** – Co-Lab Director
- Amanda Prokasky** – Project Coordinator
- Scott Frohn** – Graduate Research Assistant
- Elaina Montague** – Graduate Research Assistant
- Molly Holmes** – Graduate Research Assistant
- Carly Champagne** – Graduate Research Assistant
- Mary Kralemann** – Graduate Research Assistant
- Moon Yu Yue** – Graduate Research Assistant
- Jayden Nord** – Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Hannah Malcolm** – Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Jeanna Song** – Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Jack Gallagher** – Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Rachel Schroeter** – Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Shannon Guy** – Undergraduate Research Assistant
- Kayla Locke** – Undergraduate Research Assistant





EDLL Kids Corner
Coloring Page!