



Early Development & Learning Lab Newsletter

Winter, 2013/2014

Sleep Study Update

By Amanda Prokasky

Tis the season for thanks, and the Toddler Sleep Study has plenty to be thankful for! Due to our amazing participants, November has been a whirlwind of data collection, and our busiest month so far! We saw 14 children in the month of November alone, which equaled 42 separate home and lab visits. December is shaping up to be another busy month, with 13 children to test. In December we will see our first sleep study “graduates” - those children who will complete their final round of testing at 3 ½ years old. While we have enjoyed witnessing first hand the development of our toddler participants over the course of this past year, we are also saddened to know that all our toddler participants will eventually “graduate” from our study and we will have to say goodbye. For the time being however, we will continue to take joy in working with and watching our toddler participants learn and grow! And as always, we want to extend our gratitude to all of our toddler participants and their families, who have made our study a success so far. Happy Holiday Season to you all!

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

Chinese Parenting

By Xiaoqing Tu

In 1966, Diana Baumrind, a psychologist at UC-Berkeley, proposed her now widely-accepted model of parenting styles. She classified parenting behaviors into four categories: indulgent (allowing children to do anything they want), authoritarian (asking children do exactly what they say), authoritative (providing rules and guidance but not being overtly controlling) and uninvolved (disregarding the children). Among these categories, authoritative parenting is viewed as the most ideal and balanced style that leads to child’s well-being. However, this classification system is mainly based on middle class European American parents, and may not necessarily represent parenting practices in other cultures.

The 2011 book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*, was written by Amu Chua, a Chinese American mother of two and

professor at Yale University. The book immediately sparked controversy regarding the authoritarian parenting practices Chua promoted. In the book, Chua describes her own strict authoritarian parenting practices, for example, setting severe restrictions on her children’s out-of-school activities, and requiring them to practice music for several hours each day. Whenever her children failed to live up to her high expectations she would punish them, sometimes rather harshly. Chua did admit that she might have been wrong in some instances but mostly she felt proud of herself as a mother and viewed her parenting as a success. Even though Chua represents a stereotyped image of Asian American parents, many studies do suggest that Asian American parents, especially Chinese parents, are more likely to be authoritarian. Contrary to the general belief that authoritarian parents have negative effects on their children, Chinese American children perform as well as European American children who have authoritative parents. It is possible that warmth and control have different meaning in these two cultures.

Chinese culture is largely influenced by Confucian philosophy, which values respect for authority, emotional restraint, compliance to parents, and the importance of education. Chinese parenting practices emphasizes 孝顺 chiao shun (to train) and 管 管 (to govern and to love). Especially for Chinese Americans, parenting becomes more difficult in the years after immigration since practices such as physical discipline allowed in China are less acceptable in the United States. Chinese parents have high expectations for their children and strive to teach their children how to maintain harmony with others. For example, children are encouraged to avoid displaying strong emotional expression as it is considered harmful to one’s health and inappropriate for relationships. Such practices are related to shame because it rewards conformity to society’s expectations. Chinese parents usually show their acceptance and care through instrumental support rather than verbal expressions like “I love you.” Parental sacrifice is central to what parental support meant to them.

Xiaoqing is a graduate student in Child, Youth, and Family Studies.



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What is Temperament?

By Dr. Kathleen Moritz Rudasill

According to temperament experts “parents often do not become believers in temperament until after the birth of their second child.” On the other hand, teachers are more aware of the wide range of temperamental differences from engaging with the children in their classrooms. Children differ in the ways that they approach learning, follow directions, are interested in and attend to class activities, engage with peers, and interact with teachers. These differences are often rooted in temperament, defined as biologically based individual differences in thinking, feeling, and behaving in the environment. There are multiple temperament traits, and those that are most relevant to children’s classroom experiences are shyness, activity, persistence, attention, and anger. Although children’s behavior changes with development (e.g., a shy toddler may hide behind her mother’s legs but a shy teenager is more likely to speak quietly when meeting a new person), temperamental traits remain threaded throughout. Thus, a persistent preschooler will probably take a firm stand and be difficult to influence (for good or otherwise) as a high school student. Indeed, temperament provides the foundation for later personality, which extends to values, morals, beliefs and social cognition.

When we consider children’s temperament as it unfolds in the classroom (or at home), it is important to keep in mind that there is no “good” or “bad” temperament; rather, it is the way the child’s temperament fits with the environment that results in positive or negative outcomes. Some temperament traits, such as attention, help children learn quickly; some traits, like activity, may strain a child’s ability to sit still in the classroom; others, such as shyness and anger, make social interactions a bit more difficult. However, in all of these cases, there are methods teachers and parents can employ to provide a better fit for the child’s temperament. This requires sensitivity and responsiveness, but it also calls for awareness on the part of teachers and parents to recognize a child’s natural tendencies and identify a path to success. For example, a shy child may feel distress at the prospect of giving an oral report or participating in a school assembly. An attuned teacher could aid this process by providing lots of opportunities for practice with a small group or a peer.

Parents can advocate for their children to the school and teachers. Because parents know their children’s temperament better than anyone else, it is their insight that can be critically important as administrators make decisions regarding

classroom assignments, and as teachers deal with children’s behavior in the classroom. Teacher awareness is key to successfully establishing optimal fit between a child’s temperament and his or her classroom environment.

Dr. Rudasill is Associate Professor of Educational Psychology.

Brainwaves and Child Development

By Elaina Montague

The EDL has recently begun conducting research that looks at toddler’s self-regulation using Electroencephalography (EEG). EEG is a non-invasive tool that uses small sensors or “electrodes” to record patterns of electrical activity from multiple areas of the brain at the same time. These electrodes are often arranged in a net-like hat that is placed on around the head. Different sized EEG nets are made for newborns, infants, children, and adults, and can contain up to as many as 256 electrodes. Once the net is on and the EEG begins recording, the EEG machine displays continuously moving lines, called waveforms, which reflect naturally occurring electrical activity that our brains produce all of the time. The cool thing about EEG is that we not only measure ongoing brain activity, but we measure it in response to a specific event. Every time a person reacts to a new image, sound or piece of information the brain produces a kind of waveform called an Event-Related Potential (ERP). Different ERP waveforms have been used to examine basic thinking skills like attention and memory.

When studying infants and young children, ERPs are especially useful in understanding how an individual learns new skills. Over the course of development, a child’s ability to process information becomes increasingly more efficient. During infancy and young childhood, parts of the brain are not yet specialized for certain mental operations such as reading or producing language. This means that a child’s ERPs take longer to generate and are more widely distributed across the scalp. As a child matures, the brain gets more efficient by using fewer mental resources and specific regions of the brain adopt more stable functions. In this case, the child’s ERPs are expected to occur much faster than before and the brain will only recruit the areas that vital to perform the newly mastered skill.

Our lab is interested in studying how ERPs are related to a child’s ability to acquire self-regulation skills and temperament. We believe that self-regulation skills are important to a child’s healthy development and EEG is an exciting method that can shed light on this critical developmental period. Thanks to local families, we can continue to understand the complexities of toddlerhood and hope to share with you our increased understanding along the way.

Elaina is a graduate student in Clinical Psychology





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Kids Events in Lincoln - Winter 2013

By Mary Kralemann

North Pole Express

What: A holiday train ride around the zoo, hot chocolate, visit with Santa, and other holiday activities.

When: Dec 7 & 8

Where: Lincoln Children's Zoo – 1222 S 27th St.

Cost: \$4 for members, \$8 for non-members

For more information call 402.475.6741 or go to www.lincolnzoo.org/events/northpoleexpress.html

Sesame Street Live: Make a New Friend

What: Elmo, Grover, Abby Cadabby, and their Sesame Street friends welcome Chamki, Grover's friend from India, to Sesame Street.

Together, they explore the universal fun of friendship and celebrate cultural similarities, from singing and dancing, to sharing cookies! Join the fun and make a memory with your friends and family!

When: Jan 31 – Feb 2 at 6:30 PM

Where: Pershing Auditorium – 226 Centennial Mall South

Cost: Tickets range from \$12 to \$55

For more info call 402.441.8744 or go to www.pershingcenter.com/

Mary is a graduate student in the Marriage and Family Therapy program in Child, Youth, and Family Studies.

New Location for the EDL Lab!

By Molly Holmes

The Early Development and Learning Lab has finally moved into our new space in the East Memorial Stadium expansion. We are excited to have been given the opportunity to be located within the brand new Center for Brain, Biology and Behavior (CB3) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. This collaborative center houses research groups from several UNL departments, including psychology, political science, and special education. Our toddler participants that have visited the new lab space love the child-friendly decorations and play areas. Note that while our address has changed, the lab phone number is still the same: 402.472.8982. Please call us if you need directions to the new lab.

Molly Holmes is a graduate student in the Cognition, Learning, and Development program in Educational Psychology.

Myth Busting

By Dr. Victoria Molfese

1. Research evidence is documenting the problems of sleep insufficient in adults. But children also need more sleep than they are getting. Children, 6 months and older, generally sleep 10 hours+ at night, but many children getting less sleep because of busy schedules, resistance to going to bed, and night time wakefulness.

2. Many parents believe that their children fall asleep soon after they are put to bed. Our study of 110 typically developing children 3 to 9.5 years old examined parents' sleep diaries on when children were put to bed and when they got up in the morning. Using actigraph data, we found that parents overestimate the actual amount of sleep their child got by almost 2 hours!

3. Good sleep habits (regular bedtimes and sufficient sleep time) are related to children's learning and behavior. Children need to be well rested so they can learn, control their behaviors, and have energy for play.

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



The EDL Staff

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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 (see *Brainwaves and Child Development* in this issue for more information on EEG). 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