Thank you!

We would just like to say thank you to the parents of our tiny participants for coming into the lab and participating in the studies we’ve been conducting recently! We genuinely appreciate the time you gave up to help us learn how infants and young children grow and develop. We hope to share some of what we’ve learned so far with you! In this newsletter you’ll find information on each study we’ve conducted recently: what we’re hoping to learn, what we’ve learned so far, and how far along the study is in the research process.

ABOUT US: In the Wilbourn Infant Lab At Duke (WILD), we’re interested in learning about how children learn language and how different types of input, such as gestures, may influence early language and cognitive development. In addition, we are interested in how different cultural backgrounds and linguistic experiences influence children’s language learning.

Currently, we are trying to find answers to: What specific role does pointing play in early language learning? Does gesture or gesture-accompanied speech facilitate early language learning? What kind of information are infants seeking when pointing? How do parents’ and caregivers’ interactions with their infants influence their infants’ language development? What cues to infants use when learning to distinguish between emotions? And finally, in what way does culture impact communicative interactions?

Our next steps are to go out into the community to get a better understanding of the real-world applications of our research!
**Pointing as a Learning Mechanism (PALM)**

Infants are better at learning new words for objects they are really interested in. One way that infants convey their interest is through their gestures. In this study, we are exploring how infants’ pointing gestures and interest in objects influences their ability to learn new words – and how this ability changes over time. During this study an infant sits on their parent’s lap across from an experimenter. The experimenter then asks the infant which object they want to play with, which the experimenter then labels. While we are still in the process of collecting data for this study, by the end of it, we are hoping to better understand how infants’ gesturing and interest in objects helps early word learning!

This study is no longer recruiting participants.

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**Story Study**

Children learn information better if it is presented to them in multiple ways. This study investigates whether gesture-accompanied speech (for example, words paired with visual gestures) can help children’s word learning. Different nonsense words are paired with a gesture from American Sign Language and presented to children in a storybook. Children are then tested to see how many of the nonsense words they can remember. So far, we’ve found that children are more likely to remember new words if they were taught as spoken words paired with visual gestures than if they were taught as just spoken words. Soon we will begin testing students in the Durham Public School System!

This study is no longer recruiting participants.
Emotion and Affect in Toddlers (EATS)

For this study, we are interested in learning about how and if infants can discriminate specifically between a happy and a disgust facial expression. We tried to find out if infants could tell the difference between these two faces by showing them the same face over and over again until they got bored of it and then showing them a new face and seeing if they noticed the change in faces. The preliminary results of our study indicate that infants, by 14 months, did notice the change and can typically discriminate between a happy facial expression and a disgust facial expression!

This study is no longer recruiting participants!

Interactions Between Parents and Children (iPac)

There are two iPac studies in the works right now: cross-sectional and longitudinal. In both studies, we are assessing how interactions between parents and babies change across the second year, from 10-22 months. For the cross-sectional study, four different groups of parent-child dyads have been recruited, while the longitudinal study allows us to assess changes in the same dyads across four different ages (10, 14, 18 and 22 months). In both studies, our goal is to see how parents and babies naturally behave and interact at different developmental time points, and in different contexts. Some findings from the cross-sectional data show that parents speak differently to their babies while reading picture books than during play with toys, which may help us understand how babies learn new words best.

Our longitudinal study is currently in its final wave of testing, and we have loved seeing these babies and parents learn and grow!

This study is not currently recruiting new participants.
**Motives of Pointing (MOP)**

Infants and young children are not passive observers of the world around them – they are active contributors to their developmental experiences! One way children actively contribute to their learning experiences is by using their gestures to seek out information. For example, children will point towards objects not just because they want to have those objects, but also because they want to learn about those objects!

In this study, we ask what types of information infants are requesting when they gesture. We will do so by asking children to gesture towards novel toys. In response, we will give children different types of information about those toys (such as the toy’s label, or how the toy works). By observing how satisfied children are when given different types of information, and how well they learn that new information, we can start to better understand how young children use their hands to shape their learning!

Current Age of Interest: 17.5 – 18.5 months

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**Emotion and Affect in Toddlers 2 (EATS2)**

Now that we know infants at 14 months can tell the difference between a happy and a disgust facial expression, we’re trying to find out if this skill extends to verbal expressions of emotion as well. We have two goals for this second part of our EATS study: 1) to see if we can teach infants to link a verbal expression of disgust and happy with a facial expression of disgust and happy and 2) to determine if infants have already learned this link on their own by 14 months. We just recently began this phase of the study and will continue recruiting participants into next spring.

Current age of interest: 13.5 – 14.5 months

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Thanks for reading! We hope to see you soon!