

Annual Newsletter

January - December 2020

FROM THE DIRECTORS

While 2020 has been an exceedingly difficult year for research, The Centre for Children's Learning in a Social World has continued to engage in and promote our research focused on children's learning. We also have been welcomed to the Faculty of Arts at Macquarie.

The main focus of our research in The Centre for Children's Learning in a Social World is to determine how children's learning and development occurs within a social context: with peers, parents, teachers, and society. As 2020 posed unique challenges for parents, teachers and children, we engaged with the Australian media frequently to share advice for adjusting to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we step into 2021, we are hopeful of a more peaceful year and the chance to host several postponed outreach events. A huge thank you to our research participants, funding partners, and collaborators, and we wish you a great break.

-A/Prof Penny Van Bergen (School of Education)

-A/Prof Naomi Sweller (Department of Psychology)

SPOTLIGHT ON COVID-19


COVID-19 has posed significant challenges. Like others in the university community, we've been busily home schooling and moving our teaching online! On the research front, some projects (particularly with community partners) have also been paused or postponed. However, we have adapted with new online streams of research considering student-teacher relationships in lockdown, teacher coping, and parent insights into child learning.

Importantly, centre members have played an important outreach role: supporting parents, teachers and children to adapt to a range of COVID-19 challenges. As outlined further in our media section, we have conducted several podcasts and radio interviews focused on how teachers can adapt to lockdown, how parents can support their children during home-schooling, and how to discuss the pandemic with children. We also contributed to the Macquarie University Website, "[COVID-19, We've got this covered!](#)"

While 2020 has been a challenging year, we are looking forward to a blockbuster 2021 including:

- Two new outreach events for primary and secondary teachers, focusing on student-teacher relationships.
- Our Society for Applied Research in Memory and Cognition-sponsored conference, postponed from 2020, with 7 Australian and New Zealand universities.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SCHOOL CHOICES PROJECT

 Our School Choices Project is entering its third year. This collaborative centre project investigates parents' decision-making processes when deciding when and where to send their child to kindergarten.



There are exciting preliminary findings in our Wave 1 data. Based on child DOB, school sector, and state school enrolment rules, some parents can choose to send their child to school in the year they turn 5 or

the year they turn 6. Other parents have no choice.

- Of 549 parents in Wave 1, 226 reported having a choice as to when their child would start school.
- We asked these parents about a variety of factors that may have influenced their choice.
- Some findings replicate those of international studies. Parents' worries about their child being socioemotionally and behaviourally ready were associated with later starting age, and boys were more likely to be sent to school later than girls.
- Others findings were unique, and offer important insights into parental decision-making. Some Australian parents were concerned about whether their child would drive or meet other adolescent milestones at the same time as their friends, for example, and this predicted later starting age.

In December we launched our Wave 2 survey, with over 360 original Wave 1 participants agreeing to be contacted again (this number includes both parents who have a choice about school starting age, as well as those who do not). One aim of this wave is to follow up with the sub-set of parents who were able to choose when to send their child to school, and to establish whether or not they are now happy with their choice. A second aim is to understand parents' and children's experiences over the past year, and to know if COVID-19 school related changes and lockdowns have influenced the decision-making of parents who are still yet to send their child to school.

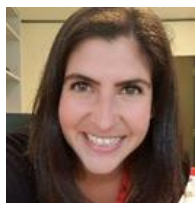
In March 2021 we will launch our original survey to a new group of parents with children aged between 3 and 5 years.

NEW CENTRE MEMBERS



A/Prof Fay Hadley (Education)

Fay's research examines leadership in early childhood education. She is especially interested in the socio-political environment and how this affects early childhood teachers' work. She also examines how educators form partnerships with diverse families, and how intersectionality impacts these partnerships. Fay has had recent funding success with a range of industry partners, bringing to the centre an important connection between research and practice.



Dr Emma Burns (Education)

Emma's research focuses on the socio-motivational processes that support adolescents' engagement and achievement in school. She is particularly interested in how the quality of students' relationships with their teachers influences their self-beliefs and goal setting, and how teacher-student relationships and motivation differ across distinct student groups. Despite only recently joining Macquarie, Emma has already been successful in seeking funding from the APS and ARC.



Professor Richard Menary (Philosophy)

Richard's research considers extended, embodied and distributed cognition, neural plasticity, symbolic cognition – particularly reading and mathematical cognition, the cultural evolution of social cognition pragmatism and cognitive science and embodied narratives and the self. Richard is particularly interested in investigating evolutionary adaptations that develop following parent/child interactions. Richard has held several large grants and fellowships and is currently Head of Philosophy at Macquarie.

MEDIA COVERAGE



A key aim for the Centre of Children's Learning in a Social World is to use the popular media, professional magazines, and other similar forms of outreach to disseminate research findings and evidence-based advice to parents, teachers, and the general public. This year our coverage has been significant. Centre members have prepared multiple press releases, professional articles, and articles for *The Conversation*, leading to more than 30 interviews for TV, radio, newspaper, and popular podcasts. Our outlets include: Lighthouse Magazine, SBS news, Channel 10 news, ABC Radio, Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, and MamaMia. Topics include toddler bullying, student-teacher relationships, student and educator wellbeing, and tips for parents, teachers and children adjusting to COVID-19 restrictions and changes. A selection of coverage is here:

- [The power of learning IRL: how hand gestures help kids - and adults – understand](#)
- [Little kids – is my toddler a bully?](#)
- [Year 12 exams in the time of COVID. 5 ways to support your child to stress less and do better](#)
- [We asked kids who their favourite teacher is and why. Here's what they said](#)
- [Spotlight on practice – how I teach now](#)
- [Kids at home because of Coronavirus? Here are 4 ways to keep them happy \(without resorting to Netflix\)](#)
- [Facebook for homework – face-to-face for emotional support](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT MEMBERS



The Centre for Children's Learning in a Social World is home to many promising HDR students, whose work we aim to showcase. In this issue we congratulate **Natalie Brand**, who successfully completed her PhD thesis entitled "Learning-focused dynamics of toddler educator conversations". With supervisor Professor Sheila Degotardi, Natalie's research found that toddler-educator conversations have greater learning potential if the educator takes an active role as a conversational leader: supporting toddlers to demonstrate their existing knowledge and to creating new knowledge.

SPOTLIGHT ON INTERNATIONAL VISITS



While most planned international visits have been cancelled this year, we were delighted to host a visit from **Sena Öz**: a doctoral student from Ankara University in Turkey. Sena visited us in March for 3 months on an Erasmus Scholarship. Working with Assoc Prof Penny Van Bergen and Dr Rebecca Andrews, Sena's project, "*Mother-child reminiscing in Australia and Turkey*", aims to extend existing cross-cultural memory research by examining differences in reminiscing style and content between Australian and Turkish families. Unfortunately, Sena's visit and data collection was cut short by the COVID19 lockdown. However, she continues to work closely with Rebecca and Penny, who will each collect Australian data while Sena collects data in Turkey.

FIND OUT MORE

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