



Social Learning Lab: Fall 2016

2016 has been a great year at the Social Learning Lab. We have welcomed new team members, moved into a new lab space, and are starting lots of new projects. In this newsletter, you can read more about some of our studies from the last year and some of our ongoing projects. We look forward to the New Year and having more exciting research updates!

Research from the past year

Does a child's religious background affect how they differentiate between what is real and imaginary?

Corriveau, Chen & Harris (2015)
Cognitive Science

5-6 year-old children were asked to judge whether the main characters in stories were real or fictional. These stories ranged from being religious to fantastical to realistic. All children were able to identify characters in realistic stories to be real. However religious children were more likely to view characters in religious stories to be real whereas secular children were more likely to identify these characters as fictional. Also secular children were more likely to judge characters in fantastical stories as fictional.

From this study we can see that exposure to religion has a powerful impact on children's reasoning about the types of events that are possible and impossible.

Is children's understanding of "real" and "imaginary" related to their ability to differentiate between historical and fictional stories?

Corriveau & Harris (2015)
Cognitive Development

Children were asked to identify familiar characters and unfamiliar characters as real or pretend. They also completed a series of tests to identify their ability to understand mental states and their ability to understand whether signs and photographs are false. Older children and children with higher ability to understand mental states were able to use the context of a story when deciding whether a character is real or pretend. Children who passed the false belief and false sign task were also able to justify their answers. This research indicates that children can distinguish between a historical and a fictional story by 5-6 years and possibly even sooner.

Does children's attention to consensus affect how they learn about tools?

DiYanni, Corriveau, Kurkul, Nasrini & Nini (2015) *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*

Caucasian American and Chinese American children watched either one person or a group of three people choosing inefficient tools for a task, like selecting a soft sponge to crush cookies. Children were invited to perform the same task and could either chose tools that were good for the task or inefficient tools. Caucasian American children were less likely than Chinese American children to copy the choice of the inefficient tool regardless of whether they saw one person or three people use the inefficient tool. The opposite was true for Chinese American children who were significantly more likely to copy the inefficient tool choice when it was used by three people. This shows that there is a cultural difference in children's imitative style.

Check out our website <http://www.bu.edu/learninglab/> and Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/bulearnlab/>



Museum of Science: Scientific Inquiry Study

Previous research has shown that using inquiry techniques when interacting with children leads to a better collaborative experience between parents and children. The Scientific Inquiry study investigates the impact of using lecture-based learning versus guided learning when delivering information. The study involves 4-6-year-olds playing with different toys with their caregiver and includes two conditions. In the control condition the parent observes a lecture-based approach and is given a paragraph to tell their child about the meaning of gears. By contrast, in the intervention condition the parent observes the experimenter carry out the Question Experiment Explain method and is given a choice of science questions to investigate with their child, such as: "What happens when I spin one of the gears?" We are measuring the different explanatory and question statements that parents use during this interaction. We expect to see a difference in the two conditions and predict that the intervention condition will elicit more interactive, engaged interactions.



Children's Scientific and Religious Cognition:

The Social Learning Lab has launched a new project examining how children from the USA, China and Iran think about religious and scientific entities and events. We plan to run several studies in this project, which has been generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation, and aim to answer the following questions:

- How do parents from different religious backgrounds talk to their children about different entities and events?
- How does children's thinking about different entities and events change over time?



Undergraduate Research Symposium



Two of our Research Assistants were featured in this year's symposium. Teresa Tam (left top) presented "Emergent Critical Thinking and Executive Functions: An Exploration of Potential Co-Development". Stephanie Santos (left below) presented "Biracial Children are More Prosocial When Primed with their Majority Race".



Both pieces are ongoing and we are in the process of adding to these exciting findings.

Holiday Social

This December, members of the Social Learning Lab hosted a Gingerbread Housemaking Contest featuring graham crackers, frosting, candy, and marshmallows! Although no actual gingerbread was present, we more than made up for this in festive spirit!



New Lab Members

Post Doctorate Associates:

Dr. Jennifer Clegg and Dr. Ayse Payir

Doctoral student: Ian Campbell

Lab Managers: Rosie Brett and Amy Macmillan

Research Assistants: Jiayi Zhong, Julie Stern, Marissa Inouye, Jenna Benferhat, Olivia Calisi, Amita Sekhon, Aarushi Talwar, Yomna Bendary, Huaiyu Liu and Aakansha Singh.

Thank you!

A huge thank you to everyone who has been part of the Social Learning Lab in 2016. You are helping us learn more about children's social and cognitive development. In particular, thank you to all of the families and schools listed below who participated in our research.

Beginnings School, Wellesley Children's Study Center, Riverside Children's Center, Tobin Montessori, Little Wagon Early Education Center, Newton Public Schools, Reading Public Schools, Ashland School, Marlborough School, Fayerweather Street School, Radcliffe Child Care Center, Little Theatre School, Morse Preschool Cambridge Public School, BU Child's Center, Charlestown Cooperative Nursery School, Rockwood Early Education Academy, The Joy of Learning Montessori, Jackson Mann, Our Future Learning Center (Allston), KIPP Public Charter School, Boys & Girls Club of Boston, Saint Peter's School (Cambridge), The Learning Project Elementary School, Little Folks Community Daycare, Imagination Station Learning Center, Lexington Montessori School, and Saint Josephs (Wakefield).