Greetings from UW! It’s been awhile since our last newsletter, and we would like to give you an update on our work here at the university. Thank you for your continued help; we are grateful for your ongoing participation in our study. This year we have continued conducting six year phone interviews and it is wonderful to see how much each child has grown. We look forward to being in contact with you shortly and wish you all the best in the new year.

Animal Puzzle: Putting The Pieces Together
By: Mayra Rodriguez and Liz Hamburger

Many children under the age of five tend to experience difficulty in independently matching and completing jigsaw-like puzzles. Very often, this is due to the ongoing development of cognitive skills that are needed for completing such abstract tasks. At lab, children at the 24 month visit were given the opportunity to put together animal and school bus puzzles with allowed assistance from their mothers. Mothers were instructed to help in anyway they felt would successfully permit the child to finish the puzzles. Children autonomously demonstrated wide ranging abilities and strategies to complete the tasks at hand. Some children were able to correctly place pieces in their designated locations by matching the shape of the piece to its symmetrical spot on the puzzle board. However, the majority of the children and their mothers collectively collaborated as a “team.” It was observed that such mother-child interactions allowed children to accomplish and learn new techniques that were slightly beyond their independent capacity. These types of interactions known as scaffolding were seen to provide the child assistance through the mothers’ abilities to provide emotional encouragement, technical demonstrations, and maintenance of the child’s attention. Such observed dyad interactions have been found to be beneficial in promoting better problem solving strategies, higher cognitive skills performance, and academic achievement.
We are over a year into our follow-up with families as the children in our study have been turning six, and we are incredibly thankful for all the families who have participated so far and look forward to hearing from those who have yet to be contacted. You may remember some of the activities we did at earlier visits, including the gift in a bag task, where your child had to wait while we got a ribbon before they could open a gift bag with a toy inside, the cookie task, where your child had to hold off eating a warmed cookie for a short time, or the magic mountain task, where your child was told not to play with a large toy mountain while you and the experimenter left the room. All of these activities were meant to measure children’s self-regulation, or the ability to control their actions, thought processes, and emotions. For the six year study, we are looking at how children’s early abilities on these tasks relate to three central areas: 1. children’s academic and social skills at age six, 2. mothers’ current stress levels and 3. children’s sleep habits at age six. We believe that this information may help lead to earlier identification of difficulties and interventions for children born preterm.

Because many of the children are beginning to enter school now that they are turning six, we are also interested in any services and diagnoses they may be receiving. One part of this portion of the study that is different from previous timepoints is that, with the parents’ permission, we are now collecting information from the children’s teachers as well. This information will help us to understand how children are doing not just at home environment, but in the school setting as well. Participation in this portion of the study is less extensive than at past time-points. To collect all the information we need, we just ask that parents fill out nine forms, which are sent to the home, and then complete a short 20 to 25 minute phone interview. No lab or home visit is required. If parents give their consent, we will also send two forms to your child’s teacher.

If you have not already been contacted by the lab, you can expect to hear from our Project Assistant, Amanda Hane, around your child’s sixth birthday. We’d like to thank all of those who have already participated, and for those, we look forward to hearing how you and your child are doing!

Are You Moving?

Please let us know if you are moving or changing your contact information. This way we can get in touch with you and we can send you our newsletters. Are you moving out of the state or country? You can still help us with our research by filling out paperwork. If you prefer that we contact you via e-mail, that’s great! Send your e-mail address to pretermbabies@waisman.wisc.edu stating that this is how you prefer to be contacted. Just make sure to include your child’s name and birth date. You may also contact us by phone at 608-263-6249.
And the collection continues... By: Adriana Salgado

You may recall in a previous edition of the Preterm Interaction Lab newsletter, the mention of the DNA testing and traits related to the development of children’s self-regulation and attention problems. It has been more than a year since we began the process and we have made some progress! But we still need your help!

We thank the families who have already participated in the genetic sample collection. But we are now finding out that some samples will need to be resubmitted because there was not enough DNA in the sample to analyze. We will contact you if this is the case.

We are still reaching out to participants. If we have not contacted you as of yet regarding this extension to your 36 month visit and you are interested in participating or in finding out more information, feel free to contact us here at the lab by phone at 608-263-6249. Remember, all information remains confidential, with no names or identifying information attached. Thank you for participating in this important work!

Play Away By: Cynthia Burnson

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation” - Plato

At the beginning of the 36-month visit, you were asked to play with your child as you normally would for fifteen minutes. This session played out in as many different ways as there were children. The toys available included babies, blocks, cars, a basketball hoop, pots and pans, and more. It was a lot of fun to see the vast array of enthusiasm, creativity, and enjoyment of your child's company evident in a play scenario. Every mother-child pair had their own distinct style of play. Some mothers tended to follow their child's lead, while others structured games and pretend play for their child. Some children dove right into a familiar-seeming toy, while others took a more “box of chocolates” approach, sampling a little bit of each. Since play is a child's work, watching mother and child collaborate in this context gives us insight into the characteristics of the relationship. This setting also gives us a chance to see a side of the child that we might not see in a more task-related section of your lab visit, like the puzzle or impossible box. Play is an important part of a child's development, especially during the preschool years. Playing with your child is a great way to foster their skills in many areas, including attention regulation, pre-literacy, and early math. But even if it wasn’t, playing with your child is a fun way to spend time together and a good excuse to get some playtime fun for yourself!
Interview With Amanda Hane

How long have you been working in the lab?

For about a year and a half, since the fall of 2008.

What is your academic background and what brought you to the lab?

I actually got my undergraduate degree in history, but I'm currently a Master's student in Human Development and Family Studies. Between undergraduate and graduate school, I spent some time working in after-school programming for children at a K-5 school, and later worked in publishing editing books on early childhood development, where I worked with a lot of faculty and researchers. Both of these jobs contributed to my interest in social-emotional development in children and my wanting to continue my education in that direction.

What is your favorite part of working in the lab?

I really like doing the phone interviews with parents! It's great to hear from the parents themselves about how the families are doing now that the children are turning six years old. It seems like every family is different too, which keeps it interesting.

What are your future plans?

I'm planning to finish up my Master's degree in the next year, and am still debating between continuing on to get my Ph.D in Human Development and Family Studies, or getting another Master's degree in a more clinical area so I can work directly with families. I miss working with people, but I'm also really enjoying my research a lot, too, so I guess we'll see!

What are some of your hobbies and interests?

Gosh, when I'm not studying, I enjoy yoga, running, knitting, and have recently taken up rock-climbing. But there's a lot to offer in Madison, so I'm hoping to try out some new hobbies this winter too.