

# SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT LAB



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## Welcome

to the first edition of the Social Development Lab's Newsletter. First and foremost, a huge thank you to all the parents and children who have participated in our research since the beginning, in 2014! We have learned so much through watching and listening to so many children (and their parents) in our community. We would also like to thank the local community events that have welcomed the Social Development Lab including Winterloo, Canada Day @UW, Kultrun Festival, and Kidspark. This newsletter provides an update on our ongoing and future research. We hope you are interested in becoming involved again! Our work isn't possible without your support.



*“ Best wishes this holiday season from the Social Development Lab ”*

## Our goals

- \* **Examine** the influence of temperament (early personality) on children's social, emotional and academic development
- \* **Study** the strategies children use to regulate their thoughts and feelings in social and non-social contexts
- \* **Understand** which self-regulatory strategies are most effective for children with different temperament (e.g., shy versus socially outgoing children).

# Research Findings

We want to thank everyone who participated in our initial study of **self-regulation** in 7- to 12-year-old children. We had 80 families in the community participate and the information gathered has churned up some fascinating results.

Claudia Labahn, our lab manager, was interested in how temperament (shyness vs. sociability) affects children's performance on inhibition tasks (i.e., games where children need to hold back a behaviour when instructed to). In our youngest children, shyness was associated with extremely good performance relative to their more outgoing peers and also relative to a large international normative sample. However, in older children, these temperament-based differences in performance were less apparent. We believe it may be a good thing for shy children to lose a little bit of this advantage over time, as it may afford them more flexibility in



“ ... as children age, the difference in the inhibitory control between outgoing and withdrawn children disappears. ”

their behavioral and emotional responding.

Dr. Henderson and our past MASc student, Emily Downs, found support for this interpretation when they reported that while extremely good performance on inhibition tasks was beneficial for

very outgoing children (i.e., it supported better emotion regulation), the opposite was true for children higher in shyness. When shy children have extremely high inhibition skills it is associated with more worrying and social fear. This is consistent with the idea that different skills help different children regulate their emotions.



## Check us out online!

We only send newsletters like this once in a while! Make sure to like our Facebook page, or follow us on Twitter and Instagram to stay updated all year round. Learn about events we are attending, new research by us and others, and more.



FACEBOOK

<https://www.facebook.com/sdl.uwaterloo/#>



TWITTER

@SDLab\_UW



INSTAGRAM

@socialdevelopmentlab



UW WEBSITE

<https://uwaterloo.ca/social-development-lab/>

# Current Studies

## *Shyness and Executive Functioning:*

With the generous support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Insight Grant, we are conducting a short-term longitudinal study examining how temperament (shyness vs. sociability) influences the way children attend to, and process, social and non-social information. We are near the end of our first wave a data collection with 7-year olds and getting ready to start seeing the same children again when they begin turning 8 in January 2018. We are amazed by how much children change over the early school years and want to understand how temperament impacts this growth.

**Emma's** Master's level research evaluates how children use their own knowledge to guess other people's emotions. "My current project looks at this by using short social scenes. I'm interested in the types of cues children use to guess these emotions and how often certain types of cues are used by this age group". This project will be continuing into its second year in 2018 and has inspired several follow up studies.

**McLennon's** Master's level research explores how kids shift their attention in social situations, and how this impacts their social lives. "Interacting with others requires kids to keep track of lots of information, and being able to fluidly shift attention between different sources of information might have a big impact on how comfortable kids feel in social interactions." In 2018, McLennon will extend this research by using our lab's new heart rate and respiration recording technology to explore how attention and early personality are reflected in kids'



physiological responses to social situations.

## *Executive Functioning in English Language Learners:*

**Serena's** is collaborating with the Waterloo Region District School Board to examine executive functions in English language learners. The "bilingual advantage" suggests that those who speak two languages have enhanced executive functioning, but what about children who are still learning a second language? We will investigate if English language learners have enhanced executive functioning, and if they do, at what level of English ability these differences are detectable. This information will help parents, educators, and policy makers create better programs for our community's English language learners.



# TECH UPDATE

In exciting news, a recent Canada Foundation for Innovation Award to Dr. Henderson and her colleagues, allowed our lab to acquire brand new, state-of-the-art equipment to wirelessly record heart-rate and respiration from children! The equipment is lightweight and mobile; after a few minutes of putting it on, you'd forget it was there altogether!



This allows kids to pop it on and go about their business as usual, giving us a glimpse into how their bodies respond physiologically to a wide variety of everyday scenarios. Exploring how the body responds to different tasks and situations can yield important insights into how kids' personalities affect the way they react in their social world. Stay tuned for opportunities to participate in new studies using this equipment!



# Our People



**Dr. Heather Henderson** is the Director of the Social Development Lab and an Associate Professor of Psychology. In addition to her research, Dr. Henderson teaches research design and developmental psychology to undergraduate and graduate students at UW.



**Claudia Labahn** is the Lab Manager at the Social Development Lab. She completed her MASC in Developmental Psychology at the UW in 2015, where she also completed her Bachelor of Arts in Honours Psychology. She currently teaches English as a Second Language and works with children on the autism spectrum.



**McLennon Wilson** is a doctoral student in Developmental Psychology at the University of Waterloo. He completed his Bachelor of Science in Honours Psychology at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in 2016. He is never without his sunglasses.



**Emma Green** is currently completing her doctorate in Developmental Psychology at the University of Waterloo. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Honours Mental Health Studies at the University of Toronto in 2016. She also spends her time coaching figure skating and judging competitions!



**Serena McDiarmid** is completing her MASC in Developmental Psychology, after completing her Bachelor of Education at Wilfred Laurier University. Serena also has a Bachelor of Science in Health Studies at the University of Waterloo. Serena is a substitute teacher with the WRDSB.



**Nina Gabert** is a Research Assistant in the lab. She is in her third year at the University of Waterloo, completing her degree in Honours Psychology. Nina will be doing a co-op term this winter with Defence Research and Development Canada.



**Sarah Thomas** is a Research Assistant in the Social Development Lab. She is a third year student in the Honours Psychology program at the University of Waterloo. Next term, Sarah is on co-op working with an exciting new start-up company.



**Taylor Wezel** is a high school student from St David completing a co-op at the Social Development Lab. She is currently applying to University programs in both education and psychology.

# Where are they now?



**Sarah Jane Garland**, our first lab manager, recently completed graduate studies at the University of Toronto in Speech Language Pathology. She is now working in B.C. and she is loving every minute of it.



**Emily Downs** completed her MASc in 2016 and is now in her second year at Queen's University where she is completing her Master's in Occupational Therapy.



**Krista McKelvey** completed her MASc in the lab in 2016. She is currently working under health care professionals, facilitating rehabilitation programming for individuals with acquired brain injury and mental health needs in Hamilton.



**Maha Sohail**, was one of our Research Assistants during her co-op in the Social Development Lab. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology once she graduates.

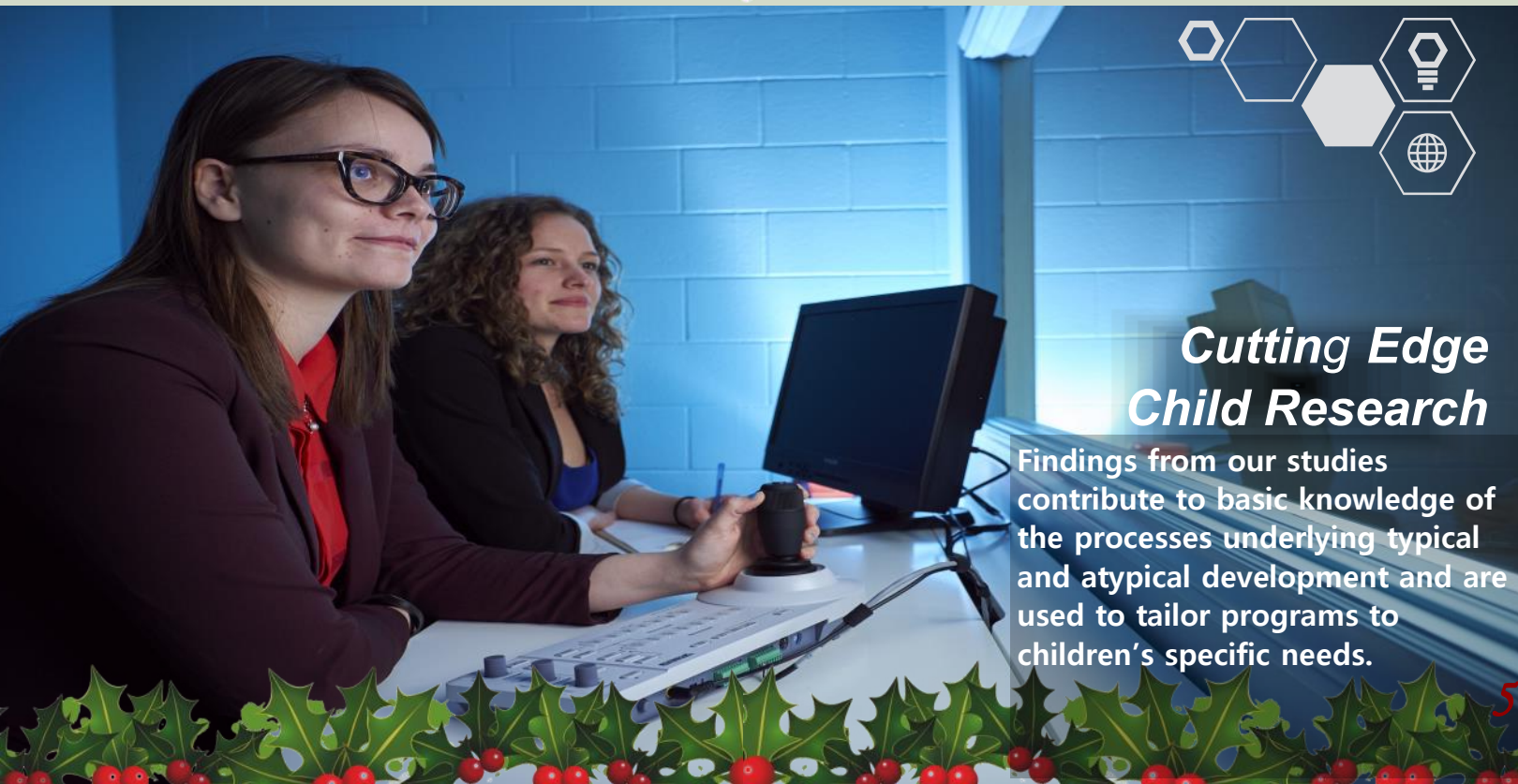
*Questions? Want to become involved in research?*

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*Call us: 519-888-4567 ext. 38775*



## ***Cutting Edge Child Research***

Findings from our studies contribute to basic knowledge of the processes underlying typical and atypical development and are used to tailor programs to children's specific needs.