Jean S. Garvin Research Fellowship Awardees 2020-2021

Recipient: Ashley Brien, B.A., M.S., CCC-SLP, Doctoral student Communication Science Disorders, College of Nursing and Health Sciences

Title: A remotely delivered parent training intervention to support Episodic memory and social learning in children with autism spectrum disorder.

Advisor: Tiffany Hutchins, Ph.D.

Abstract:

Note: This project also received a research fellowship award last year. The request this year is to pay for printing and mailing research documents because the study could no longer be conducted in-person due to COVID-19.

Episodic memory (EM) is memory for past personal experiences. It is foundational to the development of imagination, introspection, future thinking, and social problem-solving and it shapes one’s self-concept, identity, and life story. EM and social cognition are developmentally intertwined and functionally dependent, and impairments in both are well-documented in individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Surprisingly, and despite the tremendous empirical and theoretical import for the construal of EM as a core deficit in the social challenges in ASD, no formal interventions have been developed to support EM in this population. Meanwhile, an impressive body of literature has documented that one particular caregiver interaction style (known as elaborative reminiscing) causally and positively impacts typically developing children’s EM and socio-cultural learning. The proposed study will evaluate the efficacy of a newly manualized EM intervention (Brien, Hutchins, & Prelock, in revision) that adapts the principles of elaborative reminiscing in ways that align with best practices for supporting social cognition in children with ASD. This study will examine the effectiveness of EM intervention on the quality of children’s EM as well as their social cognition and narrative discourse, which are theoretically and empirically linked to EM.
Recipient: Charlotte McCarthy, Department of Education

Title: Examining the Relational Foundations of Afterschool Programs in Burlington, Vermont

Advisor: Sean Hurley, PhD

Abstract

After school programs have evolved over the last few decades to become an essential care solution for school-age children with the rise in family employment rate and subsequent increased need for childcare. In some places, afterschool programs have even exceeded the standards of providing typical child supervision after the school day, and transcend to provide students with engaging, valuable learning opportunities.

Such is the case with Burlington School District (BSD), located in Vermont’s Chittenden County. Burlington after school programs aim to provide high-level care, through daily programs consisting of hot lunch provided to students, as well as hour-long classes and activities structured to be engaging and educational. Staff are extensively trained throughout the year to be knowledgeable about child social and emotional development, signs of child abuse or trauma, and cultural mindfulness. Staff are also trained to be able to perform CPR/First Aid, mandated reporting duties in connection with the Vermont Department of Children and Families, and use restorative practices in program activities and student conflicts.

For this proposed study, I plan to conduct research on how standards and regulations for afterschool programs in the Burlington Vermont School District (BSD) are designed and subsequently implemented into the district’s afterschool program. The goal of this research is to perform a comprehensive case study of the Burlington School District’s after school program and to answer my research question: how is the program’s structure is designed, and if the design is implemented with the intent to enhance students’ social and emotional experiences? In addition, this study will also aim to identify common reasons why children are enrolled in afterschool in Burlington, and examine if reasons for enrollment align with low socioeconomic status and/or families seeking means of child care that provide structure and stability for their children that are otherwise unavailable after the regular school day.