

Issue 6
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The New Jersey Families Study

How do families build skills in their young, pre-school children and help them get ready to learn?

Overview

Families are small schools, and parents are children's first teachers. Every child in America is being home schooled in the sense that children's expectations, aspirations, and early abilities are shaped at home. Their behaviors, learned skills and knowledge are forged in the crucible of parent-child interactions. Yet we know surprisingly little about the nature, frequency, or quality of these interactions.

In the New Jersey Families Study, we ask: *How do families build skills in their young, pre-school children and help them get ready to learn?* Our study features a highly innovative "video ethnography." We use direct observations of parent-child interactions as a way to deepen our understanding of the contextualized strategies families from a variety of backgrounds and in different social and economic circumstances use to build skills in their young children. Unobtrusive technologies in the form of video cameras placed strategically in up to four rooms in participants' homes (rooms where most interactions occur) and activated continuously throughout the day and evening for two weeks constitute the primary means of data collection.

Interactions that hold particular interest are those that are believed to be linked to cognitive and social-emotional development—the amount of reading and talking parents do with children, children's sleep routines, their diets and nutrition, their exposure to electronic screen time, structure versus chaos at home, and the way that stress outside the home affects parenting practices. Taking a holistic approach to parent-child interactions and filming families in their natural habitats over an extended period will not only help more children to become school-ready. This unique study will also help schools become more "children-ready" and lead to a better appreciation of the daily struggles facing many families.

Where We Are Today

We have completed video recording for 20 of the 21 families in the study. These families are typical of young families in Mercer County, NJ and highly diverse by social class, race and ethnicity, family structure, and place of local residence. We will have amassed roughly 500,000 discrete video clips, corresponding to an estimated 4,000 hours of in-home video, by the time the study is completed. We are now making plans to turn this unprecedentedly rich information into a data resource for a global research community.

The NJFS Team

This newsletter features members of the Video Production Support team in Princeton's Office of Information Technology. This team, led by David Hopkins, has been responsible for installing the video recording equipment in participants' homes. Team members not pictured include Sundiata Cowels and Dan Kearns.



David Hopkins is the Senior Manager of the OIT ISS Video Production Support Team. He has worked for Princeton University for over 20 years. His team produces video projects that range from single camera interviews to multi-camera live productions for major events. Some of the event speakers include Chief Justice Sotomayor, Senator Corey Booker, Dalai Llama, and Queen Noor of Jordan. David manages a 4K video and digital audio studio where professors are interviewed on international television and radio networks. He consults with various campus partners, like the Office of Population Research, on audio and video production equipment recommendations. David enjoys finding digital answers to analog questions.

Daniel Quiyu is a Video Production Specialist. He has a bachelor's degree in film and video production and has been working at Princeton University for the past four years. Daniel got involved with the project when the Office of Population Research reached out for crew to install the equipment in families' homes. His video experience has helped solve the challenge of installing multiple camera systems in various homes with minimal disruption of a family's everyday life.



Dan Elghossain is a member of the Video Production Support team. He uses his technological abilities and creative talent to deliver video marketing, live-streaming productions, and other video solutions to clients. Dan studies all forms of media and video technology and is a lifelong student in the school of artistic filmmaking.



Matthias Cassar is a writer, videographer and filmmaker. He studied communications at The College of New Jersey where he discovered his passion for creative writing. He is the middle child in a family of seven kids and loves spending time with family. He is a self-proclaimed expert on foreign films and an avid animal lover. His hobbies include Jiu-Jitsu, watercolor painting, and spending time with his cats Chadwick and Lenina.



Kayce West currently works as a Video Production Specialist. She has a background in video production and a degree from Penn State University. She was able to get involved in the project through David Hopkins and is excited to be a part of the team.



Contact Information

For more information about the project or to make a contribution, please contact:

Thomas J. Espenshade, Principal Investigator
Office of Population Research, 249 Wallace Hall, Princeton University | Princeton, NJ 08544
Tel. 609.258.5233 | tje@Princeton.EDU

Newsletter Edited By: Anna Weiss, Graduate Student, Department of Leadership, Policy, and Organizations, Peabody College of Education, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN