

## IT'S THE PREGNANCY & BABY EXPO AGAIN!

The Pregnancy and Babies Expo is an important event whereby the ECDU gives you as parents an opportunity to register your child/ren to take part in our fun and exciting research and also to find out more information regarding the studies we conduct at The University of Queensland. Enclosed are complimentary passes to the Expo, so bring along your friends and family and visit us at Stand No. J9 at the Brisbane Convention Centre on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> - Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June. SEE YOU THERE!!

To all those who have participated in our studies, we would like to sincerely thank you for your contribution to our unit. You have not only increased our knowledge about children's development, but also assisted our students in obtaining their degrees at both the postgraduate and undergraduate levels. This newsletter describes results of some of our studies that are running and also which have been completed.

## Can Infants Tell the Difference Between Men's and Women's Bodies?

When it comes to faces, infants learn rapidly. By the time they are 6 months old, babies have learned the differences between male and female faces.

Most infants of this age also prefer female faces, unless their day-to-day care is provided by a man, in which case they do not show a strong preference for women's faces.

In the ECDU we are currently conducting a study to find out, for the first time ever, when infants have learned to tell the difference between male and female *bodies*.



So far we have discovered that babies do not notice the differences between male and female bodies until at least 12 months of age. This is in line with other research we have done over the last few years in showing



that babies' knowledge about bodies, as opposed to faces, is relatively slow to develop.

In some ways, this is not surprising. It may not be until they are sitting up at 6-8 months, or even standing at around age 12 months, that infants get a good look at the human physique.

## ECDU Begins Large-Scale Study on Newborn Imitation

Your baby, right from birth, may be trying to communicate with you – long before he or she can smile and talk.



Through imitation games involving facial expressions, hand gestures and vocal sounds, your baby may be communicating with you and others in their social environment.

Unfortunately though, this is not known for sure; what appears to be imitation in newborns might just be reflexes or a response due to arousal and not necessarily a true sign of communication.

While some research has investigated this issue over the past 30 years, there is still not a definitive answer and much controversy still exists. Therefore, starting in 2009, Early Cognitive Development Unit researchers are undertaking a new 5-year Australian Research Council project to establish whether imitation in the newborn period exists, and to determine whether babies' imitative gestures are linked to later achievements in social responding and communication.

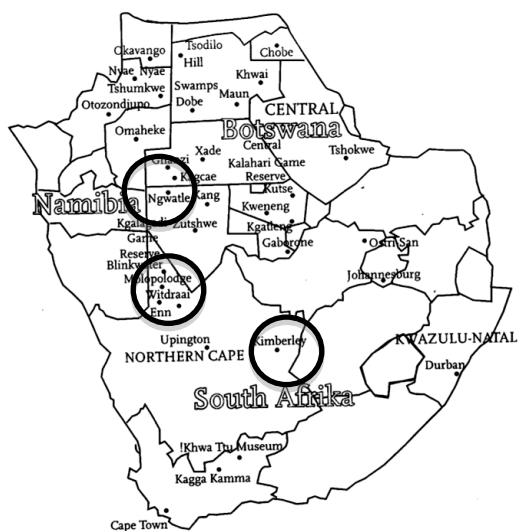
This project will generate new knowledge about the development of early social skills and provide the foundation for new programs to enhance social development in typical and at-risk infants.

## “Kids will copy what we do – No matter where they are from”

Children develop in environments saturated with objects that they must learn to use. One of the most efficient ways in which children do this is by copying.

Some of your children will have participated in research where we showed them how to get a box open using an object (like a red stick) when it would be easier for them to just use their hands. Sometimes we even threw in silly actions to see what would happen (like waving the stick around in the air before using it). We found that children copied all of the actions we used – even the silly ones. Why would children do this? Perhaps it is because, from a very early age, we are constantly showing them what to do and how to use objects. Why not copy us, after all, we are their experts and teachers.

But showing children what to do is not common in all cultures. So we decided to see whether children living in remote Bushman communities in southern Africa would show this same behaviour.



Parents in these communities do not teach their children directly and do not highlight the features of objects like we constantly do.

Surprisingly, the Bushman children responded exactly as did the Brisbane children.

They copied everything we showed them, even the silly actions.



So this tendency to copy adults' actions is not something to do with the way children are used to being taught.

We think it reflects our very human desire to be like those around us and to do things as others do. This is how culture gets transmitted from one generation to the next. Children are primed to do so, no matter where they are from.

So next time you are doing something in front of your children be sure to do it right because no matter how wrong it is they are likely to copy you.

## Foresight Studies

Parents typically think ahead and ensure that their children have what they need. But when do children begin to make their own plans?

We are currently conducting a series of studies examining how young children start to reason about, and prepare for, future events. In addition to simply asking children about this, we are giving them opportunities to demonstrate their foresight in action.

For example, in one study we show children a puzzle in one room and a few minutes later offer them a chance to secure its solution in another room. Early results suggest that dramatic changes occur over the preschool years.

***We currently have some studies in progress involving children aged from newborn to 5 years. If your child/ren or your friend's children fall into any of these ages, we would love to have you participate in our studies again. If you would like more details, please call us on (07) 3365 6323.***

**You can also register your interest on:**

<http://www2.psy.uq.edu.au/research/ecdu/>

