

Meet the ICL

We are a cohesive team of 12 undergraduate assistants, four graduate students, and five full-time staff. Our backgrounds are diverse, but working together at the University of Pittsburgh our goal is common.



Our focus...

The Infant Communication Lab studies the development of gesture and language in infants and toddlers. We do this primarily by observing babies as they play with familiar adults in their own homes. To babies, our research is just playtime!

Your Team Leaders



(left to right, back to front) Jana Rea, Meg Parladé, Laura Ayer, Jonni Johnson, Lindsay Nickel, Jana Iverson, Nina Leezenbaum



In the Spotlight...

- One of our ongoing projects focuses on the development of communication in infants who have an older sibling with autism. For this project, we ask parents to fill out the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (CDI) at each visit between 8 to 36 months. Using these checklists, parents help us keep track of the phrases understood, words understood, words produced, and gestures produced by their babies.
- A related project focuses on how babies communicate during our visits. We view our videos to look at the gestures, vocalizations, and words produced by babies, whether gestures are combined with words and/or vocalizations, at what ages, and how often.
- In a different area of focus, we use the Early Social Communication Scales (ESCS) to elicit social interaction between our staff and the babies. Here, we enjoy playing with the babies one-on-one to track the development of their social communication skills. Using toys such as puppets, cars, and wind-ups, we watch for babies' attempts to share, request, and draw attention to our toys.



- During one segment of our visits, we give babies a set of rattles and toy keys and watch them play. This gives us an opportunity to look for rhythmic limb movements. These are movements that are repeated at least three times and follow a regular beat. Our coders then watch videos from each visit closely to keep track of arm swinging and banging, leg kicking, and torso bouncing.

These are just a few of the many projects going on at the ICL, so stay tuned for more updates!

Behind the Scenes...

When we're not at play with the babies we're at work at the lab. This is a look into our coding room, where countless hours are spent identifying and coding the movements, gestures, and vocalizations of the babies.

Calendar of Events:

ICL Members will present research findings at:

- Society for Research in Child Development (Denver, CO)
April 2-4
- International Meeting for Autism Research (Chicago, IL)
May 7-9

AUTISM SPEAKS Walk Now For Autism:

- Laurel Highlands, PA-Sunday, May 17
- Wheeling, WV- Saturday, May 30
- Blair County, PA- Saturday, June 6
- Pittsburgh, PA- Saturday, June 13

Our Newest Addition to the Lab!

We'd like to congratulate Erin Koterba, a former team leader and current graduate student, who gave birth to her daughter Sophie on December 25, 2008. Welcome Sophie!

**Interested in Participating? Know someone who is?**

Do you have a child with autism? Does s/he have a younger sibling? Would you like to participate in our current study? If you or anyone you know would like more information about our research, please contact us!

Lindsay Nickel, *Project Coordinator*: 412-624-4517
Dr. Jana Iverson, *Director of Research*: 412-624-6160
icl@pitt.edu

Special thanks ...

Everyone at the ICL would like to extend our deepest thanks to the families who regularly welcome us into their homes. Without your support and enthusiastic participation, our research would not be possible.

Additional Information:

<http://www.pitt.edu/~icl/>
<http://www.pitt.edu/~peas/>

Selected Publications and Conference Presentations by ICL Members and Collaborators

Publications

Iverson, J.M. & Wozniak, R.H. (2007). Variation in vocal-motor development in infant siblings of children with autism. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37, 158-170.

Zwaigenbaum, L., Thurm, A., Stone, W., Baranek, G., Bryson, S., Iverson, J.M., Kau, A., Klin, A., Landa, R., Lord, C., Rogers, S., & Sigman, M. (2007). Studying the emergence of Autism Spectrum Disorders in high-risk infants: Methodological and practical issues. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 37, 466-480.

Zwaigenbaum, L., Bryson, S., Lord, C., Rogers, S., Carter, A., Chawarska, K., Dawson, G., Fein, D., Iverson, J., Landa, R., Stone, W., & Yirmiya, N. (in press). Clinical assessment and management of toddlers with suspected ASD: Insights from studies of high-risk infants. *Pediatrics*.

Conference Presentations

Iverson, J.M. & Wozniak, R.H. (2007, May). "Communicative and Language Development in Infant Siblings of Children with Autism." *Poster presented at the International Meeting for Autism Research, Seattle, WA.*

Koterba, E.A., Paradé, M.V., & Iverson, J.M. (2008, March). "Early Joint Attention and Relations to Preschool Socioemotional Competence in Infant Siblings of Children with Autism." *Poster presented at the 16th International Conference on Infant Studies, Vancouver, BC, Canada.*

Iverson, J.M., Poulos-Hopkins, S., Winder, B., & Wozniak, R.H. (2008, May). "Gestures and Words in the Early Communication of Infant Siblings of Children with Autism." *Poster presented at the International Meeting for Autism Research, London, UK.*

Zwaigenbaum, L., Stone, W., Dobkins, K., Urbano, R., Lambert, W., Bryson, S., Chawarska, K., Constantino, J., Dawson, G., Fein, D., Iverson, J.M., Klin, A., Landa, R., Ozonoff, S., Rogers, S., & Sigman, M. (2008, May). "Prospective Evaluation of Head Growth in Infants at Increased Risk of Autism." *Paper presented at the International Meeting for Autism Research, London, UK.*