



MERRILL-
PALMER
QUARTERLY

Journal of
Developmental Psychology

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50th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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Commentaries in Honor of the 50th
Anniversary of *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*:
An Introduction to the July 2004 and
October 2004 Issues

Gary W. Ladd, *Arizona State University*

This occasion in the journal's history provides a vantage point from which to appraise the scientific endeavors that have generated the contents of the *Quarterly* and its sister publications over the last half-century. To capitalize on this opportunity, two issues of this year's *Quarterly* (i.e., July and October 2004) contain commentaries written by senior investigators whose research programs and accomplishments span many years within this epoch. Included in the content of these commentaries are historical analyses of pivotal accomplishments within various subdisciplines, appraisals of the contemporary status of specific areas of investigation, and visions of the future of scientific inquiry in the human developmental sciences.

Children's Friendships: Shifts Over a Half-Century in Perspectives on Their Development and Their Effects

Thomas J. Berndt, *Purdue University*

Provocative ideas about the nature, development, and effects of children's friendships were included in the lectures of Harry Stack Sullivan, which were edited and published in the 1950s. Sullivan emphasized the love, intimacy, and collaboration found in the close friendships that children form around 8 to 10 years of age. Later research has shown that close friendships have both a positive dimension, with features such as intimacy, and a negative dimension, with features such as rivalry. However, close friendships do not emerge suddenly at 8 to 10 years of age. Rather, the closeness of children's friendships increases gradually during middle childhood and adolescence. Recent studies suggest that having close, high-quality friendships increases children's success in the peer social world. Having high-quality friendships could magnify the positive or negative influence of friends with positive or negative characteristics, but this hypothesis needs to be evaluated more thoroughly in the future.

Understanding Children's Family Worlds: Family Transitions and Children's Outcome

Judy Dunn, *Social Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry*
Centre, Institute of Psychiatry

Increasing numbers of children experience parental separation and formation of stepfamilies. Research into the impact of these family transitions on children's adjustment by family sociologists and psychologists has greatly increased; changes in research perspectives over the last two decades are discussed, including a focus on individual differences in children's responses and the risk and protective factors implicated, on parent-child relationships as mediators of adjustment, on the significance of within-family differences and of biological relatedness (not solely family type), and on intergenerational patterns of associations. The importance of taking account of children's perspectives on family change, and of including investigation of children's relationships and experiences beyond the immediate household, to clarify the significance of children's relations with their nonresident parents and grandparents is increasingly recognized. Controversial issues are noted, and the lessons learned for research design, if we are to understand better the implications of these family changes, which are of major social and developmental significance, are summarized.

Emotion-Related Regulation: An Emerging Construct

Nancy Eisenberg, Claire Champion, and Yue Ma, *Arizona
State University*

Emotion-related regulation is a topic of considerable current interest; however, this was not always true. We briefly discuss the history of interest in the topic and then the current state of the field, including definitions of the construct. In addition, we summarize some of the important issues for future attention, including definitional issues, topics that merit attention, and methodological and design issues. This field of inquiry is flourishing, but it is one that is rapidly expanding and improving in the quality of the research.

The Next 50 Years: Considering Gender as a Context for Understanding Young Children's Peer Relationships

Richard A. Fabes, Carol Lynn Martin, and Laura D. Hanish,
Arizona State University

The study of children's peer relationships has been well represented within the pages of *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*. Particularly over the last decade, the pace of publishing studies on peer relationships has increased. Despite this upswing in interest in peer relationships, significant gaps remain. In this article, we focus on a particularly overlooked and significant area of peer relationships, namely, the role of sex-segregated peer interactions and how these relate to development in early childhood. We review why this topic is important for researchers to consider and highlight promising directions for research that we hope will appear in future volumes of *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*.

Theory-of-Mind Development: Retrospect and Prospect

John H. Flavell, *Stanford University*

This review begins with a brief history from Piagetian perspective-taking development, through metacognitive development, and into the past and present field of theory-of-mind development. This field has included research on what infants and children know about a variety of mental states, on possible causes and consequences of mentalistic knowledge, and on similarities and differences in this knowledge across individuals, cultures, and primate species. The article concludes with some speculations about the future of the field.

The Limitations of Concepts in Developmental Psychology

Jerome Kagan, *Harvard University*

Many concepts in developmental psychology are inferred or confirmed from very particular experimental or naturalistic observations but investigators often generalize their validity to a broad domain of situations. This permissiveness is affecting progress. This paper provides examples of this error and criticizes the tendency to award essences to predicates representing psychological processes.

Conscience in Childhood: Past, Present, and Future

Grazyna Kochanska and Nazan Aksan, *University of Iowa*

We ask three questions: What are the components of young children's conscience? How are they organized? How does early conscience develop? We discuss the changing perspectives on each of those questions. We describe the shift from a focus on a single component of conscience (moral emotions, conduct, cognition) to a growing emphasis on their integration; from a view of conscience as loosely organized to a view of a coherent system of causally related components; from a focus on older children and adolescents to young toddlers and preschoolers; and from a top-down view of parental discipline immediately following child misbehavior to a focus on mutual processes between the parent and the child that occur in multiple socialization contexts and are shaped by the history of the parent-child relationship and the child's individuality. We conclude by outlining new directions for research on early conscience.

Contextual Factors in Risk and Prevention Research

John E. Lochman, *University of Alabama*

This paper reviews how cascading levels of contextual influences, starting with family factors and extending to neighborhood and school factors, can affect children's behavioral and emotional development. The ability of contextual factors to trigger or to attenuate children's underlying temperament and biological risk factors is emphasized. Recognition of the powerful effects of an array of contextual factors on children's development has clear implications for preventive interventions as well. Intervention research can explore the effects of multicomponent interventions directed at children's family and peer contextual influences, can examine how contextual factors predict children's responsiveness to interventions, and can examine how contextual factors have effects on how, and how well, interventions are delivered in the real worlds of schools and community agencies.

Integrating Developmental Scholarship and Society: From Dissemination and Accountability to Evidence-Based Programming and Policies

Robert B. McCall, Christina J. Groark, and Robert P. Nelkin,
University of Pittsburgh

Increasingly, practitioners and policy makers are demanding research evidence as a basis for funding programs and policies. The application of research to society has undergone several transitions, from a scholarly emphasis on the experimental method to an attempt to disseminate research and contribute to social policy. Policy makers have emphasized accountability and now evidence-based practices. Although developmental scholars should be pleased that policy makers want evidence, scholars need to examine the assumptions of evidence-based programming and continue to refine how evidence should be used to decide which services to fund. In addition, we propose a more collaborative strategy to promote evidence-based policies in general.

Genetics and Developmental Psychology

Robert Plomin, *Institute of Psychiatry*

One of the major changes in developmental psychology during the past 50 years has been the acceptance of the important role of nature (genetics) as well as nurture (environment). Past research consisting of twin and adoption studies has shown that genetic influence is substantial for most domains of developmental psychology. Present research has moved beyond documenting the importance of genetics to investigate the mechanisms by which genetic influences affect behavioral development. The future of genetic research in developmental psychology lies in DNA: Identifying the specific genes responsible for the widespread influence of genetics and using these genes to investigate developmental pathways between genes and behavior.

Learning About Learning

Robert S. Siegler, *Carnegie Mellon University*

The field of children's learning was thriving when the *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* was launched; the field later went into eclipse and now is in the midst of a resurgence. This commentary examines reasons for these trends, and describes the emerging field of children's learning. In particular, the new field is seen as differing from the old in its emphases on variability, choice, and change as central aspects of children's functioning and in its reliance on high-density sampling of learning, of the type provided by microgenetic methods. Examples of learning in content areas ranging from motor development to problem solving to attention, and with age groups ranging from infants to adults, are used to illustrate the insights that this new field is yielding.

Why We Need to Explore Development in Its Cultural Context

Robert J. Sternberg and Elena L. Grigorenko, *Yale University*

Cultural context should be taken into account in our research so that we characterize how people behave in their everyday lives, not just a sterile laboratory environment. Much developmental research treats children as though they grow in a sociocultural vacuum. Such research misses important points about development. The article illustrates the importance of cultural context by giving examples from implicit-theoretical and explicit-theoretical lines of research.

Early Child Care: The Known and the Unknown

Deborah Lowe Vandell, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

Child care research during the last 20 years has made considerable progress in addressing questions about (a) the effects of child care quality, (b) the effects of amount and timing of early child care, and (c) the effects of different types of care such as centers, child care homes, and relative care. This commentary summarizes the converging research evidence with respect to each of these questions and then outlines some future directions for child care research.