

Windows into the Infant Mind



Sandra Waxman

Lewis W. Menk Professor, Psychology Faculty Fellow, Institute for Policy Research Founder & Director, The Project on Child Development

CURRENT RESEARCH

How infants' surprisingly early capacities are shaped by experience

There is no greater wonder than watching a baby discover the world — from first steps to first words, infants learn at an astonishing rate. For more than 20 years, Dr. Sandra Waxman has directed Northwestern's Project on Child Development, a lab dedicated to understanding how infants acquire language and cognitive capacities. Adopting a unique approach, Dr. Waxman and her team examine how language and cognition unfold from the first months of life and across the world's communities. Her work sheds light on the origin and unfolding of two "quintessentially human" capacities — language and conceptual organization. "We want to know what 'kernels' of knowledge babies are born with, and how these kernels are shaped by their early experience," she says.

By focusing on infants from birth to three years, an extraordinarily dynamic and formative period, Dr. Waxman hopes to uncover how we begin our life-long journey of learning, thinking, and communicating with others. Dr. Waxman emphasizes that language is at the center of this journey. "Language is our most powerful cultural and cognitive tool," she says. "It permits us to share our thoughts and beliefs with others in a fashion unparalleled in the animal kingdom. Language is a channel for future learning."

In another line of research, Dr. Waxman asks how young children across the world learn about the natural world, asking "What does it mean to be alive?" "What is the relation between humans and the rest of the biological world?"

She hopes that state-of-the-art research in developmental science will enable us to meet the very real challenge of designing more effective educational and policy interventions, and to launch them earlier in children's...

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AFFILIATION

 Northwestern University

EDUCATION

- Ph.D., 1985 , University of Pennsylvania

AWARDS

- Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences
- Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science
- Guggenheim Fellow
- Ann L. Brown Award for Excellence in Developmental Research, Association for Psychological Science
- James McKeen Cattell Award, American Psychological Society

RESEARCH AREAS

Humanities, Psychology, Neurological / Cognitive, Global Policy

FUNDING REQUEST

Your contributions will support the continued research of Dr. Sandra Waxman, as she discovers how language and cognition unfold in the first months of life, across the world's communities. Donations will support the \$250K required annually to enroll families of infants and young children from diverse backgrounds in the United States and abroad to study early development. It will also support training of a new generation of researchers who are prepared to address pressing parental, educational, and policy concerns, and to shed light on how early development shapes life outcomes.