

## SEF Final Report

Having the opportunity to participate in the Student Engagement Fund program was an extremely rewarding and eye-opening experience and is something that I will cherish forever. As a current major in Human Development and Family Sciences with an emphasis in Child Development, I am passionate about working with children. My mentor was previously one of my professors. When she had mentioned the project, I was so excited to begin. Being involved in this research project has helped me gain more confidence in myself, have a more positive outlook on how to redirect plans when they change, and overall, just to be patient and trust the learning process. Before this summer, I had absolutely no idea how research even worked, however, Dr. Walter gave me the opportunity to observe and participate in the process step by step and allowed me to ask any questions I had along the way. The project that Dr. Walter and I have been working on can be described as examining how parental cell phone use/technofence can affect the quality of parent-child interactions and the child's home language environment. The study consists of two parts including: observing parent-child play sessions and measuring technofence and the child's home language environment by using a phone app and a recording device that tracks the number of words spoken to a child at home. Throughout this entire process, I have observed, read, and learned more than I could have ever imagined.

In the beginning of this summer research project, I had no research experience and was nervous that I was going to let my mentor down. However, I was completely wrong. I began the project by assisting my mentor with the IRB application for the study, and during this time I was able to ask all the questions I had about the study and how it would be conducted. As part of the IRB application, I assisted my mentor in creating a recruitment flyer to recruit our participants. While waiting for IRB approval, I continued to learn about the project by reading literature

reviews of parent-child interactions and child language development. One of my key roles on this study was learning to code parent-child interactions using the *Parenting Interactions with Child: Checklist of Observation Linked to Outcomes (PICCOLO)* (Roggman, Cook, Innocenti, Norman, & Christiansen, 2008) coding measure. This coding measure includes four different components: affection, responsiveness, encouragement, and teaching. These components help identify different skills that parents can demonstrate to support their child's development. Each of the four main components are then broken down into seven or eight different subcomponents which allows the researcher to rate the quality of the parent-child interaction. After the rating process is done, it is much simpler to see which components that parent is doing well and which ones they may need some work on. Learning this had me stressed out, however, in the end I realized how capable I was and how much I enjoyed this study. While still waiting for IRB approval, I selected specific research materials to use in the study. These materials included a video camera, tripod, books for the parent-child interaction task, and board boards that participants will receive for compensation.

One of my major takeaways from this experience is that like the majority of things in life, research does not go as smoothly as we plan it to. One of my original objectives for this project was to assist my mentor with data collection and data management, however the IRB process took much longer than we had anticipated so we could not begin data collection during this time period. Thankfully, my mentor did not let this setback have too much of an effect on us. Instead, we completed literature reviews of study variables and became reliable in observational coding of parent-child play sessions using the PICCOLO. To become reliable with my mentor, we had a specific process. This process consisted of us watching one, five- or ten-minute video clips of parent-child interactions. After watching the video, would we score them and compare our

results. Eventually, we became reliable on three in a row, so we are now able to reliably use this measure in the study. I felt very proud and confident in myself when I was able to become a reliable coder with my mentor.

This experience has helped me grow tremendously as a student and as a person. During this time, I was happy to figure out that I am exactly where I want to be when it comes to my major and that I am in an environment that I truly enjoy and am passionate about. I am also really happy that even though I have had Dr. Walter as a professor for three different classes, I was able to form a strong relationship with her. During this opportunity I was able to pick up many different reasons on how this opportunity will help me. The first reason being that patience is key, which I learned through having to wait on IRB approval. I found myself very frustrated with this process, however, Dr. Walter always redirected our meetings to a different task that would have meaning to our project in a different light. Something else I learned was that my college courses are SO important. Although it should be a given, I was able to pick up on many theories and terminology that were familiar to me because I remembered previously learning about them. I believe I am walking away after this summer a much better learner and researcher.

Overall, my experience being of a part of SEF was once in a lifetime. I am not really sure when I would get another opportunity like this, so I am so thankful and so glad I decided to take it. accepting this offer from Dr. Walter, I was quick to doubt myself when it came to coding data and analyzing. However, I am much more confident in my abilities now, and I cannot wait to continue working on this project in the fall. This experience has made me excited to learn more about my field and continue research. I am so grateful that I was given this opportunity by Dr. Walter through the NIU Student Engagement Fund.