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MPSI IS PART OF THE DIVISION OF RESEARCH AT WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY, DETROIT, MI

FALL 2015

\$2.5 Million to Improve Interactions between Parents, Teachers and Toddlers

Researchers from Wayne State University, Michigan State University and the University of Michigan will receive \$2.5 million over five years in a cooperative agreement with the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), a division

of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Ann Stacks, Ph.D., director of the Infant Mental Health program at MPSI, is the principal investigator.

The team created professional development trainings for teachers and an intervention for parents designed to improve parent and teacher mindfulness and reflective functioning. The project will evaluate this approach to see if strengthening those skills leads to more responsive interactions be-

“ This is a great opportunity to meet other researchers and learn from them.”
– Dr. Ann Stacks



tween teachers, parents and children in Early Head Start programs.

The Michigan site is one of four funded by ACF across the country, designed to work cooperatively and share information about the implementation and scalability of each approach. Unlike a grant, a cooperative agreement assumes substantial ongoing programmatic involvement between funder and recipient. “This is a great opportunity to meet other researchers and learn from

them,” Dr. Stacks said. “All the projects are different. Ours is the only mindfulness group intervention.” The URC research team is part of a larger group of faculty from five universities, known as the Michigan Infant-Toddler Research

Exchange, which aims to foster cross-university research that can inform best-practices in early intervention and early childhood education.

The project is titled *Recognizing, Reflecting, and Responding to Infant/Toddler Cues: An Integrated Parent-Teacher Intervention to Support Social Emotional Development through Caregiver Mindfulness and Sensitivity*. Phase I will pilot a professional development cur-

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A Different Way to Learn

“Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn.”

– Benjamin Franklin

If Ben Franklin taught Psych 2400 at Wayne State University, the class would look a lot like . . . this. At twice weekly classroom sessions, students engage with the material and discussion flows freely. But it’s the student experiences outside the classroom that really drive the curriculum. Each student spends at least 15 hours during the semester at one of seven available community sites. This isn’t watch and learn. Students must “do something” at the site, from reading to toddlers to interviewing low income older adults about their lives. Service learning is truly a different – and for many a better – way to learn.

“I really like it,” said Chanel Matti, who works with infants at Bright Horizons child

care center in Detroit. “I’ve been around babies in my family, so I’m comfortable. They don’t scare me. But now I’m learning about their development, connecting it to class. It’s really good.” Most of the 20 or so undergrads in the class agree: Service learning has been a unique and stimulating approach to education.

Psychology 2400 is a survey of development from conception to end of life with focus on changes at each phase of the lifespan. Course materials emphasize learning outcomes that include an enhanced “sense of initiative, responsibility, reliability, place within the community, and openness

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Hannah Francisco helps care for toddlers at an early childhood service learning site.

Service Learning from cover

to new people and ideas.” This is the first time Hilary Ratner, Ph.D., has offered the new course, created in partnership with Beverly Weathington, LMSW, director of the MPSI Healthy Urban Families program. Dr. Ratner is a professor at MPSI with research interests in the social foundations of cognitive development, especially memory and learning. “This isn’t strictly volunteering, because it is tied to learning,” Dr. Ratner explained. “It isn’t an internship because it doesn’t prepare you for a particular profession. Service learning connects a project to a course to make learning deeper and more meaningful.” What happens outside the classroom reinforces learning in the classroom.

Ben was on to something.

2 + 2 = Brighter Future

At Wayne State’s Harris Literacy program, offered with Focus: HOPE, service learning student Corrie Sartain hands out homework to her math literacy students. A few groan, but most take the extra work in stride. Like Corrie, they are here to learn. The group represents a wide age range from recent high school graduates to seasoned workers looking for a better job. In about a week, they take a proficiency test to see if they qualify for classes in skilled trades. “I see how important this is,” Corrie said as she tutored students one-on-one to help them master the concepts.

“The most important lesson I learned here is not to judge a book by its cover,” she said. “Everyone has a unique story. I realize how fortunate I am to have the opportunities I’ve had.” She teaches basic math skills and is humbled by how hard some students work to understand simple addition. “I would volunteer here even after the class is over. To be able to give back is something I’ve never done before.”

Two types of student journaling integrate the on-site experiences with the readings and lectures: reflection and observation. Reflection prompts vary each week on topics like feelings, expectations, and motivation. Observations, on the other hand, always address course content. What did the people I was working with do? What happened? How does this fit with what I’ve learned? Several students praised Dr. Ratner for the written

Professor Ratner (lt) integrates classroom lectures with on-site learning through discussions and student-written journals.



feedback she provides on all the writing. “She really reads it,” Angelica Lemus said. “Not every professor does.”

Learning to Earning

Service learning altered the trajectory of junior Hannah Francisco’s career plans. As a clinical psychology major she expected to use art therapy and rehabilitation to help high-risk teenagers. A few weeks at the Early Childhood Center at MPSI expanded her interest to young children. “I had no expectation for the class,” Hannah said. “I figured I’d be a helping hand, teaching kids, guiding kids. I never thought it would make me rethink my career.”

Hannah’s academic advisor recommended the class to teach her about different age groups. “It changed everything,” she said. Her weekly journal entries have also aligned well with the classwork on early child development. “We learned about types of attachment. Then I saw them in action as the children reacted to their parents saying good-bye, and how the children socialized with other children.” From what she learned in class, Hannah was able to soothe a four-year-old on the playground who missed her mother. “I got her to smile and play with me,” Hannah said, smiling herself. “It was a happy moment.”

Caring for Toddlers

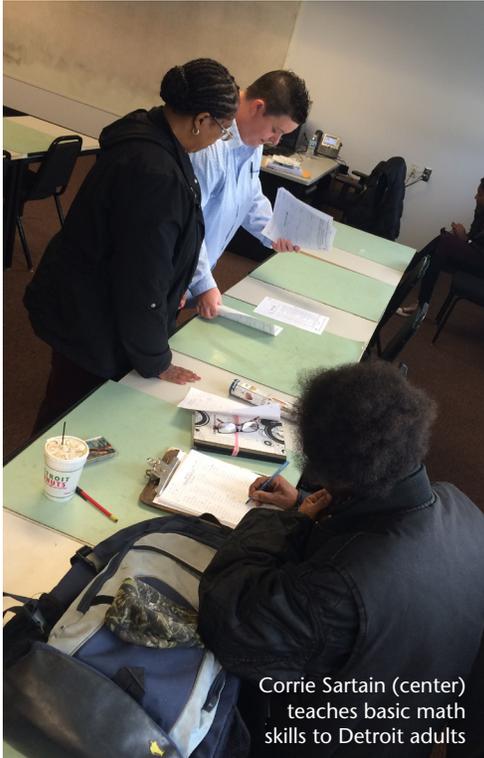
Hannah impressed her site supervisor so much that she was offered a part-

time job as a before- and after-care assistant, in addition to her service learning hours. A sleepy three-year-old shuffles in at 8 am sucking her thumb and clutching her blanket. Hannah kneels to greet her and asks if she is hungry. The girl smiles through her thumb. “There is no negative in service learning,” Hannah said. “You can’t go down from it. It always builds up what you do in a good way. You learn something in the world and you help out the community.”

Corrie’s future plans are also solidifying as a result of service learning. She’s an older student, laid off from the auto industry in 2008 and completing classes in heating and cooling before realizing it wasn’t for her. Today she is a psychology major interested in working with the elderly, especially Alzheimer’s patients. “I’m applying much of what I learn in class to the people in my family,” Corrie said. “My 3-year-old nephew is hitting all these developmental milestones. And my grandmother is in her 80s, struggling with memory problems.”

Corrie and Hannah agree that hands-on learning is deep learning. “I’m pleased with





Corrie Sartain (center) teaches basic math skills to Detroit adults

how well the class has done overall,” Dr. Ratner said. “The students are invested in the learning. They are making connections between theory and practice, inferences from the material to their activity at the sites.”

A love of learning is palpable. During the semester, the students asked if the final exam could be scheduled earlier which would require condensing a few of the lectures. Dr. Ratner complied. As the class progressed, though, the students felt they needed more class time. “So Dr. Ratner expanded it back out,” Hannah said. “It was weird really. What students ask for more class? But we really want to learn this. It matters.”

Ben Franklin couldn’t have said it – or done it – better.

If you or your organization would like more information about service learning, contact **Dr. Ratner** at hilary.ratner@wayne.edu



Detroit Lullaby Project Singing to Soothe

New research was launched this summer to test whether singing can decrease stress responses in parents and infants. Twenty pairs of new parents, at risk of chronic stress from situations like poverty and community violence, will sing to their 6 to 9-month-old infant in a MPSI laboratory. Their heart rate, breathing and perspiration will be measured. At a biological level, chronic stress over time takes a heavy toll and can impair physical, psychological and social functioning, including parenting.

The research team hypothesizes that signs of arousal indicating stress will decrease in both infant and parent during active singing. If so, a “Singing to Soothe” intervention could become a low-cost, easy-to-teach public health intervention.

MPSI’s Carolyn Dayton, Ph.D., and Valerie Simon, Ph.D., are assisting principal investigator Wendy Matthews, Ph.D., who is an assistant professor of music education at Wayne State. Dr. Dayton is co-PI and Dr. Simon the co-investigator. “We know music has calming effects on individuals from infancy through older adulthood. It’s also free,” Dr. Dayton said. “We think music may help parents, especially those under stress, feel calmer and be better able to bond with their babies.” The project won a one-year, \$49,000 Research Enhancement Award in Arts and Humanities from Wayne’s Division of Research. The awards provide seed money to outstanding research protocols within the university to propel them toward external funding.

The project was inspired by Detroit’s rich music tradition and Dr. Dayton’s recent prenatal study of parents-to-be. Her Baby on Board protocol recruited 50 expectant couples living under environmental stresses. They completed questionnaires then were asked to comfort a crying doll while their heart rate and perspiration was measured to detect physiologic arousal. Dr. Dayton’s team

wanted to better understand the fathers’ involvement in parenting, especially in low-income urban men.

An ancillary to the Baby on Board study was a collaborative study between Drs. Dayton and Matthews, and doctoral student Laurel Hicks, examining the intergenerational use of music. Parents described the use of

music in their childhoods, the use of music in their current lives, and their plans to use music with their babies after birth. A majority of couples said they would expose their infants to music, but planned to passively play music on phones and electronic devices rather than

actively sing. Research has found that *active* music making between parent and child can improve children’s cognitive, communication and motor skills. Drs. Matthews, Simon and Dayton wondered if singing might offer a low-cost way to strengthen attachment between infants, mothers and fathers.

The Lullaby Project hopes to recruit participants from a similar group of at-risk parents. “Results from the earlier study are mainly positive in that parents view music as central to their childhoods and want to pass this positive legacy on to their children,” Dr. Dayton said. “The passive way they plan to do this, however, is less than ideal.” For Lullaby, parents sing two songs to their infant, one they choose and a standardized song (*Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*). Physiological arousal is recorded for both parent and infant. Video and audiotapes are analyzed for parent/infant interactions, and musical attributes (e.g., pitch, tempo, text). Researchers expect that the act of singing will physically calm the infant and, in turn, calm the parent. “If we can show parents that active singing is really good for their own mental health and for their babies,” Dr. Dayton said, “we may have the makings of a low-cost and effective early intervention.”

“We know music has calming effects on individuals from infancy through older adulthood. It’s also free.”

– Dr. Dayton



WE'VE GOT AN APP FOR THAT – Need ideas for parenting activities shown to improve a young child's readiness for school? What if you could instantly access high quality, evidence-based information about parenting whenever and wherever you need it? **Dr. Kathleen "Lucy" McGoron**, a post-doctoral fellow in MPSI's Parent Health Lab, is working to make that happen.



Dr. McGoron is developing a mobile app for parents that generates daily activities to improve a child's school readiness.

Dr. McGoron received \$35,000 from the Community Telecommunications Foundation to develop a mobile web application that brings simple, yet proven, ideas to parents, especially low-income parents in high-need due to stresses in the environment or having children who display challenging behaviors. The app will deliver five activities a day shown to improve school readiness in young children: reading, playing together, sharing meals, expressing affection, and optimal sleep. Parents in low-income families often have reduced time for parenting tasks due to school and work schedules. Activities in the app are designed to be low-cost, convenient, and can often be accomplished in small segments of time.



FIRST PRIZE WINNER – Hasti Raveau, a graduate fellow in MPSI's training program, took first place in the Clinical Division of WSU's

Psychology Department Graduate Poster Day. Hasti studied the relationship between fathers and mothers and the social support provided to fathers for her poster, *Moderators and mediators of neighborhood violence and paternal depression*. The poster displayed research conducted with three co-authors and Hasti's MPSI mentor, Dr. Erika Bocknek. She also presented her research at the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies in New Orleans.



LEADERSHIP EXPANSION – MPSI named **Hilary Ratner, Ph.D.**, training director and **Steve Ondersma, Ph.D.**, deputy director this academic year, as Deputy Director John Hannigan, Ph.D., stepped down after a five-year term.



Training had been part of the deputy director duties under Dr. Hannigan; the rapid growth of the institute now supports training as a separate position. As Dr. Lichtenberg said, "It takes two people to replace John." Dr. Hannigan continues at MPSI as senior faculty, researching alcohol use and pregnancy, especially Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

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NEW DOCTOR – **Amy Loree**, a MPSI graduate fellow, successfully defended her dissertation this summer. Dr. Loree's research, *Toward Enhancing Treatment for Pregnant Smokers*, examined ways to lay the groundwork for complementary and alternative medical approaches. She accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at Yale University this fall and will work with the VA Connecticut Healthcare System.



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riculum for teachers adapted from the Mom Power program developed by U-M researchers. Creators Maria Muzik, M.D., MSc., assistant professor of psychiatry and Katherine Rosenblum, associate professor of psychiatry, are co-PI and co-investigator on the ACF project. Parents will also receive Mom Power training.

The goal of Mom Power is to help caregivers better understand children's attachment needs through video-based feedback and hands-on activities that reduce stress and promote sensitivity and responsiveness. Current parent and teacher trainings often focus on information about child development and age-appropriate strategies, without addressing the changes in attitudes and skills

needed to support caregiver-child interactions.

"Our project is different," Dr. Stacks said. "We want to induce and sustain lasting change. Sensitivity in parenting and teaching young children is a key component of later social and emotional competence and school readiness. This skill is especially important when infants and young children are at-risk for delays. We will test whether our approach can promote that sensitivity." Phase II will combine parents and teachers as caregiving partners to support each child's social-emotional development.

The project team includes co-PI Claire Vallotton, Ph.D., associate professor, and co-investigator Holly Brophy-Herb, Ph.D., professor of child development in MSU's Department of Human Development and

Family Studies. "The partnership is so equally divided that any one of us could have been the PI," Dr. Stacks said. "We already have excellent working relationships and the project taps into each of our respective strengths."

Funder ACF promotes the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals and communities with partnerships, funding, guidance, training and technical assistance. "It's exciting to be part of ACF's drive to infuse research into practice, using research to determine best practices for students and teachers," Dr. Stacks said. "The impact our work could have on Early Head Start programs and children's futures is gratifying."



Documenting an Art-filled Life

By William Colburn, Director, The Freer House

The Freer House undertook an exciting project this year to document a rare and remarkable collection of personal objects that once belonged to Charles Lang Freer (1854-1919). The more than 100 objects, ranging from furniture to textiles, tableware to opera glasses, now reside in the personal collection of Freer House scholar and board member, Dr. Thomas W. Brunk.

In the 1990's, Dr. Brunk was researching the genealogy of Freer's live-in caretaker and curator, Joseph Stephens Warring. He learned that Warring's surviving child, Grace, was in her 90's and living near his own home in Indian Village. Grace was born and raised in the Freer House. Her family worked for Freer during nearly all the 27 years he resided on E. Ferry Avenue in Detroit.

Freer willed his art collection to the Smithsonian Institution for the Freer Gallery of Art. He also bequeathed many art objects not destined for the Smithsonian to various universities and museums, and gave some art, as well as personal objects, to family and friends. As Freer was single and childless, the Warrings became a favored recipient.

The existence of these rare objects

remained largely unknown outside the Warring family until Dr. Brunk's visit to Grace. She possessed many of the Freer objects given to her family and was so impressed with Dr. Brunk's scholarship on Freer, she willed most of these objects to him. Since her death in 1995, Dr. Brunk has been the

been inventoried, examined, measured, and photographed from multiple angles. Details about the objects' origins and provenance have been recorded based on Dr. Brunk's recollections from Grace, his own knowledge, and team research. The result is a remarkable and comprehensive database.

The objects reflect Freer's exceptional taste and aesthetics. Origins range from American custom made furniture to Asian and Islamic ceramics and art. Especially notable is Freer's ivory and gold porcelain dinnerware, described in Aline Saarinen's 1958 book, *The Proud Possessors*: "His (Freer's) finicky scrutiny missed no detail, from the flat silver and the ivory dishes with gold edges on his table . . ." Another rare piece is a yellow ceramic vase decorated with blue peacocks that Mary Chase Perry,

founder of Pewabic Pottery, created for Freer to celebrate his 1904 acquisition of James McNeill Whistler's famous Peacock Room.

These singular pieces also provide a priceless view into Freer's personal and domestic life and his Ferry Avenue home.

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owner and custodian of Freer's surviving belongings. Until this project began, these items had never been inventoried, photographed or documented, and rarely seen outside of private viewings.

After four months of hard work by Dr. Brunk and an extraordinary team of volunteers and professionals, each item has now

Photo at top: Freer's 1910 Crane's stationery with logo, Rookwood inkwell with floral motif, and writing stylus

Bottom photo: Buddy Englehart, Dr. Brunk and Freer assistant Meg Urisko meticulously examine and record Freer's silverware from Brunk's collection



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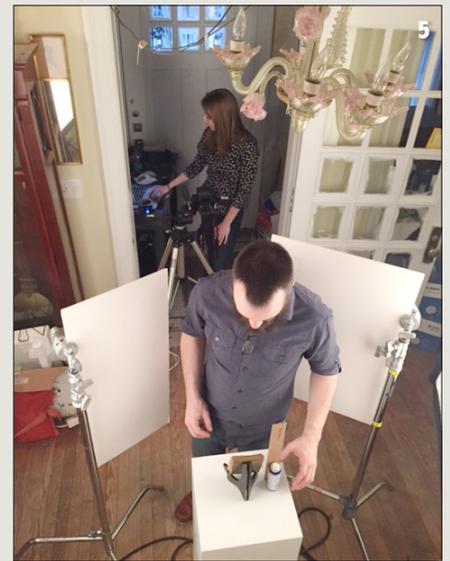
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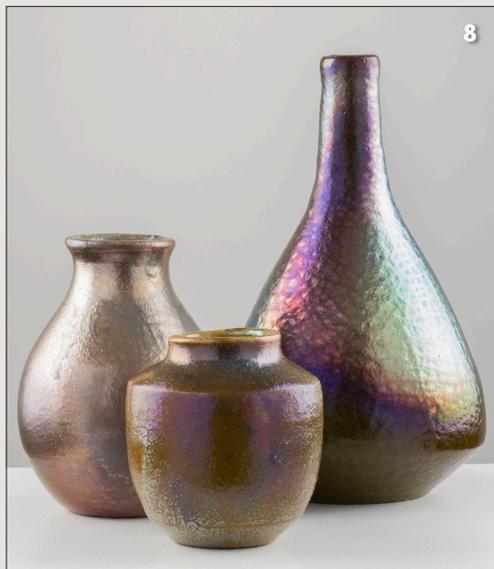
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5

His bed was custom built for the house. His beautiful Rookwood inkwell is accompanied by several exquisite handmade writing pens. A silver candlestick bears his monogram as does a silver-plated soap case likely used on his travels to Asia to buy art. Inscriptions and dedications to Freer in several books provide clues to his close friendships and social circle.

The Freer House now has a permanent digital database of each Freer object, to better inform researchers, scholars and the general public about Freer's personal life and his home's furnishings and decoration. Sincere thanks to Dr. Brunk and project team members Rachel Bertolini, Matthew Coleman, Michael Coleman, Buddy Englehart, James K. Miller, Justin Trupiano, and Meghan Urisko.



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1) A portrait of the Warring family with Grace Warring, center **2)** Small black iridescent bowl by Pewabic Pottery **3)** Silver candlestick with "F" monogram **4)** White porcelain dinner plate by Copelands China, England **5)** Photographer Justin Trupiano sets up a shoot in Brunk's foyer while his assistant Rachel Bertolini prepares to title the images. **6)** Soap case with "CLF" monogram **7)** Folding opera glasses with leather case by Archimede **8)** Three early iridescent Pewabic Pottery vases **9)** Scarab Box made by William Stratton for Pewabic Pottery **10)** Set of two silver seasoning shakers by Fisher Silversmiths, Inc.

The 40-Year Bachelor's Degree

In December, Dorothy Mahlin will cross the stage to receive her undergraduate degree in Communication Studies from Wayne State University. As expected, her proud family will applaud from the stands as Dorothy smiles broadly for the photographer. But this graceful, vivacious, 'A' student is no typical college coed. Dorothy is 88-years-old; she's been taking classes at Wayne since the early 1970s.

Many people helped Dorothy cross the finish line to graduation, but two stand out: her daughter Nancy Mahlin, and the instructor of her final class, Amy Graham, a psychology predoctoral trainee at MPSI. "Mom needed just four credits to finish," Nancy said. "But after the first session of Developmental Psychology,

she said she wasn't up to it and wanted to quit." Nancy reminded her of the family credo: we finish what we start. Within a week, Dorothy relented and returned to class. "That was a work of genius on Nancy's part," Dorothy said. "She never coerced, just left it up to me. And then Amy was so nice and helpful. I knew I would get through it."

College was an unattainable dream for Dorothy. "I loved to learn, but we were poor and couldn't afford college," she said. She worked and, in her early 20s, she married Murray, a student in WSU's School of Medicine. As he launched his practice, Dorothy gave birth to four children and devoted herself to motherhood. She vowed to one day go to college, as soon as the children were

also in school. "I couldn't leave them. They came first." Dorothy completed most of her classes at WSU in the 70s then life pulled her in another direction – the stage. She wrote and performed musical parodies for many organizations. "I loved it. It was fun," she said. "And I was good."



Dorothy Mahlin (lt) credits instructor and MPSI trainee Amy Graham (rt) with helping her cross the finish line to a WSU diploma.

Everything changed two years ago when Murray died, after 65 years of marriage. Her children Jeff, Catherine, Cindy and twin Nancy, searched for ways to help their grieving mom re-engage. They encouraged her to finish her degree. Nancy, who lives close to Dorothy and has a flexible schedule as a realtor, became the driving force.

But Nancy's support and Dorothy's motivation might not have been enough without the special effort of instructor Amy Graham (and her department supervisor Rita Casey, Ph.D.). "Amy's enthusiasm was unmatched," Nancy wrote in a glowing letter to Psychology Department Chair Boris Baltes, Ph.D. "She is very professional with a heart of gold and the gift of sensitivity. Amy bent over backwards to help my mom in her class. She emailed me the slides for each class lecture so I could print them for my mom. She made it easy for me to help."

Dorothy is equally complimentary, saying Amy created an environment that was academically nurturing without being intimidating. Teaching is an art and Amy's artistry shows in her "total commitment to her profession and her students, and her ability to

MPSI Trainee Helps "Senior" Graduate



teach with grace, honesty, enthusiasm and friendliness. She made me feel good to be in the class," she said. Amy gave each student "the courage to believe in oneself."

Amy says the class was lucky to have Dorothy, who lived through the developmental stages being taught. Students learned from her perspective. In one discussion, Dorothy's life experiences confirmed core parenting concepts that remain valid today. "Dorothy and her siblings grew up very poor. Her father died when she was young. She credits her mom with keeping the family going," Amy said. "Her mom understood instinctively what was important. She gave the children her undivided attention, kept them clean and fed, with a roof over their heads and a regular bedtime. She taught them to take school seriously." Research now shows that concentrating on these priorities helps combat the stresses and risks to children that poverty often triggers.

With graduation around the corner, Dorothy, her family and Amy are more than ready to witness the long-awaited pivotal moment. "Amy is as excited for my mom's graduation as we are," Nancy said. "This is the most important thing I've ever done for my mom or with my mom. I'm so glad Wayne gave us the chance."



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2015 FALL
NEWSLETTER



IMPRINTS | Editor/Writer - *CHERYL DEEP*, Graphic Designer - *CATHERINE BLASIO*

Timeline Triggers Pivotal Moment

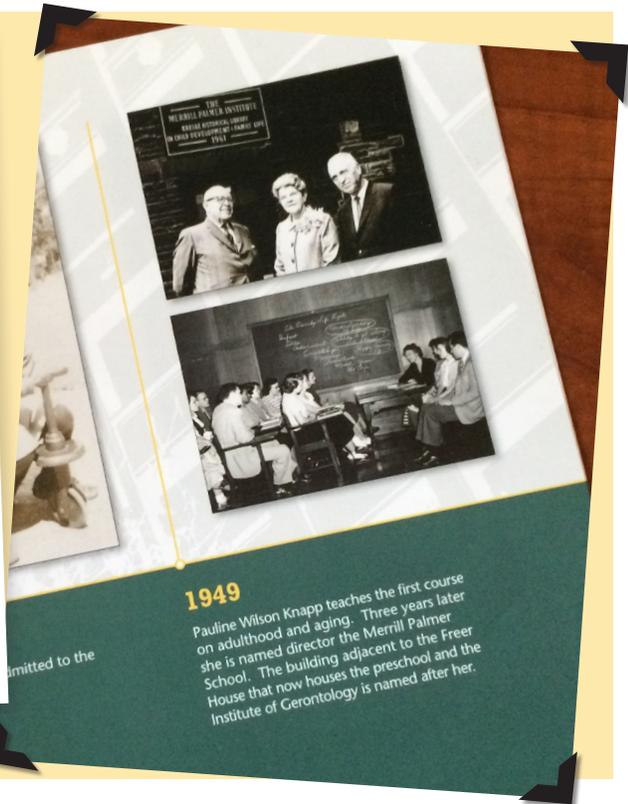
Last year, Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute published a timeline of key historical moments starting with the 1916 bequest that funded MPI's creation. Alumna Helen Haugsnes received a copy of the timeline, and it inspired this letter to us.

"What a fun idea! My own place on the Timeline comes in the middle, in the era of Director Pauline Knapp. That was my own pivotal moment as a teaching assistant. I went on in the teaching profession for 50 years, retiring into the Peace Corp to work with classes of five-year-olds.

"When my own children were of the right age, I worked with other mothers to start a parent co-operative nursery school, which celebrated its 50th Anniversary in October 2014. Let me assure you that it has maintained the Merrill-Palmer philosophy!

"The check I enclose is my return to you, for the investment you made in me."

Helen Haugsnes
Merrill-Palmer Institute Alumna (circa 1960)
Chicago, Illinois



Pivotal Moments
OUR CAMPAIGN FOR
WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY

Gifts of all sizes make a positive impact on MPSI's research, programs and community engagement. To support our efforts, please contact our Senior Major Gift Officer **Marguerite Carlton** at 313-664-2608 or margueritec@wayne.edu.