Dr. Haley Vlach is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology and director of the Learning, Cognition, & Development Lab in the University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Education. She did her undergraduate research with Dr. Carver at the Children’s School (see reference and abstract below), graduating in 2006. She earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from UCLA in 2012. Her research is on children’s learning and cognitive development. https://sites.google.com/site/haleyvlach/welcome


“Education programs have fostered advanced levels of graphic representation ability in young children but have not detailed the specific mechanisms responsible for the accelerated growth. Research suggests that between 6 and 8 years of age children begin to observe more carefully before drawing and that observation prompts aid children's development of graphic representations. This study experimentally investigated the effects of observation coaching on the graphic representations that children produce when looking at models of animate and inanimate objects. Drawings were collected from 22 kindergartners once a week for a month. Half of the children received observation coaching that instructed them to look at objects from multiple angles before, during, and after drawing an object; the remaining half of the children did not receive observation coaching. Both casual inspection and statistical analyses of data from the videotaped sessions revealed that the coaching was effective at encouraging children to look at objects more frequently during the drawing process. Additionally, each child's drawings were evaluated using a detailed scoring system. This rating system revealed that children receiving observation coaching had significantly greater improvements in drawing scores than children who did not receive coaching. All children receiving coaching had improvements in their drawing scores, with advances primarily involving enhanced detail and conceptual accuracy.”

In May of 2015, Dr. Vlach received CMU’s William Chase Memorial Award, an early career honor in cognitive science that is given biennially to a young scholar who conducts research that exemplifies the scientific values of the late Bill Chase. Chase “spent 15 years as a professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University and is credited with demonstrating that good memory is an acquired skill. He also made important contributions to a range of areas in cognition and left behind seminal publications on sentence comprehension, perception and chess, and memory span.” Vlach’s “work resonates with Chase's emphasis on a deep understanding of processes underlying learning and performance. In particular, Vlach's research has outlined how children's rapid forgetting of information supports, rather than deters, their ability to learn language, categories and concepts.” Vlach argues that, “forgetting acts as a form of abstraction, which promotes children’s ability to generalize knowledge across contexts. In essence, she claims that, “what makes children incredible learners is not simply that they learn to encode information in the world, but that they rapidly forget the large amount of irrelevant information they learn.” Vlach will give the Chase Memorial Lecture at CMU on Monday afternoon, April 4th at 4:30pm. The lecture is free and open to the public.