

BORN TO LEARN

Maureen Conroy Anita Zucker Professor in Early Childhood Studies

It begins at birth, cooing babies see us smile back at them. Or later, when toddlers gesture for a drink and we hand them the cup.

Through thousands of these everyday exchanges with parents, caregivers and others, children gain skills to help them learn how to interact and be successful in their world.

Maureen Conroy is an expert on effective ways to facilitate these early learning processes. Through her role as co-director of the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies and her research, she helps families and others to maximize these earliest learning experiences and interactions. Critical between birth and age 5, these experiences help shape the brain's architecture and capacity.

"We know from research that this makes a big difference when they reach adulthood," Conroy says. "These early experiences can positively impact their likelihood of completing high school, entering the workforce and contributing to their communities."

Conroy has devoted more than 35 years of her career to the science of what works to improve children's lives.

"How you really make a difference in the world is working side-by-side with families, children and teachers in communities where they live, learn and play," Conroy says. "Within every interaction, children are looking for cues about what to do. All of us have endless opportunities each day to help children learn."



Anita Zucker

From the time they began as freshmen at the University of Florida, Anita Zucker and her now late husband, Jerry, worked side-by-side completing their education, nurturing a family and ultimately building a successful life in Charleston, South Carolina.

Because of Zucker's passion and partnership, UF is carrying her vision beyond her local community and Florida. Experts, led by Maureen Conroy in the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies, are working to reach every community in this country and beyond. Together, they will repair the world, beginning with its children.

"Every child needs to have every opportunity," Zucker says. "Healthy communities have to start with our youngest children."