Leeds Child Development Unit

Newsletter · Spring 2019

Welcome to the Spring 2019 edition of the Leeds Child Development Unit newsletter! We have been busy bees and would like to tell you all about our past, present, and future projects. All of this research is only possible with your help, so many thanks go to all our particpants! If you know of anyone who might want to take part, please direct them to our **website** (details below).

Listening to speech

Many Babies

Since our 2018 newsletter, data from our Leeds babies has been pooled with data from 66 other labs across Europe and North America to make a huge dataset of 2312 babies – hence the name of the project! The analysis confirmed that infants prefer listening to speech meant for babies, but also revealed differences in how strongly they preferred it according to where they came from, and according to how individual labs measured the preference. The paper should appear in *Advances in Methods and Practices in Psychological Science* later this year.

Adjectives in speech

We are now one year into our ESRC-funded project on adjectives and have completed our first study. We spent many hours analysing speech directed at children during free play, during shared book reading, and in children's books. We found that adjectives were more common before the noun (e.g. *the lazy fox*) than after it (e.g. *my sock is wet*), especially when those adjectives were more familiar. We also found that they were used much more often to describe than to contrast objects. These results are intriguing since they don't match the types of sentences that should be most useful for children's language development. Our second study aims to find out why this might be the case. *Watch this space!*

Processing adjectives

We have launched a brand new study which investigates how 3 to 4 year-old children understand different types of adjectives. In this experiment, children sit in front of a computer monitor and piece of equipment called an eyetracker, similar to the one in the photo below. A series of pictures appears on the screen, and instructions are played to encourage children to point at particular pictures. The eyetracker records where children look on the screen and for how long they continue to look. The data will tell us how children come to make sense of descriptive language, and how their understanding might differ from adults.

If you and your child would like to take part in this study, please contact Jamie Lingwood on j.lingwood@leeds.ac.uk

Word learning

Bilingual word learning

About one in five children in English primary classrooms speaks English as an additional language (EAL). These children start school with a smaller English vocabulary than monolingual children, and this persists throughout their school life. So, we're interested to find out how EAL children learn new words compared to those who only speak English. We found that EAL children were better at learning novel names for animals through explicit teaching, but that monolinguals had an advantage when children were left to 'pick up' the new words through a story. We think this is because EAL children are better at learning and using two different labels for the same word. However, they find it more difficult to comprehend longer stories, because they have a smaller vocabulary. Consequently EAL children find it harder to make inferences about what new words might mean.

## Reading: breakfast or bedtime?

In a project we started in 2017, we asked what is the best time of the day to read with children so that they learn new words: at breakfast time or at bedtime? We documented 3 to 4 year-olds' word knowledge right after book reading and twelve hours later. We expected bedtime stories to be more beneficial, because research has shown that children remember new words better after a night's sleep. We have now analysed the data and it turned out that levels of new word learning were already very high right after reading. Therefore we were unable to see improvements over time, irrespective of the time of day. **This means children learn new words really well really fast!**

Multilingualism

Inclusive language assessment programme

Learning multiple languages and coming from a lower socioeconomic background are well known factors affecting language development and subsequent academic attainment. However, few screening programmes allow for a complete assessment of language in children in UK primary schools, while taking into account socioeconomic and language background. PhD student Lydia Gunning is developing a comprehensive language assessment that can be used to screen for atypical language development in monolingual, bilingual and multilingual children. This research can help distinguish developmental differences between these groups, allowing for the assessment of various core language skills, as well as pragmatic skills like dealing with ambiguous and figurative language. A language exposure questionnaire is used to generate a 'score of multilingualism'. Preliminary analysis has shown that this score predicts core language ability and measures of academic attainment.
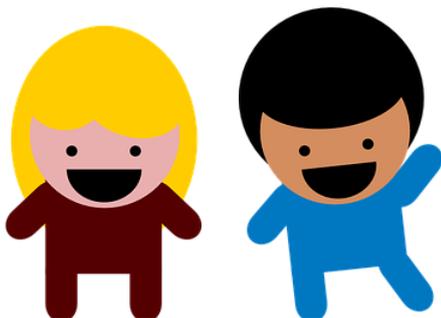
EAL Children

LITE Fellows Helen Sadig and Prof Cecile De Cat have launched a project that aims to help schools support children who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) by increasing awareness of pupils' needs. They are developing training for students (like those in the *Student into Schools* programme at the University of Leeds) and CPD workshops for teachers.

Via their website **ealchildren.org** you can find out about upcoming workshops for those who work with EAL pupils. You can also discover research reports and online resources to support EAL children from a variety of backgrounds inside and outside the classroom.

Reading difficulties
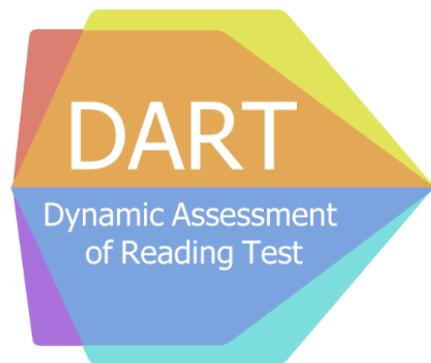
Screening for learning disorders

DART
Dynamic Assessment of Reading Test

25% of children leave primary school unable to read well and we need to identify these children early. Current screening tests for reading difficulties focus on existing knowledge, which is influenced by experience. This is problematic, because children starting primary school come from a range of home backgrounds. In January 2019, we started the DART project that will test whether dynamic learning tasks can improve screening. Dynamic tasks measure children's learning capacity by measuring their learning during play. These could be more accurate screeners – differentiating children with underlying learning disorders from children who have not had sufficient experience to learn. **Ours will be the first large scale study of dynamic assessment of reading in a UK context!**

New Dyslexia Research Database

We are setting up a new research database focussing on children with dyslexia.

Do you have a child who has dyslexia? Would you like to take part in research that aims to understand why some children develop dyslexia, how this affects their learning in school, and what we can do to help? Please contact Hannah Nash to sign up: h.nash@leeds.ac.uk
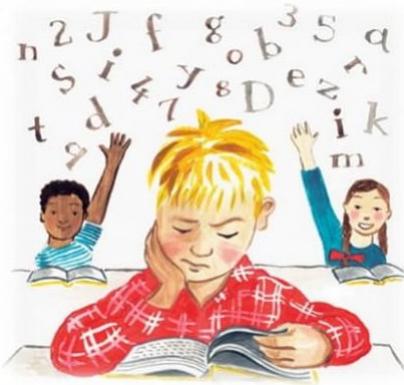
Reading intervention

Good news for struggling readers! Funding has come through for the **REACH Primary** project. REACH Primary is an intervention programme that aims to improve reading skills of children in primary school. Trained Teaching Assistants provide pupils with individual 20-week training. The programme offers two types of intervention: one that improves word recognition and decoding, and one that increases reading comprehension. The project will run a trial with 800 struggling readers in Year 3 across 80 primary schools.

Sleep

Impact of sleep on children with ADHD

What is the impact of **sleep** on daytime functioning, cognitive development, academic attainment and wellbeing in children with ADHD? This is what the **Paediatric ADHD Sleep Study** (PASS) aims to find out.

We are recruiting children with ADHD aged 7 to 12 years and matching them to typically developing children. We will see children at two time points, approximately one year apart. During these visits we will take measures of sleep (most notably *polysomnography*), cognition, emotional well-being, and numerical, reading and spelling abilities. By doing this, we can investigate the sleep difficulties faced by children with ADHD and the part these might play in the attention and behaviour problems that children with ADHD struggle with.

Do you have a child between 7 and 12 years old, with our without ADHD, and would like to take part in this study? Please contact Anna Hamilton: a.hamilton1@leeds.ac.uk

PolyWHAT?

Polysomnography is used to study sleep and to diagnose a variety of sleep disorders. In the PASS study, it involves placing electrodes on the child's head, face and legs to measure brain activity as well as eye movements and muscle tone. This information can be used to chart a child's sleep stages and cycles during the night, as well as calculate their sleep efficiency. It is a portable device, meaning that the test can be carried out in the home where children can follow their typical bedtime routine with minimal disturbance.

Who's new at the LCDU?

Davut Aslan

"I'm a PhD researcher in School of Education, investigating the effectiveness of a dialogic reading intervention on the language and early literacy development of children in Turkey. My research investigates the impact of a parent-delivered dialogic reading program targeting phonological awareness, vocabulary knowledge, letter knowledge, print awareness, listening comprehension, and reading attitudes in Turkish preschool children whose language development may be at risk due to their socioeconomic background".

Annika van Wijk

"I am a Masters student in Linguistics at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, and I am spending Spring 2019 at the LCDU on an internship. I am working with Dr Cat Davies and Dr Jamie Lingwood on their project on children's processing of adjectives".

We need you(r family and friends)!

Our research is only possible with your help! We're always looking for more families to take part. Are you interested or do you know someone who might be? Please contact us for more information or to sign up for our database!

Why we contact you - and why we don't

Age

Each of our studies targets a very specific age range. When we start a study, we look for families who have children in this range at the moment of testing. If we don't contact you, your child may just have been a little too young or a little too old to participate this time around.

Multilingualism

For most of our studies we're looking for monolingual children, because this is the 'simplest case'. Studying language development in a child who knows just one language is already very complex. However, other studies specifically focus on how multilingual children develop their languages, and we're keen to contact our multilingual families then!

Contact details

If your child fits the criteria for our research, we try our best to get in touch with you through phone or email. However, sometimes we're unable to reach families because their contact details have changed, or there's an error in our records.

If you think this might be the case for your family, please contact us using the details below, so that we can reach you in the future!

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