



Language and Reading Acquisition

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Picture Source: <http://www.corilearning.com/>

At the language and Reading Acquisition (LARA) lab, we are interested in oral language and literacy development in childhood and adolescence. We work with children with and without reading and language difficulties and use longitudinal and experimental designs as well as eye tracking methodology in our research. This lab is directed by Dr Jessie Ricketts.

We are currently working with a number of secondary schools and primary schools whose help and involvement are invaluable to us. In addition to this vital contribution to our research, schools and pupils have found it interesting to take part. It is anticipated that findings from our research will have implications for professionals working in the field of education by informing theories of reading and oral vocabulary development.

Vocabulary and Reading in Secondary Schools (VaRiSS)

Although there is well-established research examining the link between oral vocabulary and reading, it has tended to focus on primary school pupils, neglecting the importance of this in secondary school, as pupils become more independent. The Vocabulary and Reading in Secondary Schools (VaRiSS) project fills this gap.

So far in this project, we have collected data from pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. We are finding that secondary pupils vary enormously in their oral vocabulary knowledge and reading abilities. For some, poor vocabulary and reading will be limiting access to the curriculum. In addition, we have noticed some intriguing differences from primary pupils. First, development in oral vocabulary and reading has slowed down. Second, for most children the ability to read words is no longer

a determinant of reading success (reading comprehension). Instead, vocabulary knowledge is really important.

We will be extending our study to consider post-16 attainment and outcomes. Watch this space!

Due to the lack of previous research in this area, the findings from our study will contribute to existing theories of reading and language, and have implications for teaching in schools. We hope that this research will highlight how reading and vocabulary development continues to be important throughout adolescence.

To find out more about the VaRiSS project:

Website: variss.org

Twitter: @varissproject

Facebook: facebook.com/varissproject



Website: www.pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/lara/ Twitter: @ricketts_lara

If you are interested in hearing more about our research and/or in taking part, please send your contact details to jessie.ricketts@rhul.ac.uk



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Dr Jessie Ricketts



I am interested in reading and oral language development in childhood and adolescence, particularly in the role of vocabulary in reading (both word-level reading and reading comprehension), and reciprocally, the role of reading in oral vocabulary acquisition. My research adopts a range of methodological approaches including longitudinal, cross-sectional and word learning studies to investigate acquisition, development and causal hypotheses, working with typically developing children and children with developmental disorders such as poor reading comprehension, dyslexia, specific language impairment and autism spectrum disorders. I aim to collect data that address questions of theoretical importance that have practical implications for policy and practice.

The Lab Team



Miss Nicola Dawson: My research explores the role of morphological knowledge in reading and vocabulary across development, with a particular focus on adolescence. The words that pupils encounter as they move through the education system are increasingly complex, and much of this complexity is driven by morphological structure. My aim is to investigate whether adolescents are sensitive to the morphological structure of words in processes relating to reading and word learning, and to examine how this sensitivity changes over the course of adolescence. The first paper from this project has recently been accepted for publication (Dawson, Rastle & Ricketts, in press). I will also extend this work to include adolescents with developmental language disorder (DLD). It is well-documented that children with DLD show impairments in the domain of inflectional morphology, but less is known about the impact of their language difficulties on the understanding and use of derivational morphemes.



Miss Gabbie May: My research is exploring whether the consumption of wild blueberries can improve memory, attention and reading ability in 7-10 year olds. Wild blueberries are a fruit high in flavonoids, a micronutrient previously found to benefit cognition across the human lifespan. Most recently, research from the University of Reading found that children who consumed a wild blueberry drink high in flavonoids improved their performance on memory and attention tasks up to 6 hrs post-consumption; a novel finding with potential educational implications, such as for reading. Reading relies upon multiple aspects of cognition, such as memory and attention, therefore I hope that the previous effects of flavonoids observed from the child literature will extend to aiding reading ability.



Miss Lianne Farrer: I am an undergraduate placement student working as a Research Assistant, primarily working on the VaRiSS project and Orthographic Facilitation (OF) in the classroom. I will also be working closely with schools and pupils on a number of other interesting projects.

Congratulations!



Alessandra Valentini: Everyone here at the LARA lab would like to give a huge congratulations to Alessandra for passing her viva at the start of this academic year. Alessandra's PhD research investigated how children learn new words when they are listening to and/or reading stories. Her first paper has just been accepted for publication so look out for it in the Journal of Experimental Child Psychology soon. Well done Alessandra!

Thanks to all our undergraduate research assistants who contribute to the work of the LARA lab: Katherine Worster, Iqra Arshad, Rebecca Crowley and Nardeen Massoud.

Thanks also to all the schools that help us with our research, we are incredibly grateful for their support: Emmbrook School in Wokingham, Cox Green School in Maidenhead, Garth Hill College in Bracknell, St Crispin's School in Wokingham, Ranelagh School in Bracknell, Meadow Primary School in Stoneleigh, Holly Lodge School in Surrey, and St Paul's CE Junior School in Wokingham.