



Language and Reading Acquisition

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Department of Psychology

Royal Holloway, University of London



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.

The LARA lab is directed by Dr Jessie Ricketts.

Working with schools and teachers

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.

This year we have worked with teachers to consider how to identify and support children with specific reading comprehension difficulties and how to harness reading to promote vocabulary knowledge. RHUL hosts an annual research-practice workshop and Jessie worked with colleagues at York, Bristol and Reading to organise an EPS-funded workshop for teachers and researchers.

Email Jessie if you'd like more information!

In the news... Jessie has been doing some work with the Times Educational Supplement: http://bit.ly/tes_rickettspod



Current projects

VaRISS (2013 – 2018)

The Vocabulary and Reading in Secondary Schools project has provided new insights on adolescent development:

- Vocabulary and reading are very closely related, with vocabulary knowledge important for reading success and reading providing opportunities for vocabulary learning

- A substantial number of pupils start secondary school without the basic reading skills and vocabulary knowledge needed to access the curriculum

- In early secondary school, achievement gaps in vocabulary and reading narrow but are not closing

We are currently investigating how important vocabulary knowledge and reading are for GCSE attainment – watch this space!

RAV (2018 – 2020)

The Reading and Vocabulary project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation to investigate whether the amount of reading that children and adolescents do is important for vocabulary growth. We are working with Dr Laura Shapiro, Professor Adrian Burgess and Dr Sanne van der Kleij at Aston University.

OWL (2018 – 2023)

The Opportunities for Word Learning project is funded by the US National Institutes of Health to investigate how children with Developmental Language Disorder learn new words and how this relates to their reading abilities.

We are working with Professor Tiffany Hogan, Professor Julie Wolter and Dr Suzanne Adlof on this project.



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



ROYAL HOLLOWAY UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

LARA Director: 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.



Miss Grace Pocock: I'm a first year PhD student, investigating whether 'educational' apps are really educational. I will be looking to work with local nurseries to look at this in terms of preschoolers early literacy development. I will systematically assess at the different features apps offer to children, and see which ones are beneficial to learning, as well as which ones hinder it.



Miss Sanne Van-Der-Kelij: I am a postdoctoral research fellow based at Aston University and I work on the Reading and Vocabulary Project with Dr. Jessie Ricketts, Dr. Laura Shapiro and Prof. Adrian Burgess. The goal of the project is to track the reading and vocabulary development in children as they transfer from primary to secondary school. We also plan to conduct an intervention study in which we aim to promote independent reading in Year 8 students and examine the influence of independent reading on vocabulary growth.



Daisy Miller, Charlotte Stoaate and Lucy Hemmings: We are three undergraduate research assistants in the LARA lab. We are all in the third (and final) year of our undergraduate degree in Psychology. We assist lab team members on a variety of projects, and we will soon be piloting a new study in schools focusing on vocabulary in secondary school pupils.



Signy Wegener, Luan Li and Jodie Enderby visited the lab in July 2018



LARA visitors

Mr. Alexander Krepel: For six weeks I exchanged my workplace at the University of Amsterdam where I am a PhD student to visit the LARA lab at Royal Holloway. My PhD research focuses on the relationship between orthographic learning and word learning in English, and as a Dutchman this means English as a second language. It has been a great opportunity to learn about studies and plans in a different lab and exchange ideas.