

Newsletter December 2019

## Department of Psychology Royal Holloway, University of London



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

### 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 closely with teachers at Cleves School to think about the best approaches for teaching vocabulary in the classroom. We are trying out one particular strategy that Jessie has been investigating since her PhD days: does seeing a word help children to learn its sound and meaning? Details of previous projects can be found on our website, see 'teachers and families' tab.

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.

RHUL hosts an annual research-practice workshop, the next one is 30th of June 2020  
More information here: <http://bit.ly/worktog2019>



### Current projects

#### VaRiSS (2013 – 2018)

The Vocabulary and Reading in Secondary Schools project was funded by the ESRC and its first paper will be published early in 2020 in the journal *Scientific Studies of Reading*.

- We can't assume secondary pupils have the reading and vocabulary abilities that they need to access the curriculum
- Vocabulary and reading are very closely related in adolescence

#### OF classroom

The Orthographic Facilitation classroom project investigates whether the presence of orthography promotes new word learning in a classroom setting.

#### 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, Prof Adrian Burgess and Dr Sanne van der Kleij at Aston University.

#### Baby Books (2019 – 2022)

The Baby Books project is funded by the Nuffield Foundation to investigate what infants learn from shared book reading with their parents. We are working with Dr Jeanne Shinsky and Dr Suzanne Aussems from the Royal Holloway Baby Lab

#### 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 and Professor Julie Wolter on this project.



**In the news...** Jessie has been doing some work with the Times Educational Supplement:

<https://www.tes.com/author/dr-jessie-ricketts> [http://bit.ly/tes\\_rickettspod](http://bit.ly/tes_rickettspod)

Website: [www.pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/lara/](http://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](mailto:jessie.ricketts@rhul.ac.uk)

# 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 Suzanne Aussems** : I am a post-doctoral researcher interested in how babies and young children learn language. I am currently working on the Baby Books Project. I received my PhD in Developmental Psychology from the University of Warwick, where I investigated how hand gestures produced by adults facilitate event memory and word learning in 3-year-old children. I have also done research on how infants learn words (ages 13-16 months), use pointing gestures to communicate (ages 9-13 months), and integrate information from speech and gesture simultaneously (ages 14-17 months).

**Miss Jessica Dyson** : My current research is on adolescent sleep restriction during puberty, and how this affects word learning and memory. This research will use polysomnography to measure objective changes in sleep patterns between school term and holidays.



**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.



**Aiswarya Thamilselvan, Alice Storr, Lauren Smith, Lauriane Bonnet, Rebecca Bright and Ellie Gray**:

We are six undergraduate research assistants in the LARA lab. We are third- and second-year students in Psychology, and we assist lab team members on a variety of projects.

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Last year was a really exciting year in the LARA lab. Grace Pocock and Jess Dyson started their PhDs and Nicola Dawson and Rachel Nesbit got their PhDs. UGRAs Daisy Miller, Lucy Hemmings, Charlotte Stoate and Paige Mahoney graduated with flying colours and Jessie was promoted to Reader. This year, we welcome Suzanne Aussems Aiswarya Thamilselvan, Alice Storr, Lauren Smith, Lauriane Bonnet, Rebecca Bright, Ellie Gray and Amrita Bains to the LARA team.



Congratulations to Alessandra on the birth of her beautiful boy Enrico. First LARA baby !



The LARA lab and friends celebrate Christmas 2019 with some pottery painting !

