

Newsletter December 2020

Department of Psychology Royal Holloway, University of London



Picture source: planbee.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 in our research. The LARA lab is directed by Dr Jessie Ricketts.



Working with schools and teachers

Our work with primary and secondary schools is currently on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, we are staying in contact. Their help last year and continued support are invaluable to us in this time.

A highlight of the LARA lab year is the research-practice event where we bring together researchers and practitioners to work together to think about research. We were very sad to cancel the 2020 practitioner event because of the pandemic. We are looking forward to our next event on the 9th July 2021, which will be held either online or with a mixture of in person and online attendance, depending on what is possible. **SAVE THE DATE: 9th July 2021**

Current projects

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 and Prof Adrian Burgess at Aston University.

OF classroom

The Orthographic Facilitation in the Classroom project is investigating whether children are more likely to learn new words if they are taught with their printed forms. What is novel about this project is that we are seeing how this strategy works in the busy, dynamic classroom context.



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.

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 from the Royal Holloway Baby Lab

VaRiSS (2013 – 2018)

The main article from this project has now been published in the journal *Scientific Studies of Reading*. We investigated reading development in adolescence. Visit our website [here](#) for our poster summarising the article, and a link to the article online (open access). You can also see Jessie talking about the project here in her talk for the General Teaching Council of Scotland: youtu.be/ykN1SRt37kl

We have now collected GCSE data for many of the VaRiSS participants and we are working on writing this up. Jessie has also been working closely with teachers and the Department for Education, Oxford University Press, the National Literacy Trust and Tes (Times Educational Supplement) to reflect on the implications of the VaRiSS findings and what the next steps should be.

Website: www.pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/lara/

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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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CONGRATULATIONS!

In 2020, UGRAs Aishwaraya Thamilselvan, Alice Storr, Lauren Smith, Lauriane Bonnet and Rebecca Bright graduated with flying colours. Grace Pocock and Jess Dyson are continuing their PhDs. This year, we welcome Abigail White, Courtney Hooton, Selan Lee, Alice Waters to the LARA team and welcome back Ellie Gray and Amrita Bains (who has just started her PhD!).



Jessie has recently received a grant from the Nuffield foundation and will be working alongside Laura Shapiro and Sarah McGeown to explore motivation in child readers and co-design an interventions to increase engagement and motivation to read.

In the news...

- Jessie now writes a regular blog for the Times Educational Supplement (TES) (<https://www.tes.com/author/dr-jessie-ricketts>)
- Watch out for a Tes feature next year. <https://www.tes.com/author/dr-jessie-ricketts>
- Jessie and Dr Laura Shapiro (Aston) recently wrote an op-ed for Schools Week (https://bit.ly/schools_week).

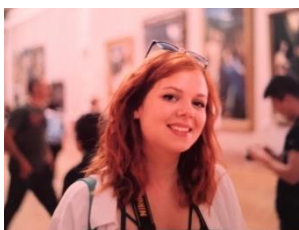
The Lab Team

LARA Director: Dr Jessie Ricketts

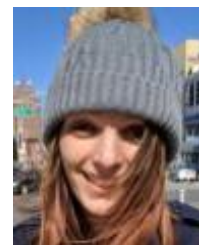


I am interested in reading and oral language development in childhood and adolescence, particularly in the role of vocabulary in reading (both word-level reading and reading comprehension), and reciprocally, the role of reading in oral vocabulary acquisition. My research adopts a range of methodological 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.

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 Amrita Bains: Currently, I am a Graduate Research Assistant working on various projects including the Orthographic Facilitation Classroom project and the Reading and Vocabulary (RAV) project. My research interests are understanding reading development and language learning using both behavioural and neuroimaging techniques. In September 2020, I started a PhD investigating intrinsic motivation for reading in relation to frameworks underpinning reward and motivation.



Research Assistants

Abigail White, Courtney Hooton, Selan Lee, Alice Watters and Ellie Gray:

We are five 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.

Here's what lab meetings look like for us this year! →

