

# WELLCOME PROJECT NEWS

## July 2015

Hello!

The Wellcome Project Team would like to thank you for your participation in our Language and Reading Project.

We completed the final assessments of the children in the study in September 2014. Since then we have been finalising the results and writing up our findings.

As the project is now complete, we wanted to tell you about our results. We also wanted to send a 'thank you' for taking part. We hope you find something enjoyable to read with your Amazon voucher – there are some suggested 'good reads' on the last page of this newsletter.

Thank you once again for your support. You can keep up to date with news about the Wellcome project at [www.psy.ox.ac.uk/research/snowling-group/wellcome-reading-and-language-project/preschool-development](http://www.psy.ox.ac.uk/research/snowling-group/wellcome-reading-and-language-project/preschool-development).

If you have any questions, you can reach us by emailing [CRLOxford@psy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:CRLOxford@psy.ox.ac.uk).

We wish you all a relaxing and happy summer!

Professor Maggie Snowling, University of Oxford  
(on behalf of the Project team)

## About the project

The main aim of the Wellcome Language and Reading Project was to find out about the causes of Dyslexia and Language Impairment (LI) in order to understand better how to identify these difficulties early.

The study traced the development of children from 3 to 9 years of age: children who have a parent with dyslexia; children who had pre-school speech and/or language difficulties; and children who have neither a family history of dyslexia nor speech and language difficulties.

The key findings are detailed in this leaflet.

To find out more about dyslexia and dyslexia provision visit [www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk](http://www.thedyslexia-spldtrust.org.uk).

To find out more about LI visit [www.youtube.com/user/RALLIcampaign](http://www.youtube.com/user/RALLIcampaign).

## Key words

### *Comprehension*

Ability to extract meaning from text

### *Decoding*

Ability to pronounce written words correctly

### *Dyslexia*

Learning difficulties characterized by problems with accurate or fluent word recognition, poor decoding and poor spelling abilities

### *Language Impairment*

When oral (spoken) language lags behind other areas of development for no apparent reason

### *Language Skills*

Understanding and production of spoken language, vocabulary and grammar

### *Phonological Skills*

Ability to tap into the speech sounds of language, for example asking a child 'What is cat without the "k" sound?' (at)

G\ VOH ID DQG ODQJ XDJ H  
LP SDLUP HQW

ODQJ XDJ H' SKRQRORJ LF DO  
VNLOV DQG UHGLQJ



## FAMILY INFLUENCES ON READING

### Why does it matter?

It is easy to find out if someone has a family member with dyslexia. If genes and genetic mechanisms associated with dyslexia can be found, this could lead to earlier identification and assessment.

### What we already knew

- Children who have a family member who is dyslexic are more likely to develop dyslexia than children not at 'family risk'.
- Some genes associated with dyslexia and dyscalculia (difficulties in learning arithmetic) have been identified.

### What we found

- The genetic mechanisms leading to dyslexia are complex and we are a long way off understanding them. At the present time, knowing whether or not a child has a family history of dyslexia and asking about their knowledge of letters at 3½ years old provides a good indication about those likely to develop reading difficulties.

### Special considerations

It is important to remember that genes act through the environment. Children who have a supportive home literacy environment (for example, children who are read to frequently) do better in the reading stakes. Teaching letters from an early age is a good thing.

## LANGUAGE, READING AND MATHS

### Why does it matter?

If we understand the causes of maths difficulties in children with reading difficulties, then we can be more helpful in providing support.

### What we already knew

- Difficulties with maths and difficulties with reading often occur together in children.
- Children need good early language in order to learn the verbal labels of written numbers (e.g. 5 is 'five') and to count. Both of these skills are important foundations of children's later arithmetic.

### What we wanted to find out

We wanted to understand why maths difficulties and reading difficulties often co-occur. Do they have the same cause?

### What we found

- The language problems which contribute to dyslexia also influence maths development.
- Some children with dyslexia are free of maths difficulties. Others are impaired only in number tasks which require language (typically arithmetic tasks). This is consistent with the idea of dyslexia as a language learning disorder.
- Some children with reading difficulties have more widespread maths difficulties. In such children the causes of their difficulties with reading and with maths are different; the two skills need separate forms of intervention.

## ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES ON READING

### Why does it matter?

If we find out how families might influence children's reading, we can help families to support their children's reading development.

### What we already knew

- In general, the more literacy activities in the home, the better the child's later reading.

### What we wanted to find out

We wanted to understand the ways in which a family's literacy practices can influence children's reading development.

### What we found

- On average, the greater the children's early exposure to storybooks, the better their early decoding skills.
- In children at family risk of dyslexia, storybook exposure promoted phonological awareness, an important foundation for reading. This is probably because such children are less likely to pick up the sounds of letters spontaneously.



Carrie's War  
Nina Bawden  
Beast Quest  
Adam Blade  
Flat Stanley  
Jeff Brown  
Artemis Fowl  
Eoin Colfer  
Matilda  
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory  
The BFG  
Roald Dahl  
Diary of a Wimpy Kid  
Jeff Kinney

## NEXT STEPS

From our findings there are some clear ways in which you can help.

- Make sure you understand your child's strengths and difficulties. Promoting strengths is particularly important for ensuring motivation if there are special educational needs.
- If you are concerned about your child's progress in literacy, ask for an assessment. You should enquire about their attainments in decoding (word reading), spelling, writing, reading comprehension and arithmetic skills. Does your child need help in any of these areas?
- Consider whether your child has problems with attention control (for example, sustaining attention). If they do, find ways of helping them stay on task.
- If necessary, make sure that appropriate arrangements are made for your child in school.
- Would your child benefit from developing keyboard skills?
- Encourage your child to join in with everyday tasks which involve reading. Ask your child to read out a recipe for you as you cook or look at newspapers together. Take every opportunity to have discussions with your child and encourage them to share their opinions with you.
- To help your child read independently it is important that you select an easy book that your child will be able to read with at least 95% accuracy. This can make reading fun! Try to make reading a relaxing and enjoyable part of your children's daily routine. Praise your child for reading and talk to them about the books they read.

We would highly recommend the books below. If you haven't already read them, they might suit your child.

Private Peaceful  
Kaspar Prince of Cats  
Michael Morpurgo  
Tilly's Promise  
Linda Newberry  
The Borrowers  
Mary Norton  
The Hobbit  
J. R. R. Tolkien  
The Story of Tracy Beaker  
Jacqueline Wilson