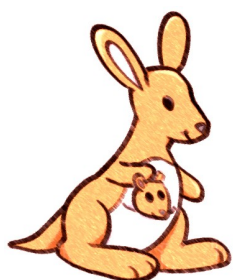




Welcome to the Spring 2012 edition of the Child Development Unit Newsletter! We would like to share news about the team, and details of the projects you may have helped with and those that are in need of volunteers.

If you know of anyone else who may wish to help with our research, please direct them to our website or our new facebook group!

## Welcome to our 2000th recruit!



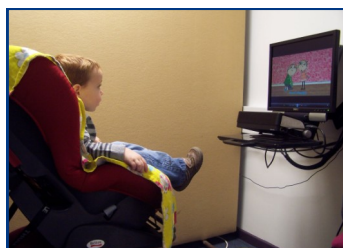
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This year, we celebrated our 2000th recruit: two-year-old James Clark.

The KCDU was established in 2010 to study child development from 18 months through to school ages and beyond, with emphasis on language, cognitive and social development.

Two year old James, who was accompanied throughout by his mother, participated in a short eye-tracking study to see how young children learn to understand basic sentences.



*Our new recruit with the Eye-Tracker*

As with all young visitors to the Unit, James was welcomed into a relaxing

child-friendly environment before moving onto the study – all at his own pace. His mother Kate said: 'James is a very sociable little boy and it was clear from his reactions that he had an enjoyable time. He enjoyed the warm-up exercises, which consisted of playing and naming toys, as well as a cartoon DVD.'

Afterwards he spoke about his experience, merrily talking about the day and his time at the University. Personally, I would like to thank everyone at the Kent Child Development Unit and I wish them every success with their research.'

The response we have received from parents has been encouraging and supportive – without your help and participation few of these important studies could take place. It is incredible that in just over a year we are working with our 2000th volunteer!



*Little James Clark receiving his 'Little Scientist' certificate from Emma, the KCDU Research Assistant*

However, we desperately need around five times as many parents and children to participate as our studies are often focussed on very narrow age ranges. For example, the study in which James took part was only looking at children aged 28 months. You may have seen us actively recruiting in the Canterbury city centre, at NCT sales, or at child centres. If you know anyone who would like to volunteer, please pass along our details!

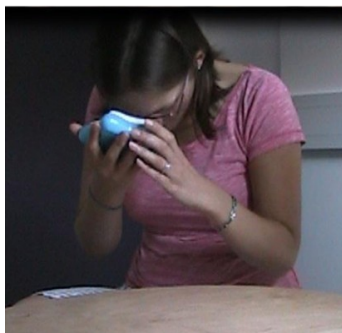
## 14 to 18 months:

### Children love to use and imitate tools

For her masters with Dr Erika Nurmsoo, Angelique Eydam explored how infants learn from others. When teaching a child, adults often make eye contact, and say things like, "watch this!". We were interested in how these cues help children to learn.

We had nearly 60 children visit our lab for this project.

Angelique taught them new ways of using a toy (e.g., turning on a light by pressing it with her forehead).



Sometimes she did this with cues ("watch this!") and sometimes without.

When children got to play with the toys afterwards, we measured whether they copied the new action. We found that children did not need the cues to

learn; they copied the new actions just as often with the cues as without.

Most interesting, however, is that infants really liked copying our tools! They imitated our use of tools nearly all the time, while they were less eager to imitate our strange body actions (e.g., the forehead-light).

Together with student Vickie Leahy, Angelique is following up to explore early tool use. We are in desperate need of more 18-month-olds to invite; please get in touch if you or a friend would like to

#### ***New study!***

Angelique is following up on these findings with older children. Part of learning new skills is learning the 'correct' way of doing things. Angelique is exploring how children between 2 and 5 understand what they have learned, and when they think you should know it too. What affects whether they correct a parent?

*We would like to invite more 18-month-olds to show us how they use tools!*

## 2 to 3:

### How 2 and 3 year old children understand sentences

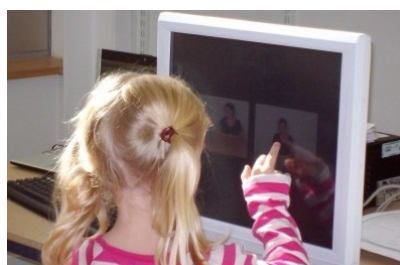
We have now finished the first phase of a study looking at how young children understand sentences. The study was conducted by Rebecca Croll and supervised by Dr Kirsten Abbot-Smith, with the assistance of Dr Cat Davies and Charlotte Guy.

Children aged 2 and 3½ watched videos while listening to simple sentences. Because we were interested in what children know about the construction of language, rather than which words they already know, these

sentences used made-up verbs (for example, 'refting' and 'gradding').

As children watched the videos, their eye movements were measured using an eye-tracker. This small box sits beneath the computer screen and follows their gaze direction during the task. Children's looking and pointing gestures were recorded, to find out which parts of a sentence children use to understand its meaning.

We found that by age two,



*A child using our pointing screen to show us which picture matches the sentence*

children correctly understand active sentences, ('the girl is refting the boy'). However, it is not until around 3½ that children begin to understand passive sentences ('the boy is

being gradded by the girl'). We also found that as soon as children have heard the verb, they can correctly match the sentence to its meaning. The study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, and continues into the second phase this year.

We would like to thank the parents and children who have been involved, and look forward to seeing more of you in our next phase!

#### ***New study!***

We have all experienced that situation when children ask us for something but don't tell us enough to know exactly what they want. Rebecca is exploring this using a picture book game in which 2- and 4-year-olds ask an adult for pictures to complete a story. Can they learn to give enough information to get the pictures they want?

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3 to 5:



## Musicality in primary school children

Even though children love singing, we know very little about children's musicality. As part of a large-scale cross-cultural study, Dr Mike Forrester is exploring children's singing and musicality.

We have finished research in local primary

schools, with great help from Bobbing Village School, Grove Park Community School, and The Brent School. We are now starting to work with secondary schools and adults, but our main focus is on

younger children. We are inviting 3 to 5-year-olds to take part in some

musical tasks.

Children are encouraged to play with the instruments and show researchers how much they enjoy singing.

Let us know if you would like to take part!



*Dr Mike Forrester, Emma Borthwick-Hunter and Jessica Baker displaying their poster in Newfoundland, Canada during the 3rd Annual Interdisciplinary investigation into Singing (AIRS)*

*We are looking for more 3, 4, and 5-year-old singers!*



3 to 5:



## Who will children ask?

Children seem to ask questions all the time, but can they tell who is the right person to ask?

In an ongoing study with children aged 3 to 5, Dr Erika Nurmsoo is exploring who children choose to ask.

Together with two puppets, children identify toys hidden in a series of boxes. One of the puppets is a good source, giving good information and having looked in the right box, and the other is less reliable. When they don't

know the right answer themselves, which puppet will children ask?

So far, we have found that when the puppets offer their guesses about what's in the box, children know to believe the reliable one. However,

when they have to ask, 3 and 4 year olds are just as likely to ask the good source as the poor one.

This study is not complete; watch this space for our final results!

3 to 9:

## Attitudes towards body shapes

From the age of 3, girls are negative towards larger body shapes. With Professor Adam Rutland, students Emily Townsend and Gulcin Yilmaz set out to explore this further.

To investigate early attitudes, Gulcin showed 3- and 4-year-old girls pictures of children with different body shapes, and asked who they would befriend. Some children played with a Barbie

first. Although girls did say they'd prefer to be friends with a thinner rather than a larger girl, this bias was not influenced by playing with the Barbie.

To explore whether daughters' attitudes are similar to their mothers', Emily asked children questions to measure their preference for different body shapes. Mothers were given

similar questions, plus a computer test that measured their automatic associations.

The girls showed negative opinions towards larger body types, preferring more average figures. Mothers did not show a bias, but there is a hint in the computer test that they may have a preference for thinner figures.

While mother/daughter attitudes were not similar,

the girls were heavily influenced by what they believed their mothers think.

More worryingly, in both these studies we have found that girls from the age of 3 show a preference for thinner body shapes.

These findings need more investigation to explore how children's early attitudes are formed.



2 to 4:



## Early helping

Children are eager to help, such as when they hand objects to a person who is unable to reach. Even young children choose who and

when to help. Together with Professor Adam Rutland, students Suada, Hayley, and Sarah are interested in what affects children's choices of

who and when to help.

This study is in its early stages, and we are looking for more children to visit us to help out our friendly puppets!

Thank you to the parents and children who have already participated!

## Why we contact you—and why we don't!

At many of our recruiting events, we speak to parents who have already signed up but who have not yet been contacted to take part. We haven't forgotten you!

There are a few reasons we might not have contacted you yet:

### *Is your child the right age?*

Each of our studies targets a very specific age range. For example, we might need to see children when they are between 18 and 19 months. When we start a study, we look for children who will be within this range during the weeks of testing, so you may simply have been unlucky because your child was just a little too young or too old!

### *Is your child bilingual?*

For many studies on language, the tradition is to see monolingual children, because this is the simplest case. Language is hard enough to study in a monolingual child, and it is even more complex when we consider bilinguals! However, sometimes we are specifically interested in bilingual children, and sometimes—when we are not studying language, for example—it does not matter how many languages your child knows.

### *Do we have your email address?*

We generally send our first invitations by email. If your contact details have changed, or we do not have your email address, we may not be able to get a hold of you. Please let us know if you think you might be in that situation!

If for any reason you don't want to be contacted in the future, please let us know and we will of course remove your details.

## Happy Easter from the Child Development Unit!



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