

Newsletter July 2015

Our Headlines!

## **Psychology Pupil Conference**

On the 6<sup>th</sup> July, the Developmental Studies Centre hosted a Psychology pupil conference day for Year 6 students from 3 local schools. Children took part in several fun psychology experiments throughout the day and got an insight into what psychology was. The day was thoroughly enjoyed by all, with positive feedback from students and teachers.

*"Thank you for a super day! We all enjoyed it and it was a great opportunity for everybody!" - Teacher*

## **Supporting the transition to Higher Education**

This year Dr Alana James has continued to work with local schools on a university-school mentoring project. Current Psychology undergraduate students acted as mentors to small groups of Year 12 pupils taking Psychology A-level, providing an insight into the transition to university level study and support with study skills. You can read more about the project and the rationale behind it on her HEA blog post (<https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/using-mentoring-support-transition-and-out-higher-education>). Schools interested in joining the project in the next school year should contact [Dr James](#) as soon as possible.

## **Some recently Completed Projects**

***Reputation management and the use of disclaimers with friends and new classmates:*** Rachel Nesbit, Natascha Ahmed, Lilian Li, Dorte Sorensen (Recent Graduates)

This project explored children's understanding of disclaimers with familiar and unfamiliar audiences, a strategy used when a person believes they will not perform well or behave appropriately in the future and that others may form negative opinions of them as a result (e.g., I do not think I will do well today because last night I was sick). Children aged 8-11 listened to short stories in which a protagonist either used or did not use a disclaimer when suggesting that they would not perform well at a specific task on the day (e.g., running in a school race) to a friend or new classmate. Eleven-year-olds, but not 8-year-olds, judged that friends and unfamiliar peers would think the protagonist's typical performance was higher when a disclaimer was offered than when no disclaimer was offered, suggesting that 11 year-olds understand the function of using a disclaimer. Further, it was judged that friends would rate future performance and the 'niceness' of



the protagonist as higher than a new classmate. Importantly, we found evidence to suggest that it was more appropriate for the protagonist to not offer a disclaimer when talking to a friend than a new classmate.

***Understanding social, biological, and neuropsychological factors related to feelings of social anxiety and depression:*** Christine Longinotti (DClin student)

This study aimed to understand the importance of attachment with parents, stage of puberty, and how we process emotions in the brain in how children think and feel in different social situations. Over 100 9- to 14-year-olds participated. Children completed a computer based task of looking at some faces, alongside completing some questionnaires. Findings showed that with children who had more negative thoughts of the self and anxiety-related feelings in social situations were more likely to have a more trusting, yet isolated, relationship with their parents. These relationships were stronger for children who were less likely to use the right hemisphere of the brain to process emotions. This work, though using a non-clinical sample, suggests that social relationships are very important in how children think and feel, and these should form the basis of treatment for depression and social anxiety.

## **Get Involved!**

The Social Development Lab at Royal Holloway is constantly recruiting local schools and students to partake in our research projects. Please check out our website ([http://www.pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/social\\_development/site/](http://www.pc.rhul.ac.uk/sites/social_development/site/)) if you would like to be involved in any of the studies currently in progress or would like to discuss any aspect of our work!

On completion of a project we contact schools to provide a summary of the finding for staff and parents. Further, we often give school talks and have participated in INSET days. Please let us know if there is anything that we could offer that would be of benefit for your school, staff, or students!

## Research in Progress

**Defining bullying:** James Dallamore, Grace Pocock, Rihanna Nasrat, Leigh-Anne Smith, Lauren Stacey (*Final Year Undergraduates*)

We are investigating children and young people's definitions of bullying and the strategies which they think will work to combat bullying. We are also interested in whether young people's understanding of bullying differs from teachers' definitions of bullying – so we are also asking primary and secondary pupils as well as teachers to take part! The findings of this study may help schools to combat bullying in the future.

**Understanding the role of attachment and emotion processing in feelings of self:** Hiu-Tung Chou, Celine Dibben, Hayley Gill, Worakarn Saekim, Robyn West (*Final Year Undergraduates*)

To follow up Christine Longinotti's DClin project (see recently completed project), we are exploring how children's thoughts and feelings in different social situations can be predicted from which side of the brain is used to process emotions, and feelings of attachment to parents and, new to this study, attachment to peers. We are looking to visit schools and have 8- to 14-year-olds complete a brief computer based task.

**Role of parent and peer relationships in adolescents' expressions of emotion:** Natalie Asamoah-Russel, Nicola Ashley, Eva Dvorakova, En-Ting Geok, Elizabeth Reynolds (*Final Year Undergraduates*)

In connection to Nadia Somers' DClin project (see below), we are investigating the relationships between emotions and teenagers' relationships with their parents and peers. We aim to explore if for teenagers the relationships with peers may become more important than relationships with parents. Teenagers aged 13+ can take part by completing a survey on paper or on computer in their school.

**Relationships between adolescents' and parents' understanding of feelings:** [Nadia Somers](#) (DClin student)

This study investigates how young people and their parents understand emotions (feelings). We are asking young people to take part by completing a survey on paper or on a computer in their schools, and we are also asking one of their parents/guardians to also answer some questions online. Having information from both the young person and their parent will allow us to develop a much more accurate understanding of how teenagers and their parents handle emotions. Understanding more about this may help to find ways of helping families cope when family members are struggling with their feelings.

**Evaluating if the use reputation management strategies differ depending on levels of shyness and mood:** [Mandy Dimmer](#) (DClin student)

This work investigates whether the behaviours that adolescents use to present themselves can predict how they think and feel in different situations. We are aiming to visit 11- to 16-year-olds in schools and have the children and adolescents complete a brief questionnaire pack containing questions about how they think and feel and the things that they do in social situations. This non-clinical study will provide important insights into how we might help adolescents with social anxiety.

**Factors influencing adolescent emotion recognition:** [Rachel Nesbit](#) (PhD student)

In a series of studies, this project investigates emotion processing in the brain and how adolescents feel in different social situations may influence their ability to recognise emotions. We will be using a computer based task and questionnaires, and possibly a mobile eye-tracker (records where individuals are attending when making decisions about facial emotions). We are looking for schools to take part in studies. We have some studies where we wish to visit children and adolescents only on one occasion, and a study that will involve longitudinal work (where we visit on two occasions). This research will enhance our understanding of how emotion recognition emerges and why some are better at it than others.

## Recent Presentations and Publications

Both [Dr Alana James](#) and [Dr Dawn Watling](#) presented work in April at the Society for Research in Child Development, Philadelphia, US.

Dawn presented work at the Centre for Family Research, University of Cambridge, and at Goldsmiths University. Alana presented work at a meeting of the Indian-European network on bullying, cyberbullying, pupil safety and well-being, and at the Higher Education Academy conference on Student Transitions.

### Publications

Bourne, V. & Watling, D. (2015). Individual differences in emotion lateralisation and the processing of emotional information arising from social interactions. *Laterality*, 20, 95-111.

James, A. I. (2014). Cross-age mentoring to support A-level pupils' transition into Higher Education and undergraduate students' employability. *Psychology Teaching Review*, 20 (2).

Watling, D. (2015). Children's judgements of social withdrawal behaviours. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 33, 180-182.