

The Aston Literacy Project (ALP)

Teacher information sheet



Who is conducting the study?

This project is being conducted at the School of Life and Health sciences at Aston University. It is led by Dr Laura Shapiro (Principal Investigator) and Dr Anna Cunningham (Research Fellow). A group of 16 Research Assistants are being employed to conduct the testing in 15 schools in the Birmingham area. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, an independent government-funded body.

What is the purpose of the study?

Our aim is to investigate the relationship between auditory skills, phonology, and reading in children at the beginning and intermediate stages of literacy development. Importantly, we are attempting to understand whether children who go on to develop reading difficulties have poor levels of phonology, auditory skills, or both at the beginning of school. In order to establish this, it is necessary to follow the same group of children from Reception to Year 1 to see how they progress. Once children have developed fluent reading, the relationships between these skills may change, hence we are testing Year 2 children as well. Therefore, initially, we aim to test all children in Reception and Year 2 at selected schools within the Birmingham area. Due to the need for children to understand complex instructions for the tasks, we have targeted schools in areas that do not have a high instance of EAL.

Children in my class will be tested as part of this project; what does this involve?

During autumn 2011 we will be assessing Reception children only. The parents of all children in your class will be sent a letter (through school) giving them information about the project. They are given the chance to 'opt-out' if they would not like their child to participate. Two research assistants will need to visit the school for a period of several weeks to conduct the assessments. *There are about two hours of assessments for each child to complete, divided up into 5 or 6 sessions of approximately 20 minutes.* A single researcher will usually be able to completely assess around 8 children a week. Therefore, two researchers will need to be present for a period of 4 weeks to assess two classes. Children will be 'borrowed' one by one from the classroom and taken to a quiet area elsewhere in the school to complete the tasks. Our research assistants will endeavour to inform you in the morning or at lunchtime if they will be borrowing children from your class that day and ask whether there are any particular times that you would like them to avoid.

What will I have to do?

This project should not create extra work for you. All the testing is conducted and marked by our trained research assistants. However, there are a few things that we ask of the school;

- A quiet room or quiet area outside the classroom to administer the tasks.
- A class list including dates of birth, and noting any children with EAL or learning difficulties.
- We ask that you tolerate brief absences from class of individual pupils.

What will happen if a child refuses to take part?

At the start of each session, children will be asked if they are happy to do the tasks. No child will be forced to participate, although they will get a sticker as a reward for taking part! Great care has been taken to ensure that the tasks are age-appropriate and engaging for young children. Each child will be asked whether they want to take part before each session. Any child who appears distressed at any time will be thanked and praised for their efforts and the session will be ended.

The majority of tasks will be administered on a laptop computer with headphones. This is to ensure that they are conducted fairly and in the same way for all children.

What will I get in return for taking part?

We will write a report for each class teacher summarising the performance of the class as a whole on all standardised assessments (the reading and Maths tests). This report will not be available to parents or anyone outside the research team.

In a broader sense, this research will help to inform teachers and parents about which children are likely to develop reading difficulties and which children will not. This will help schools to target certain children for the correct intervention from a young age.

Will the results be kept confidential?

Yes. Although we will need to keep records of children's names while we are conducting the assessments, names will be removed from our files before analysis and not included in any reports of our findings. We will not release information about individual children to anyone.

Has this research been reviewed?

The research has been reviewed by peer reviewers at the Economic and Social Research Council to ensure that it is valid, timely and appropriate research. It has also been reviewed by the Aston Research Ethics Committee. All researchers will have CRB enhanced disclosures.

What if I have a query or concern?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should speak first to the research assistants assessing your class who will do their best to answer your questions. Alternatively, contact Laura (L.R.Shapiro@aston.ac.uk, 0121 204 4052) or Anna (A.Cunningham@aston.ac.uk, 0121 204 4190) directly.

Further information can be found at www.aston.ac.uk/alp