WELCOME TO THE 2009 ACADEMIC YEAR. A special welcome to our commencing undergraduate and graduate entry masters speech pathology students and our new research students. 2009 promises to be a busy and exciting year for us. This year will see the roll out of year 2 of our revised undergraduate curriculum. We will also have the first group of students commencing in the new Bachelor of Health Sciences, major in Hearing and Speech. There will also be a focus on reconnecting with our alumni this year, so please pass this newsletter onto anyone you know in the profession who is not receiving it.

I hope you enjoy reading about what else is happening in the discipline and that 2009 gets off to a healthy and productive start for all of our colleagues and students. Regards,

Michelle Lincoln

Who’s Who in Speech Pathology at SYDNEY UNI?

Staff

Congratulations to Dr Bronwyn Hemsley who has been awarded a post doctoral fellowship at the University of Queensland, so sadly she will be leaving us to take up this wonderful opportunity.

This month we have also farewelled Corina Yiannoukas, who has been working in the Discipline as a project manager and research assistant.

Late in 2008 we were fortunate to add Carl Sokkar and Karen James to our Clinical Staff.

Natalie Footit (nee Berg) will also be joining the clinical team for the start of semester.

Dr Jacqui Roberts has also joined the staff of the Discipline to coordinate and promote research in Autism.

Congratulations to Cate Madill and Natalie Munro who were awarded their PhDs at our December 08 graduation ceremony.

It is also with much pleasure that we announce that Kirrie Ballard and Leanne Togher have been promoted to the position of Associate Professor in the Discipline of Speech Pathology.

Discipline SUCCESS

Speech Pathology at the University of Sydney wins a National Australian Government Teaching Award!!

The COMPASS™ Project has been awarded an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Award for Programs that Enhance Learning. The project has been led by A/Prof Michelle Lincoln and Dr Sue McAllister from The University of Sydney in collaboration with A/Prof Alison Ferguson from the University of Newcastle and A/Prof Lindy McAllister from Charles Sturt University. The team were presented with their award at Parliament House Canberra in late November 2008.

Staff Member PROFILE

Kimberley Docking (PhD)

Kimberley has enjoyed her first full year in Sydney since arriving in February, 2008. She completed both her PhD in 2003 and a Postdoctoral Fellowship in 2007, at the University of Queensland. Kimberley’s research has focused on the long-term cognitive-linguistic outcomes associated with children treated for cancer, head injury, childhood stroke and seizure disorders. Her research has shown that these children commonly have longer term higher-level language deficits than previously reported. Kimberley’s current research is dedicated to mapping the neuroplasticity mechanisms and recovery patterns of the developing brain following treatment for leukaemia and brain tumour, and in children with mild head injury. This involves documenting the changes in the brain that occur over time using Neuroscan EEG equipment and is supported by a Cancer Council grant.

Kimberley serves on a number of international committees in the area of aphasia and childhood language disorders, including the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics (IALP) Aphasia committee. She has also worked clinically in a variety of settings including acute hospital based rehabilitation teams, the Queensland education system, early intervention teams, and private practice.

This year Kimberley will be teaching a number of units in the Discipline related to child language, clinical processes, and professional issues. Along with Belinda Kenny, she will also be assisting with student related course coordination.

If you are interested in Kimberley’s research areas or would like to contact her, she can be contacted on (02)9351-9694 or k.docking@usyd.edu.au.
Julia Starling

Becoming a full-time postgraduate student at this stage of my professional career was both completely unforeseen, yet quite inevitable. I wish I could say that I have always been interested in working with adolescents, however the reality is that I had spent a large part of my career actively avoiding any direct contact with them! But, to quote John Lennon, “Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans”, and a special interest in school-age and adolescent language disability took a gradual, but firm hold. What happened next was that every time I found myself berating my profession for having minimal clinical and research focus in this area, and encouraging other clinicians to contribute their valuable experience and resources to the field of research, a nagging little voice would be saying “Well, and what are YOU going to do about it?”. So here I am, a full-time postgraduate student, with a golden opportunity to become completely focused on the issues of adolescents with language disability, in particular looking into the possibilities of speech pathologists and secondary teachers working as collaborative support teams. The study is being funded by a full-time postgraduate research grant, the Jack Bloomfield Scholarship, awarded by SPELD NSW, and I have also recently been awarded a postgraduate student research grant by Speech Pathology Australia. However, apart from the much-appreciated tolerance of my family, it is the fundamental support of some key people in the department that really makes this happen, from the initial encouragement of Tricia McCabe, Kerrie Lee and Michelle Lincoln to apply for a research grant in the first place, and now to my amazing “team” of supervisors, Leanne Togher, Natalie Munro and Joanne Arciuli. Even though I am immersed in the area of language ability and disability, I find the language of statistics and methodology quite incomprehensible, and this is just one area where their input is invaluable. I soon learned that the actual traits needed when taking on a research study are not so much academic as the ability to be very stubborn, to not be afraid to ask a gazillion questions, to be prepared for a roller coaster ride of highs and lows, and to keep a humorous perspective at all times. So a word of encouragement to any budding researchers out there is this: don’t be put off if you don’t know your ordinals from your nominals, or your End Notes from your ANOVAs! Just be ready for a steep learning curve in ways you never imagined. My main message though, is that research in all aspects of communication disorders is vital to our profession, and I am so thankful to have this opportunity to be directly involved in the process. It’s quite an adventure!

Service RECOGNITION

Congratulations to Eva Nemeth, Speech Pathologist at St Joseph’s Hospital in Auburn, who was awarded the 2007 Deirdre Russell Award for Service for her continued support of our Discipline and our students.

The award was presented at a function held on 25th November 2008. This award was established in 1991, to recognise organisations and individuals who have, in a non-paid capacity, contributed to and supported the endeavours of the Discipline.

Breaking SCIENCE


A new rating scale to evaluate single case experimental design studies: the SCED scale. With the advent of evidence based practice it is now an expectation that clinicians and researchers evaluate the methodological quality of treatment studies as part of the clinical decision making process. In Australia, two teams of clinical researchers have developed additional tools to evaluate methodological quality of research; the PEDro team (www.pedro.org.au) has developed the PEDro scale to evaluate group designs and the PsycBITE™ team (www.pscybite.com) has developed the Single-Case Experimental Design (SCED) scale to evaluate single case experimental design studies. This paper presents the items on the SCED scale and the results of 2 reliability studies which attest to the psychometric robustness of this scale. Tools which evaluate methodological quality are useful for a number of reasons. They provide clinicians with a way of determining the quality of papers as part of their clinical decision making. They give researchers benchmarks against which to develop well designed clinical research studies and provide a common language for clinicians and researchers to discuss the relative merits of published research. Finally, it is hoped their use will ultimately improve the robustness of treatment outcome studies and therefore improve quality of life for people with disabilities.

Arciuli, J. Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney, Australia and Monaghan, P. Dept of Psychology, Lancaster University, UK (in press, accepted March 2006) Probabilistic Cues to Grammatical Category in English Orthography and their Influence During Reading

Grammatical category distinctions, in particular the distinction between nouns and verbs, are found in all of the world’s languages and the importance of decisions regarding the grammatical status of individual words during language acquisition (both L1 and L2) has been emphasised in the literature.
The possibility that there is a rich source of probabilistic non-morphological orthographic information pertaining to grammatical category is theoretically important for number of reasons. First, the existence of such orthographic cues does not fit easily with the traditional Saussurian view of arbitrariness between word-form and function. Second, the existence of such cues questions the privileged role of phrasal constraints in resolving grammatical categories. In the current study we conducted a large-scale corpus analysis of trisyllabic English words and found strong cues to grammatical category in the beginnings (e.g., ‘e’ in ‘elephant’) and ends of words (e.g., ‘ant’ in ‘elephant’). Discriminant analyses of 14,638 words revealed that classification accuracy (noun vs. verb) is 67.7% on the basis of the beginnings and 92.6% on the basis of endings. Two behavioural tasks tested participant sensitivity to these cues (in healthy adults) during visual lexical decision and visual speeded grammatical classification. Words with beginnings and endings in line with the actual grammatical category of the word (e.g., ‘marathon’, ‘semester’) elicited advantaged responding compared to words whose beginnings and endings were not in line with the grammatical category of that word. Word endings were shown to have more influence than word beginnings. These data point to the multi-faceted nature of grammatical category representation and have important consequences for cognitive models of language processing. Where language models may have incorporated grammatical category information only at the phrasal level or perhaps in conjunction with morphological processes it is timely to consider that grammatical category information is also reflected probabilistically in word-forms (i.e., orthography).


Children learn to respond to requests for clarification (RQCL) before they are 18 months old. When the communication breakdown is about speech production a number of responses are possible including repetition of the production, revision (better or worse), rewording, confirmation or ignoring the request. Weiner & Ostrowski (1979) reported on the effect of single word, single syllable speech that is caused by different types of RQCL. They found that children made more changes to their speech in response to a RQCL which included a “worse” production than the child had made. Recent research has shown that accurate polysyllabic word production is later developing in typical and disordered children so in this research 6 typically developing 4yo children were asked to say a 50 polysyllabic words and if they made a speech error on any of 18 predetermined words we gave them this special type of request for clarification: We asked them “did you say (predetermined incorrect production) and recorded how they responded. The predetermined incorrect production was a non-developmental “worse” production than the child's production, for example, if the child said “puter” for computer, he or she was provided with a RQCL “did you say dobruder”. When the responses were analysed it was shown that these typically developing children improved their productions (as measured by percent consonants correct) after this type of “worse” prompt. More than 50% of responses were speech revisions and most of these were for the better.

This research may provide us with directions for the development of new therapies and provided insights into the phonological systems of young children.

New External Advisory COMMITTEE

Late last year a new External Advisory Committee (EAC) was convened for the undergraduate and masters program in speech pathology.

The role of the committee is to give advice and direction to the Discipline regarding the attributes of our graduates and future workplace trends that need to be accounted for in our curriculum.

If you have specific feedback you would like to give the university on either of these issues you are welcome to contact Michelle Lincoln, Head of Discipline or the EAC member most relevant.

Below is a list of our EAC members and the groups they are representing. We are looking forward to working closely with our EAC members to maintain the quality of our graduates and the relevancy of our courses to the current and future workplace.

Cheryl Andrews – Private Practice
Leigha Dark – Spastic Centre, NSW
Janet Greely – Speech Pathology Regional Advisor’s Group
Leah Hanley – New Graduate
Eva Nemeth – NSW Student Unit Supervisors
Kerrie Plumer – NSW Department of Health
Liz Poynting – Speech Pathology Managers Group
Justine Watkins – Speech Pathology Association of Australia
Farewell to our GRADUATING STUDENTS

Congratulations and Good Luck

Up-Coming EVENTS

Interprofessional CE Workshops - 25th and 26th March 2009
Will be held in Dubbo, NSW.
Contact Liz Scott for details: e.scott@usyd.edu.au

Health Sciences graduation ceremony - 17th April 2009
Students from the Discipline of Speech Pathology will graduate in the Great Hall
Time: From 2.00pm Location: The Great Hall, Quadrangle

Clinical Education Workshops – Dates to be advised
The Discipline runs workshops for Speech Pathologists who have not supervised students before and/or those who are experienced clinical educators and wish to update their skills and knowledge. The workshops cover areas such as models of clinical education, managing placements, giving and receiving feedback, learning styles and their application to clinical education and an introduction to COMPASS™: Competency Assessment in Speech Pathology. Keep an eye on our News and Events page at http://www.fhs.usyd.edu.au/speechpathology/news/index.shtml. Dates and times for these workshops will be posted on the site as soon as they are scheduled.

For more information
Faculty of Health Sciences
Discipline of Speech Pathology
PO Box 170. 75 East Street
Lidcombe NSW 1825 Australia
Phone: +61 2 9351 9447
Fax: +61 2 9351 9173
email: fhs.csdinfo@usyd.edu.au
website: www.fhs.usyd.edu.au/speechpathology/

Produced by the Discipline of Speech Pathology, Faculty of Health Sciences of the University of Sydney, January 2009.
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CRICOS Provider No. 00026A