



Surrey Communication and
Language in Education Study

Spring 2019

Newsletter

pals.scales@ucl.ac.uk

020 7679 4241



UCL

You have been
taking part in the
Surrey
Communication and
Language in
Education Study
(SCALES)!

What has happened so far?

You were randomly selected out of all the children from Surrey who started Reception class in 2012 and were invited to take part in SCALES. A researcher visited you at school in Year 1, Year 3 and Year 6, and you took part in many different tasks involving language, speech and cognition (a fancy word for thinking!). We have tracked how much your skills in these areas have developed as you have got older and we have learnt lots of exciting things about child development!

Number of children seen Yr 1 (2012/13)	529
Number of children seen Yr 3 (2014/15)	499
Number of children seen Yr 6 (2018)	384

Why is this research important?

The development of language and communication skills in childhood can vary greatly across children. Some children develop these skills with ease. However, other children have difficulties with language, speech and communication. This is known as '**developmental language disorder**' or '**DLD**'. We want to understand why these difficulties occur and how language skills are linked to performance at school and some other skills too, including speaking, listening, learning, relationships, and behaviour.

What happens next?

We would like to visit you at school during Year 8. You will do similar tasks as before, but this time we are also interested in how your social and emotional skills are developing now you are an adolescent. This includes things like how easy you find it to make friends, your concerns about school, or how good you are at understanding how other people feel. We are interested in this because language is one skill that predicts social and emotional health later in life. What we learn from you can help us to find ways to support children with DLD.

What is Language Disorder?

Language Disorder occurs when children have problems:

- Understanding what others say,
- Sharing thoughts and feelings,
- Combining words into complex sentences,
- Taking turns in a conversation,
- Giving the right amount of information in the right order.

If this is the primary difficulty then it is called **Developmental Language Disorder, or DLD**.

Sometimes children have language problems as part of another condition, like Autism Spectrum Disorder, Cerebral Palsy or Down Syndrome. **Every child is different and has a unique pattern of strengths and challenges!**

SCALES found that approximately two children in every classroom start school with language difficulties that have long-term effects on school achievement.





Why is Language important for mental health?

Language helps us to identify, think about, and talk about our emotions. Language is important for taking control of our behaviours and helps us to make good relationships with our friends and family.

As we get older, we use different ways to control our feelings. You might remember a task you took part in when we visited you in Year 6 where you were asked to imagine how your feelings about an event that happened today, might change in the future.

Imagine you have been teased at school today.

Show me how you feel by pressing one of the buttons below



This 'distancing' strategy helps to make us feel better about a negative event that has happened to us today, such as something that has made us feel sad, angry or embarrassed. If we think about our feelings about the same event in the future (e.g in a week or many years' time) we might feel less angry, sad or embarrassed about the event or may not even remember it!

A strategy like this relies on having the language skills to talk yourself through a situation or problem to change your feelings about it; also known as 'self-talk'. Children who have poorer language skills find this very tricky. Not being able to talk it through can cause frustration and can lead to behavioural or emotional difficulties.

We have been busy spreading the word about how important language is for good mental health by speaking to the public about SCALES!



You might have visited us at one of our 'Words4Wellbeing' events where we had lots of different tasks to show how language and communication is important for our wellbeing. Below are some photos from the events!





SCALES STARS - we need your help!



The SCALES team will be visiting several schools across Surrey during the Summer term to run after-school workshops for young people who have been involved in SCALES.

Each session will last approximately 1 hour and we are excited to hear your ideas about what you think might be important for the next stage of SCALES. You will even get the chance to become the face of SCALES in our brand new YouTube video!

In each workshop you will:

- Meet other children in your school and other schools nearby who are also taking part in SCALES!
- Find out what you have helped us to learn so far in our study about child language development.
- Help us to decide what other important things we should include in our research.
- Hear all about an exciting opportunity to get involved in a YouTube video about 'Language and wellbeing' which will be filmed by a **professional film crew!**



RADLD stands for **RAISING AWARENESS OF DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER**. RADLD are a charity who have lots of useful information on their website for

both children and adults who have difficulties with language, speech and communication.

On '**RADLD**' **YouTube channel**, you can find some of the previous videos that have been made about DLD—it might give you some ideas for when you attend our workshops!

<https://radld.org/>



You could be the next Eddie or Dyls featuring in our video!

<https://www.youtube.com/user/RALLIcampaign>

Doctoral Student Projects

Hi, I'm Lydia. I began a PhD project with SCALES in September 2018. Growing up in a poorer



neighbourhood is one factor that has been linked to both poorer language skills and increased mental health difficulties, but we don't yet know how these difficulties are linked. My research hopes to answer

this question using information from SCALES!

The aim of my research is to find out how many children

from disadvantaged neighbourhoods have language difficulties and how problems with language learning might affect how well children perform in school exams. I will also look at the mental health outcomes of children as they move from primary school into secondary school. I've spent the last year working with the SCALES team and had a great time meeting some of you during our Year 6 assessments. I look forward to seeing you again in Year 8!

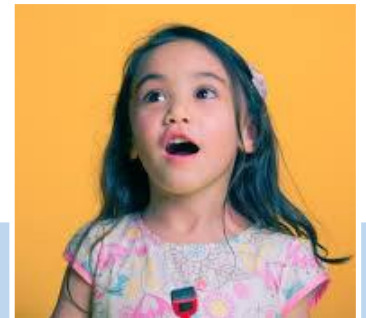


Hi, I'm Ria. In September 2018, I started my PhD with Professor Norbury. I'm a Speech & Language Therapist and before I started my research I was working with children with speech, language and communication needs in schools in south and east London. For my project I'm focusing on

stammering (or stuttering!) in children and the relationship with anxiety and depression.

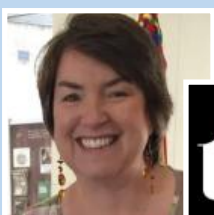
I'm investigating whether children who stammer are more likely to experience mental health difficulties than

children who do not stammer to help us think about how we treat stammering. As well as my research, I work for Action for Stammering Children one day a week as their policy officer which means I advise and talk to politicians about what might help young people who stammer. I'm really enjoying my research and hope that our findings can be used to help children who stammer.



SCALES is making an impact!

The large number of children taking part in SCALES makes our study a really important source of information for people who make policies about education and speech-language therapy. Professor Courtenay Norbury (who set the study up) has appeared in the House of Commons to tell MPs about how important language is for doing well at school and for developing good mental health. As part of SCALES, we estimated how many children start school with language and learning needs—this is called 'prevalence'—and our prevalence estimates have been included in policy documents submitted to Government. One example is 'Bercow-10 years on' which explains the need for speech-language therapy. Finally, the SCALES team spend lots of time talking to teachers—we've even done a podcast about the link between language and behaviour! Thanks for helping us make a difference!



<https://www.tes.com/news/how-misbehaviour-can-be-sign-language-disorder>



We share all of our news stories on our Twitter page: @PALS_SCALES.