

**Seminar 6: Relating psychological theory to education strategies  
in autism spectrum disorders**

Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2007

*School of Education, University of Edinburgh*

Paterson's Land, room 1.21

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- 09.30 Registration & coffee
- 10.00 **Amanda Ludlow**  
*Goldsmiths College, University of London*  
The use of colour overlays in ASD: A significant finding or a simple placebo effect?
- 10.45 **Liz Pellicano**  
*University College Oxford, Section of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Park Hospital for Children,*  
Autism as a developmental disorder: tracking changes across time
- 11.30 Coffee in 'Chapters'
- 12.00 **David Saldaña**  
*University of Seville*  
What does and what does not make readers with autism different?
- 12.45 Lunch in 'Chapters'
- 2.00 **Courtenay Norbury**  
*Department of Psychology, University of Oxford*  
Autism and language impairments: links to learning
- 2.45 **Paula Clarke**  
*Department of Psychology, University of York*  
Can cognitive theories help us to understand reading, language and memory in individuals with ASD?
- 15.30 **Discussant:**  
**Bob Walley**  
*Dept of Psychology, Edenhall Hospital, Musselburgh*
- 16.00 Close of seminar

### **Selection of Abstracts**

Please note that these abstracts relate to seminar presentations, rather than to formal publications and, as such, should not be cited without the permission of the author

#### **Autism as a developmental disorder: tracking changes across time**

Liz Pellicano

*University College Oxford, Section of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Park Hospital for Children*

Parents and clinicians know that the behavioural symptoms of autism wax and wane throughout development. Despite this knowledge, there have been surprisingly few longitudinal studies relative to the multitude of studies published every year on autism. In an attempt to redress the balance in research, I conducted a 3-year follow-up study of 69 children (37 children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and 31 typically developing children) involved in an earlier study examining cognitive functioning in autism (Pellicano, Maybery, Durkin, & Maley, 2006). The findings reveal both stability and change at the levels of behaviour and cognition in children with ASD. The theoretical and educational implications of these findings will be discussed.

#### **What does and what does not make readers with autism different?**

David Saldaña

University of Seville

Readers with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) show poor performance on reading comprehension tasks relative to their word reading. The reasons for poor text comprehension in readers with ASD have been associated with poor inferencing at the sentence or text level. Various experiments involving typically developing adolescents with age-appropriate reading and poor comprehenders with ASD matched on age and word reading are presented. The experiments explore the ability of poor comprehenders with ASD to produce inferences that aid in local text coherence. The influence of knowledge activation, text content and the use of linguistic markers on inferencing are explored. Some potential implications for future research and practice will be discussed in view of these results and the existing literature.

## **Autism and language impairments: links to learning**

Courtenay Norbury

*Department of Psychology, University of Oxford*

Pragmatic language abilities, or how we use language in context, are universally impaired in autism. Structural language abilities, such as grammar, vocabulary and speech sound processing, are much more variable. Does this variability matter? My talk will focus on the implications of structural language impairments for (a) the processing of language in context and (b) the ability to process non-verbal social cues. The relationships between language and social processing on long-term social outcomes will also be considered.

## **Can cognitive theories help us to understand reading, language and memory in individuals with ASD?**

Paula Clarke, Kate Nation, Graham Hitch

*Department of Psychology, University of York*

The Weak Central Coherence Theory (WCCT, Frith, 1989) predicts that individuals with ASD will show a preference for processing details coupled with a weakness in integrating details with meaningful context information. Many researchers have argued that this theory might account for some of the complex patterns of strength and weakness observed in the reading, language and memory development of individuals with ASD. Data will be presented from recent studies examining hyperlexic reading profiles, homograph reading and free recall. It will be argued that whilst behaviours consistent with WCCT may be observable in real life educational settings, in tightly controlled experimental settings differences between high functioning individuals with ASD and IQ matched typically developing controls disappear. Issues with designing reliable measures to probe cognitive functioning in individuals with ASD will be discussed alongside implications for future research into the cognitive basis of ASD.

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### **Organising Committee:**

María Núñez & Clare Brogan

*Glasgow Caledonian University*

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