

# Developing Minds

*Exploring Cognitive Diversity*

A stylized profile of a human head facing right, composed of overlapping curved shapes in shades of blue and purple. The top part is a dark purple curve, the middle is a medium blue curve, and the bottom is a lighter blue curve. The overall shape suggests a brain or a face.

**Newsletter April 2019**

**Kingston  
University**  
London

## Foreword

Welcome to the introductory newsletter from the Developing Minds Lab. We are based at Kingston University within the Department of Psychology. Our research focuses on typical and atypical development across the lifespan. This term, our feature article examines the important issue of social inclusion which will be of interest to parents and practitioners alike.

We will be hosting a variety of different events from workshops to networking events. Our first event will be Young Scientist Days in May half-term where children are invited to take part in a range of our research studies. This year we have developed one of the days to be aimed especially at those in secondary education with more challenging tasks and games. We expect these days to fill up quickly so please make sure you book your space.

It would be great if you could 'like' our new Facebook page and follow our activities [here](#). Alongside the termly newsletter, we will be publishing the results of our research and advertising our events mainly on this page so please don't miss out.

Please feel free to contact us and we hope to see you at an event soon.

Kind regards,

Dr Elisa Back  
Director of the Developing Minds Lab  
e.back@kingston.ac.uk



The logo for Kingston University London, consisting of the text 'Kingston University London' in white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a solid black rectangular background.



# Young Scientist Days

We invite you and your children to come to Kingston University for half a day of fun and games. Come and see what developmental psychologists do to understand how children develop

**Kingston University**  
London

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For more information and to book:

**Reception to Year 6**

30<sup>th</sup> May

<https://www.kingston.ac.uk/YSDchildren>

**Year 7-11**

31<sup>st</sup> May

<https://www.kingston.ac.uk/YSDadolescents>

# We need your help!

We are always grateful for any help in recruiting children for our studies which aim to understand how minds develop. We are equally keen to find out what you are interested in us researching.

## Maths at Home



*What do you think of your child's mathematical abilities?*

*Help us with our research on the Numeracy Learning Environment!*

### **Who can take part?**

Parents of children aged between 4 and 6 years old.

### **How can you get involved?**

Just complete the 30 minutes online questionnaire and share it with other parents:

<http://goo.gl/t4BWGh>

### **Would you like some more info?**

Contact us at [e.ranzato@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:e.ranzato@kingston.ac.uk)

## How do adolescents feel about themselves and why?

What is the impact of social relationships with teachers and peers on adolescents' feelings for themselves?

Help us with our research on the social inclusion and self-esteem of adolescents with and without visual impairments!

### **Who can take part?**

Adolescents with and without visual impairments aged 11-18 years and their parents.

### **How can you get involved?**

- Adolescents will be asked to complete two questionnaires about their feelings and wellbeing. Interviews can take place in their schools!
- The parents of the adolescents will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire which takes no more than 5 minutes to complete!

### **Would you like some more info?**

Contact us at [K1738620@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:K1738620@kingston.ac.uk).

## On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019 it was World Autism Awareness Day.....

The Developing Minds Lab meet every fortnight and during our meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April we had a visiting PhD student (Junik Balisha) from the University of Florence in Italy. He gave a talk discussing the importance of designing autism friendly environments and how architecture can contribute to the well-being of individuals with autism.





## Understanding and Promoting Social Inclusion

Ifigeneia Manitsa

Social inclusion refers to all the opportunities that children with special educational needs have in regular settings in order to be taught all the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. This also includes interacting positively with their typically developing peers and developing social relationships and friendships with them. Research shows that students who feel socially included develop positive feelings about themselves and consequently their self-esteem is higher. It has also been found that the development of social relationships with their typical peers increases their classroom understanding and participation. However, my experience as a special needs assistant and social clubs supervisor in a primary school confirmed what I had read; Pupils with special educational needs usually participate in fewer school activities and extra-curricular activities than their typical classmates and this may have a negative impact on their social inclusion.

According to 'Theory of Mind', individuals have beliefs, desires and intentions, which are inferred from other people in order to understand why someone acts in a specific way or to predict how someone will act in a specific situation. Through this process, people are able to think and react in non-egocentric ways which allows them to develop social relationships.

However, for those with additional needs, attachment disorders during infancy seem to play a considerable role in the development and maintenance of social interactions. There are many differences in the way that infants with and without special educational needs interact with their primary caregivers. For instance, it has been found that infants with visual impairment develop an attachment to their mothers more slowly than typical infants and therefore their mothers need to be more verbally and physically involved with them in order to develop an emotional attachment. Such early experiences can have a significant impact on children's later interpersonal interaction.



The different types of educational settings also have an impact on students' social inclusion, for instance some studies suggest that the number of interactions among students with and without special educational needs is much higher in mainstream schools which promote inclusion. The presence of support teachers next to students with special educational needs is also important for their progress and inclusion, because they are helping them by using adaptive teaching strategies. However, this is a double-edged sword; according to some students, the presence of a support teacher, at times leads them to feel isolated from their typical peers. The extent of their needs is also significant when it comes to the development of social relationships with peers. Typically, students are usually more tolerant towards their classmates with visible disabilities than towards their peers whose disability is not apparent.



The question is what can be done in order to promote the development of social relationships among students with and without special educational needs? Generally, in most countries children with special educational needs are nominally part of a child centred curriculum, where educational interventions take place at schools and all teaching staff are trying to respond to their needs. However, there are some “tips” for how educators may help promote inclusion and some of them are described below.

Before students with special educational needs start attending mainstream schools, the teaching staff need to create the appropriate environment suited to their needs. This could include preparing the equipment they need, for instance any assistive technology and tools, in order to make students feel confident in their new school environment.

We should always keep in mind that typical students may not have previous experience with students with disabilities. Consequently, the educational strategies, that their teachers are going to use, need to provide them with the appropriate awareness; the development of awareness interventions on typical students' attitudes toward their peers with special educational needs is essential for the inclusion of these students.

These awareness programmes may consist of a lesson and a video about special educational needs in order to prepare students for the arrival of their new classmate. They may also include some sensibilization activities toward special educational needs. For instance, 344 students who participated in a study which was exploring the effect of educational interventions on children's attitudes toward peers with visual impairment, took part in soccer tasks using blindfolded goggles and had also the chance to discuss with some soccer players with visual impairment (Reina, Lopez, Jimenez, García-Calvo & Hutzler, 2011). According to the findings of this study, typical children's attitudes towards their peers with visual impairment changed and they started interacting positively with them.

On the other hand, students with special educational needs should also participate in educational programmes in order to reinforce and maintain their social skills. Through these programmes, they learn how to take initiatives, maintain self-control, accept differences and manage their emotions. Lego therapy and social stories clubs are two early educational interventions which can make the difference on students' social life. Students with special educational needs may also be asked to co-operate during these social clubs with their typically developing peers in order to develop social relationships and friendships with them.



The feedback from teachers and classmates is essential to the development of social skills and self-evaluation of students with special educational needs. Many studies which explore the well-being of students with special educational needs indicate that when teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are positive, their students develop the sense of belonging and feel less stigmatized.

It has also been found that the best feedback is the one which is provided naturally by peers and it does not need further intervention from the teachers. Specifically, the presence of friends is the most protective factor against the adverse experiences of social isolation and depression.

The development of friendship plays a considerable role in the protection of students against victimization and bullying. Therefore, it is important to create educational environments which encourage the development of social relationships among students with different needs and as a result this can boost the confidence of students who need the greatest support.



# Further reading



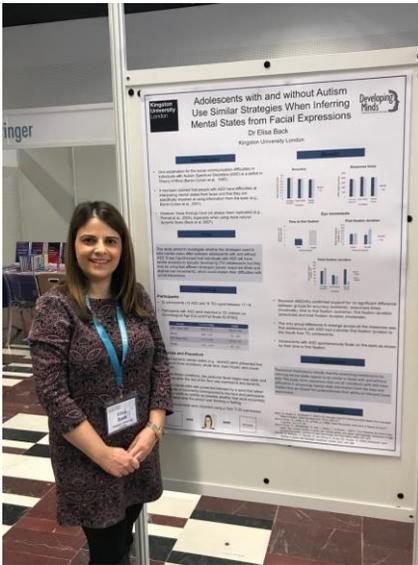
Coster, W., Law, M., Bedell, G., Liljenquist, K., Kao, Y., C., Khetani, M. & Teplicky, R. (2012). School participation, supports and barriers of students with and without disabilities. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 39, 535-543.

Jindal-Snape, D. (2005). Self-evaluation and recruitment of feedback for enhanced social interaction by a student with visual impairment. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 98, 486-498.

Reina, P., Lopez, V., Jimenez, M., García-Calvo, T. & Hutzler, Y. (2011). Effects of awareness interventions on children's attitudes toward peers with a visual impairment. *International Journal of Rehabilitation Research*, 34, 243-248

Uplane, M. & Wadegaonkar, A. (2017). Using 'Socialization Programme for Visually Impaired students' (SPVI) to improve their Social Skills. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 4, 39-52.

# Sharing our research



Elisa Back presented her research on how adolescents with ASD infer mental states from facial expressions at the International Convention of Psychological Science in Paris, 7-9<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

Wendy Ross presented her research on the importance of serendipity when assessing cognition at iCog5 at the University of Reading, 21-22 February, 2019



## Recent Publications

El Asam, A., & Samara, M. & Terry, P. (2019). Problematic internet use and mental health among British children and adolescents. *Addictive Behaviors*, 90, 428-436.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2018.09.007>.

Samara, M., El Asam, A., Khadaroo, A. & Hammuda, S. (In Press). Examining the psychological wellbeing of refugee children and the role of friendship and bullying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*.

# Research Group Members



Founded in 2019, Developing Minds is a research group consisting of academics, PhD students and researchers with a broad range of interests and expertise in how children learn and develop.

## Dr Elisa Back



My research area is social-cognitive development in typical and atypical populations across the life-span. My current research focuses on how individuals with autism perceive and interpret the world and the impact this has on daily life using a range of methodologies including response times and eye movements.

My main area of research is intimate partner violence (IPV), associated risk factors and the mechanisms for intergenerational transmission of this behaviour. I am particularly interested in the evaluation of interventions for perpetrators of IPV and how particular typologies of offender influence the effectiveness of interventions. Recently my work has widened to include aggression in dating relationships in adolescence and emerging adulthood and the evaluation of 'healthy' relationship programmes.

## Dr Delphine Theobald



## Dr Fiona Barlow-Brown

Fiona is a developmental psychologist. Her main research interest is in the development of blind children with a particular focus on reading development. She is also currently investigating the nature of letter reversals in both blind and sighted populations. She is also studying social and academic inclusion in visually impaired and blind adolescents

## Prof. Muthanna Samara

Muthanna's research area is in Developmental Psychopathology. His major research interests are in school and sibling bullying, the long-term outcomes following prematurity and the development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) amongst children in war zones and refugees.



## Dr Maria Livanou



My background is in Forensic Psychology and I have worked in both applied and experimental forensic psychology projects in the past such as in deception detection, false confessions and interrogating techniques. The past four years I have been working with young people in forensic secure services and the youth justice system. My areas of interest include transitions of care across forensic mental health services, policy and practice in forensic mental health, child and adolescent psychopathology and, particularly, emerging personality disorders (BPD), and eating disorders.

## Hayley Hunt

My PhD researches how children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder process another person's face and understand what that person is thinking and feeling. Additionally I hope to explore the production of expression in the faces of those with ASD. I have collected most of the data for my research and I am now investigating the results.



## Rashma Hirani

Rashma is a PhD student investigating micro-expression recognition in typical development across the lifespan as well as children and adolescents with autism.

## Rose Turner

Rose Turner is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Psychology, Kingston University, and she works with a range of organisations employing and evaluating arts-based initiatives in education, criminal justice, medicine and social care settings. Her research investigates engagement with fictional worlds and social cognition throughout the lifespan.



## Wendy Ross



Wendy researches creativity and serendipity. She is particularly interested in children's attitudes to serendipity as well as how we can foster more serendipity and creativity in childhood. Her work is interdisciplinary across philosophy and both cognitive and cultural psychology.

I am a researcher interested in numerical cognition and education. My research focuses on how mathematical abilities vary and develop in typical and atypical populations - such as ASD, Down Syndrome and William Syndrome. A better understanding of number development will allow us to design effective educational programmes to build children's mathematical competence, which is crucial for their independence later on in life.

## Erica Ranzato



## Ifigeneia Manitsa



Ifigeneia is a PhD student in the Department of Psychology at Kingston University. Her research focuses on the impact of social inclusion on the self-concept of adolescents with visual impairment and the way this differs from their typical sighted peers. Her study considers developmental and cognitive theories which are used to explain the development of self-concept in typical and atypical adolescents and the impact of social inclusion on this particular aspect of mental health.