Season’s greetings!

Thank you and Merry Christmas! We hope you’ve had a wonderful 2016 and wish you a happy 2017. With your help we’ve made great progress in our project. We’ve now had the pleasure of working with over 170 children and their families!

Our study is unique because we have the privilege of catching up with our families every year, for three years. Time flies! Some of our children who were only eight years old when we met are now getting ready for their last year of primary school.

Every one of you has made an important contribution to our study and we look forward to updating you with our findings as we move forward. You can have a look at the research questions our honours students asked this year on the next page.

The SciFace Project

Faces are incredible! We can often look at a person’s face and instantly know who they are, what they are feeling and how old they are. When we are children, we are not yet as good as adults at reading this kind of information from faces. People with autism and anxiety can also have difficulties. Our research will help us understand how we develop these very important face-reading skills. If you would like any more information, please contact Ellen Bothe at ellen.bothe@uwa.edu.au or see our website: sites.google.com/site/scifaceuwa
My research focused on the very important ability to recognize face identity, and what might cause this ability to vary from child to child. I wanted to know whether a tendency to process all of the features in a face together, as a complete whole face, might be related to how good children are at recognizing faces. In adults the strength of this tendency to process faces as a whole, which we call “holistic processing” is related to how good individuals are at recognising faces. But we don't yet know if this is true for children. So, we measured holistic processing in children aged from 6 to 10 years. We found that children certainly use holistic processing when recognising faces but interestingly, the strength of their holistic processing wasn't related to how good they were at recognising faces! So we are still on the hunt to find out what kind of processes might cause individual variation among children in face recognition skills. I enjoyed the project, in particular I enjoyed working with all the children and the team in our lab. It was a wonderful experience to share in the struggles, and the fun, of a very challenging year!

We ❤️ Feedback!

We love hearing what you think about getting involved in our research. Here are some comments you’ve sent us this year about your experience:

“Had a great time and can’t wait to go to university now!!” *
“Looking forward to coming back!” * “Always very eager to participate” * “Had a ball!” * “So excited about the whole experience” * “Loved every minute” * “A great first university experience!” *

If you have anything to add, Ellen (pictured) would love to hear it! Email ellen.bothe@uwa.edu.au

This Year’s Honours Students

Prue
Maira

Face recognition is a really important part of communicating and being social. Children with autism can have difficulties recognising identity from a face. Interestingly, typical children and adults who do not have autism can have personality characteristics that just slightly resemble the characteristics of individuals with autism, e.g., a need for order, a tendency to focus on details. We call these “autistic-like” traits and having high levels of these is not necessarily a problem at all! However, we hope to learn more about autism by also studying how these characteristics vary in typical individuals. So I wanted to find out whether typical children with higher levels of “autistic-like” characteristics might also have slightly more difficulty recognising faces than children with lower levels. We found that this was indeed the case, but only for boys. This suggests that the link between “autistic-like” traits and face recognition ability is stronger for boys than for girls. For me, this project was a thoroughly enjoyable learning experience on many levels. Working on the project from the conceptualisation through to the final report was very fulfilling and has taught me invaluable lessons that I know I will draw from in years to come.

Natalie

The ability to recognise faces is crucial for social interaction. Face recognition ability varies greatly among children and adults. Unsurprisingly, people who find it extremely difficult to recognize faces often report feelings of anxiety in social situations! Even among typical adults, those with better face recognition ability report experiencing less social anxiety. So I thought an interesting question for my honours project was to ask whether there is a similar link between face recognition ability and shyness in children, because shy children sometimes find social situations anxiety provoking. However, I found that shyness wasn’t linked with face recognition ability in children aged 6-9. This result is interesting because it suggests that the link between social anxiety and face recognition ability that we see in adults might only emerge later in childhood or adolescence, as social demands increase. I had a great time working on this project and I found it to be a very rewarding experience to work with children!