Dear Parents,
We are excited that we can share with you news about the studies that we have been conducting. With your help we have been able to learn more about how young babies and children learn from social interactions and play!

If you have not yet been invited to take part in one of our studies, it is because your child has not yet fallen in one of the age groups that we are studying. As many of you already know, we are always looking for volunteers for our studies and we are looking forward to contacting you in the future. Below you can read about recent studies carried out in our lab.

**Jokes and Mistakes:**

**Who Can Tell The Difference**

Elena Hoicka has now completed her Phd thesis on children’s understanding of humour. Elena examined whether children understand humour by testing whether they understand the difference between an action done by mistake and an action done as a joke. She showed children unusual actions such as placing a cup on her head. She indicated some actions as accidental by saying the word “Whoops” and some actions as funny by saying “heehee” and laughing. She found that children as young as 19 months corrected her actions when she indicated them as accidental and copied exactly what she did when she had indicated that unusual action as a joke. Older children (25- to 36-month-olds) corrected mistakes and copied jokes. These results suggest that older children corrected mistakes and copied jokes not only for unusual actions but also for familiar actions. These results suggest that by 25 months children can use intentions to tell the difference between jokes and mistakes.

**Reading to Your Toddler:**

**The Things You say When Joking**

How can a toddler know that you are joking? Elena Hoicka examined this in a study where parents were reading a book that had either a sweet or a funny theme to their children. She found that parents used a different tone of voice when reading the two books. Elena also looked for differences between the sentences parents said relating to the book that were not written in the book themselves, and in particular she looked for abstraction. Abstraction is important because humour involves finding joy in things that are not quite right. This means that to enjoy humour, you have to think beyond the text and the images in the book, and think about how things really should be, which involves abstract thinking. Elena found that when parents read the funny pages, they used more abstract language than when they read the unfunny pages.

**Intention Understanding and Language Learning**

Harriet Over is a new Phd student in our lab and she is interested in the relationship between how children learn language and their understanding of other people’s minds. At present, she is conducting a series of studies looking at how 3-year-old children copy speech. So far she has found that when children are presented with grammatical sentences, such as ‘it is sunny today’, they tend to copy the words exactly. However, when we present children with ungrammatical sentences, such as ‘I need need the ball’, they tend to correct the sentences. In other words, children tend to copy the intentions behind speech rather than the words they hear. We hope that our studies in this area can help us to better understand the ways in which children learn.

**Intention Understanding From Intonation**

Elena Sakkalou is now in the third year of her Phd. She has conducted a series of 3 studies on infants’ ability to infer intentions and in particular whether they can do that from the tone of voice. Elena showed infants four toys and she performed a set of two actions on each toy. In the first study she indicated one action as intentional with the word “There” and the other action as accidental with the word “Whoops.” Following these two actions a fun outcome appeared on the toy. When infants between 14 and 18 months were given the toys to play with they performed more intentional actions
than accidental actions. The same study was conducted with foreign words expressed in accidental and intentional intonations. The results again were similar as infants performed more intentional than accidental actions. This indicates that infants are able to infer someone else’s mental states from the tone of voice. Therefore in this study infants were able to understand that the person meant to get the fun outcome by performing the intentional action which was indicated as intentional from the tone of voice.

Imitation Questionnaire
Almost all the parents who came in for one of our studies also completed a questionnaire on imitation. This questionnaire helps us to understand what it is that children tend to imitate or mimic in their natural interactions with their parents. This questionnaire has questions regarding actions, facial and vocal expressions. Currently we are analysing the questionnaires and we are trying to look for relationships between our imitation tasks and the questionnaires. We look forward to sharing our results with you in the future.

Newborn Imitation Study
Sarah May is a new Phd student who is studying newborns’ ability to imitate adult’s facial expressions such as mouth openings and tongue protrusions. The results of a pilot study run by Dr. Mary Fagan last year suggest that infants’ imitation abilities are related to their attention skills. This year they hope to extend those findings. We are looking forward to seeing the newborn babies in our lab.

Other New Studies
Currently we are running a number of new studies. Recently we recorded short video clips of the toys used in the foreign words study. When children come into the lab we habituate them or in other words we familiarize them with these video scenes by showing them to children a few times in a row. When the children become uninterested in these we present them with a scene that is congruent but somewhat different to what they have been seeing, and following this, a scene that violates their expectation about what they saw during the habituation phase. The hypothesis that we have is that children will look longer at the scene that violated their expectation because they find that odd. In this study we record children’s eyes in order to later measure how much time they looked at each scene. Through this method we are examining intention understanding from intonation. The children participating in this study are 12-month-olds and 14- to 18-month-olds.

The Word is Out
Members of our group have been talking about the research that has been going on in our lab at various child development conferences. Talks have been given to the British Psychological Society Conference in London, and the Cognitive Science Society in Canada. Also, more recently five members of our group have been accepted to present their results at the Society of Research in Child Development Conference which will be in April of 2007 in the United States.

A New Arrival
We would like to welcome Dr. Oliver Perra who has recently joined our group. During his PhD, Oliver studied young infants’ facial imitation and gaze following. He then worked in Scotland with children with autism and children born prematurely. He is now at Cardiff University on an Economic and Social Research Council post-doctoral fellowship. His main interests are in infants’ social and cognitive development.

A Big Thank You!
We want to extend a big thank you to our student interns Mareike Stiel, Katy Bowen, Kate Ellis, and Alice Winstanley. Our interns help us to with contacting families and conducting studies. We also would like to extend a big thank you to you too for your continuous support and participation in the studies. We want to thank you once again for helping us enrich our understanding of child development. As many of you are well aware, we always need parents and children to participate in our studies. We are currently testing children from newborns to five years. If you yourself have, or know of any friends or family with children from newborn up to five years and would be interested in hearing more about ongoing studies or taking part in a study, then please fill in the freepost postcard or alternatively you can call us (02920 876190) or e-mail us (development@cardiff.ac.uk).

Who We Are
Dr. Merideth Gattis, Lab Director  
Dr. Oliver Perra, Postdoctoral Research Fellow  
Ms. Elena Hoicka, Postdoctoral Research Fellow  
Ms. Elena Sakkalou Phd Student  
Ms. Harriet Over, Phd Student  
Ms. Sarah May, Phd Student  
Ms. Alice Winstanley, Research Assistant