

## **Welcome to the annual DART newsletter!**

The goal of this letter is to keep interested people updated with the latest research and other activities from the DART group. DART encompasses a range of projects you might have heard of, or even participated in, including the **Click-East** trial of an iPad app for kids with autism and our recent study on **bilingualism and autism**. Since the last newsletter, DART has moved house and is now based at the **Patrick Wild Centre** in the University of Edinburgh medical school. Here you'll find out about recent projects, studies on the go and future plans for people associated with the DART team.



*Sue with her new colleagues at the Patrick Wild Centre getting ready for a marathon team relay!*



*Sarah Hampton,  
DART researcher*

Over the last year DART has been working with colleagues in Psychology and Linguistics, as well as new DART research associate, Sarah Hampton, on a project exploring **attitudes to bilingualism among parents of children with and without autism**. We interviewed a number of families in and around Edinburgh where parents spoke more than one language. Our findings showed that parents of autistic children often felt that it would be prudent to stick to one language – normally English. However the loss of what was often their native language was difficult – parents described their native tongue as the language of the heart. We are now seeking funding to continue this important work. Is bilingualism really a detriment to the development of children with autism? and if not, how can we support bilingual families to raise their autistic children with two language – for example by creating intervention and support materials in multiple languages.

Sue has started a new, occasional category of blog post **Behind the Headlines** in which she unpicks some dramatic newspaper reports, using scientific evidence to dissect their claims. So far she has blogged about spurious links between smartphones and autism and the impact on children of having a mother in paid employment.

DART is also having a drive to provide **plain language summaries** of all the academic work published by authors associated with DART. We hope that the resulting repository of accessible information about the work of DART will help to break down academic / community barriers.

Finally, on our website you can also find **practical guidance** for parents on using technology to support children with autism, and similar guidelines intended for teachers and schools. These are evidence-based guides drawn directly from research at DART. There is also now an **updated app wheel** summarising the DART team's most highly-recommended apps for users with autism

In June 2015 the DART team were delighted to be able to host, in Edinburgh, the first in a series of important seminars. The seminar series, funded by the *Economic and Social Research Council*, is called **Shaping Autism Research in the UK**. The focus of the seminars is to bring together researchers, practitioners (in health, education and social services) and members of autistic and autism communities. Together we hope to set out a vision for the future of UK autism research. The goal of this first seminar was for researchers to come together with the autism community, to identify challenges and solutions to creating, evaluating and disseminating evidence-based supports for children and adolescents. You can read more about the series at [www.shapingautismresearch.co.uk](http://www.shapingautismresearch.co.uk)



*Since moving into the medical school, DART has set up a lovely new lab in Kennedy Tower, Morningside*

In 2014 DART collaborated with colleagues all over Europe to explore how the autism community feels about research into the earliest signs of autism in infancy. As the pie chart below shows, support for early autism research was very strong. Key opinions about early autism research were

- *Sharing information between researchers and participating parents is essential*
- *Getting earlier diagnosis of autism is important*
- *Long-running studies should be responsive to families' needs and opinions*

One **new project** we're just starting at DART is looking at how playing an iPad game changes the way in which children behave at a fundamental level. We are going to record children's eye-movements while they look at pictures from a game.

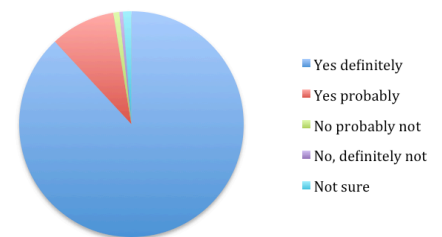
Then half the children will take an iPad home and play the game for about two weeks. When they come back we'll show them the same pictures and see whether their looking pattern has changed.

We'll also be showing them some pictures from different games which they've never played, and some photographs of real life scenes.

The study is important to help us understand the impact of technology on child development – which we believe has the potential for huge benefit but may also carry risks.

We also hope that one day this work will form the basis of a new way to support learning and measure progress for children with autism.

Should early autism research be done?



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Please do get in touch directly if you have any questions or comments or if you're interested in hearing more about our research:

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