Reading development from age 2 to 16: Prediction of divergent developmental paths and understanding of protective and risk factors.

Progress Report from 1.8.2018 to 31.3.2019

Alli Paasikiven Säätiö awarded me a working grant for my dissertation work for the years 2017-2019. I have started using the second year of the grant since August 2018. My project focuses on the risk and protective factors in the development of reading in a long time frame from age 2 to 16. It examines reading development over time and the key factors for the early identification of risks and resolution of reading difficulties. In addition to the cognitive skills, it also includes family risk effects as well as environmental. The project contributes to reading development theorizing and the development of support systems and intervention programs that can be used to support reading skills. It builds on data from two Finnish large-scale longitudinal projects (the Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Dyslexia and the Alkuportaat) enabling the analysis of reading development from grade 1 to 9 and the predictive value of factors from age 2 to kindergarten. The specific research questions are the following; 1) Can we predict reading development and reading difficulties at different ages with very early skills and family risk? 2) Are reading skills and reading difficulties stable from grade 1 to grade 9 in a large Finnish sample? 3) What are the key protective and risk factors for different reading pathways from age 2 to 16?

During the last year, I have managed to work full-time on my project. The University of Jyväskylä has offered me a working room and a supportive working environment. My first article has already been published, the second has been submitted for review and I am working on my third. In the third study, it is examined the development of reading fluency and reading comprehension from grade 1 to 9 and the predictive value of several cognitive skills, parental education, and mother's and father's reading difficulties. The divergent developmental pathways of reading development are examined longitudinally in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 9. The data analysis is underway and it includes a latent growth model to examine the development of reading fluency and reading comprehension across grades. Four possible profiles of reading development have been identified. In addition, it examines whether family risk has a direct effect on children's reading skills or indirect via the early cognitive skills and until which grade. The third study is going to be submitted by the end of spring 2019. The results of the study are going to be presented at two international conferences during the summer and the fall of 2019.

During the last year, in addition to the progress with the papers, I had the opportunity to present my current work at an international conference on reading development and discuss the results of my study with other internationally well-known researchers. This gave me the opportunity to receive feedback on my study both on the methodology that was used and on the factors that could predict the different developmental trajectories of reading. I also participated in the 8th international summer school on literacy (with focus on reading) in the Netherlands in which I had the opportunity to meet several leading senior researchers and discuss my project. During the summer school, senior researchers presented overviews on main areas of literacy research and I also had the opportunity to present my current work and receive fruitful comments. In addition, I spent one month as a visiting scholar at the University of Amsterdam, which is considered one of the leading groups worldwide in the field of learning difficulties. My collaboration with the research group there, gave me the opportunity to learn new methodologies. This was an excellent opportunity for networking, to discuss new ideas and get new perspectives, think about new strategies to approach my research and also get fruitful comments on my studies.

During the academic year 2019-2020, I will be writing the compilation of my dissertation. The defence of the dissertation is expected by summer 2020. The progress with my dissertation would not have been possible without the funding from the Alli Paasikivi Foundation.

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Jyväskylä, 1.4.2019