

Shared book reading with young pre-school children with Down syndrome: exploring parent-child interactions and language boosting behaviours

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Abstract

Background and Aims: The development of language and communication skills is one of the biggest challenges for children with Down syndrome. Although language ability is a well-known predictor of later psychosocial and academic outcomes, few evidence-based interventions exist to enhance the development of language and communication in young pre-school children with Down syndrome. Shared reading has been suggested as possible mechanism for early language intervention for children with Down syndrome (Jeremic et. al, 2023) but few studies have examined shared reading interactions with this group. Our objective is to investigate the characteristics of parental and child behaviour during shared book reading and any language boosting strategies parents may be using. Our findings will inform a future shared book reading intervention for young children with Down syndrome.

Methodology: We recruited eleven children with Down syndrome, aged 12-48 months. Parent-reported and standardised measures of language and cognition, and a Home Literacy Environment Parent Questionnaire were administered. We analysed parental and child behaviours during a videorecorded 8-minute shared book reading interaction, using the Child and Maternal Behavior Rating Scales (Mahoney, 1998; Mahoney, 2008). We also examined parental use of evidence-based language facilitation strategies such as labelling, repeating, asking questions, pausing, recasting, and relating book concepts to child's life experiences (Salley et. al, 2022).

Findings and Results: Preliminary results indicate that parental responsivity and child attention and initiation are positively correlated within this group. We also find that parents of children with lower vocabulary skills tend to adopt less interactive behaviours such as reciprocal exchanges and read more directly from the book. While parents are already using some language boosting strategies, such as questioning and pausing, to engage their child and expand their language skills, this is inconsistent within each parent-child dyad and across the group. All parents report that they would welcome further advice on how to support their child during shared book reading.

Conclusions and Implications: Shared book reading should be further explored as an environment for language development for young children with Down syndrome.