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Developing Reading Comprehension for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder through
Concrete Representations

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Abstract

The ability to comprehend written text is an essential skill for all students, leading to their increased engagement at school, and the development of communication and cognitive skills. Recent research has found that a significant number of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may have fluent word reading skills, but often experience difficulties with reading comprehension. Research is limited on this topic, and there are few studies that have identified strategies that enhance comprehension for learners with ASD.

In the present study, the researcher investigated whether it was possible for students with ASD to improve their reading comprehension through a multimodal, researcher developed intervention, “Show Me”. Concrete figures and objects representing text features were manipulated by the students in accordance with the text they read, as a scaffold to assist their understanding. A single subject multiple baseline design was utilised to assess the effect of the intervention on the reading comprehension ability of three participants (aged 7-10 years old) with ASD. The results established a functional relationship between the independent variable, the ‘Show Me’ intervention, and participants’ ability to respond to comprehension questions during and after a reading session. A smaller relationship was established between the intervention and the verbal output of the students. Staff responses to the intervention were positive and indicated high social validity. The findings suggest that the manipulation of concrete representations may support students with ASD develop their reading comprehension abilities.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Figures and Tables	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Context and Need for the Present Study.....	1
Background of the Study	2
The Nature of the Show Me Intervention	3
Research Design and Measures of Social Validity	4
Purpose and Research Questions	4
The Structure of the Thesis	5
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
Reading Comprehension	6
Current reading comprehension practice	7
Theoretical Models.....	8
Dual coding theory and embodied cognition	8
Reading Comprehension and ASD	9
Theory of mind, executive function, weak central coherence.....	11
Reading characteristics	13
Language differences.....	14
Sensorimotor, visuospatial, and sensory differences.....	15
Current ASD Comprehension Research	16
Modifications.....	16
Focus on language skills.....	17
Teaching explicit strategies	18
Peers	18
Additional supports	19
Visualisation Techniques	19
Concrete Supports	23
Engaging motor processes in learning	25
Concrete materials in reading.....	25
Summary	27

Chapter 3: Methodology	29
Research Design	29
Participants and Context.....	30
Eligibility criteria	30
Screening measures	30
Participant characteristics	32
Setting	36
The Intervention.....	36
Materials	36
Staff training	37
Phases	37
<i>Baseline phase</i>	38
<i>Intervention phase</i>	39
<i>Intervention probe phase</i>	41
Intervention Measures.....	41
Dependent variables	41
<i>Comprehension questions</i>	41
<i>Verbal output</i>	42
Post intervention.....	43
Data Analysis	43
Quality of Measurement	44
Inter-observer agreement.....	44
Intervention integrity	45
Social Validity	45
Ethical Considerations	46
Informed consent	46
Confidentiality.....	47
Summary	47
Chapter 4: Results	48
Research Question One.....	48
Lucy	48
Henry	49
Zavier.....	50
Research Question Two	52

Lucy	52
Henry	52
Zavier.....	54
Research Question Three	54
Social Validity	56
Staff rating scale and feedback	56
Anecdotal feedback	58
<i>General</i>	58
<i>Resources</i>	58
<i>Professional learning</i>	58
<i>Organisation</i>	58
<i>Improvements</i>	59
<i>Student learning, experience, and engagement</i>	59
Student responsiveness	61
Summary	62
Chapter 5: Discussion	63
The Study	63
Constructing a Mental Model.....	65
Visualization and Concrete materials	66
Consider Reading Profiles	67
Focus on Language Skills	68
Referents.....	68
Verbal Output	69
Developing Meaning through Engagement	69
Engaging with illustrations	70
Observations of innovating on the story	71
Implications for Practice	72
Meaning focused skills	72
Assess and develop language skills	72
Develop visualisation skills	73
Multimodal approaches	73
Limitations	73
Sample, variability, and time span	73
Staff influences	74

Baseline	74
Recommendations for Further Research	75
Chapter 6: Conclusion	77
Summary	78
References	79
Appendices	95
Appendix A: Baseline and Intervention Sequence.....	95
Appendix B: A List of Texts used.....	99
Appendix C: Figures and Story Map Examples.....	100
Appendix D: Visual Sequence and Prompts for Baseline and Intervention	102
Appendix E: Intervention Integrity Checklist	103
Appendix F: Staff Rating Scale.....	104
Appendix G: Ethics Approval	105
Appendix H: Ministry of Education Approval.....	106
Appendix I: Principal Information	107
Appendix J: Parent Information Sheet	108
Appendix K: Staff Information Sheet	111
Appendix L: Consent Sheets	114
Appendix M: Confidentiality Agreement	117

Figures and Tables

Figures

<i>Figure 1:</i>	Characteristics of ASD and possible impacts on reading comprehension.....	11
<i>Figure 2:</i>	Theoretical approaches informing the intervention.....	24
<i>Figure 3:</i>	Sequence card for the student.....	39
<i>Figure 4:</i>	Stop visual used during book reading.....	40
<i>Figure 5:</i>	An example of the intervention figures and setting.....	40
<i>Figure 6:</i>	Graph displaying data from responses to comprehension questions.....	51
<i>Figure 7:</i>	Graph displaying data on words and phrases per minute.....	53
<i>Figure 8:</i>	Student experiences displayed on a column graph.....	57
<i>Figure 9:</i>	Staff experiences displayed on a column graph.....	57
<i>Figure 10:</i>	Mean student responsiveness.....	57

Tables

Table 1	<i>Participants' pre-intervention scores in reading and language.....</i>	33
Table 2	<i>Pre and post intervention results.....</i>	55