Global Advances in Pediatric Communication Disorders: Part 2
Autism-friendly Storytimes - Why, Who, How. (Session Number: 1139)
Marleen Westerveld, PhD, CPSP, FSPA – m.westerveld@griffith.edu.au
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Learning Outcomes

Following attendance of the seminar, attendees will be able to:

1. Explain why autistic children are at increased risk of early and persistent literacy difficulties,
2. List and explain the evidence-based principles and approaches for implementing autism-friendly storytimes at home, school, and in the community,
3. Outline how embedding AI in the design of autism-friendly storytimes may promote engagement, individualization and accessibility.

Session Description

This session starts with an explanation of why autistic children may be at high risk of reading failure, drawing on current theoretical frameworks and the body of research, including our own, investigating early literacy pathways of autistic children (e.g., Davidson, 2021; Dynia et al., 2014; Paynter et al., 2024; Solari et al., 2021; Westerveld et al., 2017; Westerveld et al., 2018). It will demonstrate the importance of an 'assess, don't assume' approach, using evidence-based approaches (Paynter et al., 2022), with key messages for speech-language pathologists and educators working with this population. It will then provide an overview of a parent-implemented approach on facilitating early literacy skills at home, using basic technologies such as tele-communication and video-coaching (Westerveld et al., 2021). Subsequently, the presentation will describe how combined findings were translated into an innovative, now freely available, online professional learning program involving librarians and library assistants in charge of community story-time sessions (Paynter et al., 2020).The session will conclude with an overview of future directions, focusing on embedding AI in the design, delivery, and evaluation of autism-friendly story-time sessions—from book selection and adaptation to AI-based assessment, progress tracking, and evaluation. It will outline how AI can enhance child engagement, aid in the individualization of interventions, and improve accessibility, while also reducing the time required for busy clinicians.

Key references: (Emergent) literacy skills of autistic children

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Westerveld, M. F., Paynter, J., Trembath, D., et al. (2017). The emergent literacy skills of preschool children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *47*(2), 424-438. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-016-2964-5

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Westerveld, M. F., Wicks, R., & Paynter, J. (2021). Investigating the effectiveness of parent-implemented shared book reading intervention for preschoolers with ASD. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy,* 37(2),149-162. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265659021995522

Wicks, R., Westerveld, M., Stainer, M., et al. (2022). Prompting visual attention to print versus pictures during shared book reading with digital storybooks for preschoolers with ASD compared to TD peers. *Autism Research*, *15*, 254-269. https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.2623

Watch: https://youtu.be/fgQDzKzlSNo

Links to online resources:

Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM). AFIRM modules are designed to help you learn the step-by-step process of planning for, using, and monitoring an evidence-based practice (EBP) with learners on the spectrum from birth to 22 years of age. Supplemental materials and handouts are available for download. https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules/

Autism-Friendly Story Time e-learning program. This online professional development program was specifically developed for library staff to provide them with knowledge and strategies for delivering autism-friendly story time sessions.

- Promotion video: https://youtu.be/puwGsvOCmco?si=Zs0uEHvyE9JQSJUl
- Overview: https://youtu.be/ytSZb2mqu0Y
- Free e-learning program https://www.marleenwesterveld.com/e-learning/story-time/

Emergent literacy development in young children on the autism spectrum

- Webinar: https://youtu.be/7r3zemZEkvk

Parent-implemented shared book reading intervention for preschoolers on the autism spectrum

- Overview: https://youtu.be/GpQr8E03QyE
- Program manual and resources: https://www.marleenwesterveld.com/intervention-programs/

AI resources / websites

I will share some more resources and links during the talk, but here are some of my favorite ones. I have no financial interest in any of these tools or sites.

Teachshare.com: https://www.teachshare.com/toolbox
Using AI to create social stories, generate text-depending questions, and create lesson plans.

ChatGPT: Use ChatGPT to create short age-appropriate stories. You may consider using the following prompt - fill in the [*blanks*] with your own text:

Create a short story for a [*age*]-year-old child
Title: [*enter your title*].
[*provide a description of the main character*].
[*provide a brief description of the setting*]
Make sure the story has a story grammar: setting, problem, actions, resolution, ending
Each page should have some text and a visual prompt for me to generate images
Create a list of Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 words

To create images [these have free options]:

- http://krea.ai/image
- ChatGPT
- https://grok.com/ (basic access is free)

Use Canva to create animated stories:

https://youtu.be/Lg68e1CLAtc?si=hLGZGhz89Zg-gxzE

Contact details

- Follow me on Instagram: @dr.marleenwesterveld.slp or @global_tales_network
- Access my personal website: www.marleenwesterveld.com
- Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=C5ot_eEAAAAJ&hl=en