Thank You

We’d like to thank all of the families who participated in our Communication Camp and Club research study.

PRESUPPOSITION

Presupposition is an assumption about the world that is not directly expressed. It is a background belief relating to what a speaker says, the truth of which is taken for granted during conversation. For example, if I ask you if you are feeling better, a presupposition would be that you were previously sick. What is important to note is that a presupposition must be assumed or known by both the speaker and listener during discourse in order for the information conveyed to be appropriate to the conversation.

What We Set Out To Do

Our aim for this research study was to learn whether an intervention that used narratives to support children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in improving their conversational skills was useful. We introduced story excerpts that focused on the characters’ ability to use skills involving presupposition.

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Children with ASD often differ from their typically developing peers in their use of presupposition to manage the topics and information during conversation. This makes maintaining a cooperative, mutually engaging reciprocal conversation challenging to sustain.

We observed increased theory-of-mind and social communication skills (significant group differences in scores) from pre- to post-intervention based on parent report (CCC and SRS parent questionnaires) and on one non-standardized measure (De Villiers) in children who experienced our treatment.

We also saw increases in expressive language skills (significant group differences in scores) from pre- to post-intervention on two of the parent questionnaires (CCC and Vineland).

We found that school-age children participating in this 10-week narrative-based intervention targeting presuppositional skills displayed gains on some measures of theory-of-mind, general social communication, figurative language, and expressive language skills across contexts. Most notably, the majority of gains were observed by caregivers (via parent report) in a context outside of the clinical setting. For those participants who were tested up to 12 weeks after the intervention ended, these gains were maintained. The participants did not demonstrate gains from pre-to post-intervention on other measures of the use of conversational skills (e.g., deception, relevance, sarcasm, irony) or in their general level of autistic symptomatology.

These findings should be interpreted cautiously because many measures were tested, while only a few showed significant improvement. However, the observed post-intervention changes in social communication skills suggest that there may be a true relationship between using narratives as teaching contexts for children with ASD or social communication difficulties and increased presuppositional and social communication skills.

Further research might employ different assessment measures, more participants, more performance probes during the intervention period, and take place within a more naturalistic setting. The results of this preliminary report indicate that further study of this intervention may be valuable.

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