

Title: The co-construction of shared memories: Conversations between mothers and their children with speech and language impairment.

Abstract:

Mother-child conversations about past events have been the focus of a wide body of literature examining how a mother's reminiscing style impacts her child's development of autobiographical memory and of self-regulation abilities. Little research, however, has examined how this type of reminiscing occurs between mothers and children with speech and language impairments. This study examines the interactional strategies mothers and their children with moderate to severe speech and language impairment employ in order to co-construct shared memories during conversation. Participants include three preschool boys (one with moderate language impairment, one with severe language impairment, and one with severe speech impairment) and their mothers. Elicited reminiscing conversations, spanning over a year for two of the participants, and ethnographic interviews revealed patterns of interactional strategies used by children and their mothers to orient themselves to each other and achieve inter-subjectivity in conversation about abstracted experience. With the support of their mothers, all preschool children, despite even severe impairment, were able to converse about shared memories and contribute their own elaborations about past events. These findings highlight children's conversational and referential abilities in the context of a close relationship and shared experience. Symbolic play and peer socialization are typically emphasized in speech and language treatments for preschoolers, and language and conversational abilities may be easily underestimated when not considered in additional contexts. Mother-child reminiscing is another context in which clinicians may observe preschoolers demonstrate high levels of language and interactional competence, making it an important context for intervention.

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