

Abstract:

Mothers whose children have developmental delays have been found to act differently in interactions with their child in comparison to those whose children are developing typically. For example they have been found to be more directing, controlling and intrusive (Tannock, 1988; Glenn, Dayus, Cunningham & Horgan, 2001). Some have suggested that the mother may be compensating for the child's delayed cognitive abilities or they act this way in response to child factors. For example, children with Down syndrome (DS) can be passive, inattentive and lack task persistence. Such factors may hinder a mother from enforcing a highly responsive parenting style (Sterling & Warren, 2014).

On the other hand, further research has found that being overly directive can have a negative impact on a child's cognitive and language development. Various researchers have reported that parents whose children have DS can be less sensitive and more directive than parents of typically developing children during interactions. This has also been reported to change with age (Slonims & McConachie, 2006).

However, currently no study has followed two groups (DS and TD group) longitudinally and assessed whether parental responsiveness is related to the child's concurrent or longitudinal language level.

Our current study followed a group of children with DS (n=13) and typically developing children (n=35) for 1 year. The groups were matched for non-verbal mental age; the DS group were followed from 18-21 months to 30-35 months and the TD group from 9-11 months to 22-23 months.

A 5 minute parent child play interaction was filmed at 2 time points 6 months apart for both groups. These were then transcribed and coded for parental responsiveness. Receptive and expressive language measures were taken at 3 time points. Parental behaviours were coded using a scheme for structured mother-infant play interactions (Murray & Karpf, 2000) which codes maternal behaviours such as: verbal control, coercions/intrusions and sensitivity. The study addresses the following questions:

- 1) Will there be differences in parental responsiveness between the two groups? Specifically will the parents of DS children act more directive during interactions?
- 2) If parents are rated as being overly directive and not sensitive during interactions will this have a negative impact on their child's language concurrently or longitudinally?

Preliminary results suggest there are differences between the two groups of parents in how intrusive they are during interactions. Specifically the parents whose children have DS are showing more physical intrusions during interactions. Results are currently being analysed and will be ready for presentation at the conference.