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BOOK-SHARING IMPROVES CHILDREN'S ATTENTION SPAN

Several important findings emerged from the study of dialogic book-sharing conducted in Khayelitsha (Vally et al., 2015*). This infographic summarises the study's findings on children's attention span.

To understand how the study was set up, see Infographic #1 of this series.

What was the context of the research?

SOUTH AFRICA IS CONSIDERED A "LOWER MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRY" (LMIC). RESEARCH HAS FOUND THAT IN LMICS,



11-33%

of carers actively involve their children in "cognitively stimulating activities", such as reading time, interactive play time, or other activities that stimulate the child's brain.



10-41%

of carers provide materials to their children that are "cognitively stimulating", such as books or interactive toys.

THESE LOW RATES CAN BE DUE TO A VARIETY OF REASONS, SUCH AS A LACK OF RESOURCES OR TIME.

Why is the development of early attention important?



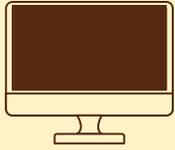
Researchers in early childhood development have found that the ability of young children to sustain their attention, or concentrate, helps the development of their brain.

In fact, it has been found that a young child with good early attention abilities is likely to make especially good future educational progress.

*The original article is: *The impact of dialogic book-sharing training on infant language and attention: A randomized controlled trial in a deprived South African community* by Zahir Vally, Lynne Murray, Mark Tomlinson and Peter Cooper. It was published in 2015 in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

How was child attention assessed?

To assess child attention span, the researchers used the "Early Childhood Vigilance Task".



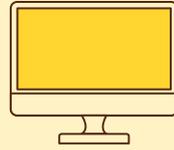
This is an assessment done on a computer.



On the screen, the child is shown interesting moving cartoon characters.



The child watches the screen as images appear, disappear, and then reappear over a period of seven minutes.



Assessment before training



This assessment was carried out before the book-sharing training and then again afterwards.

Assessment after training



Child sustained attention is measured by the number of seconds the child looks at the screen.

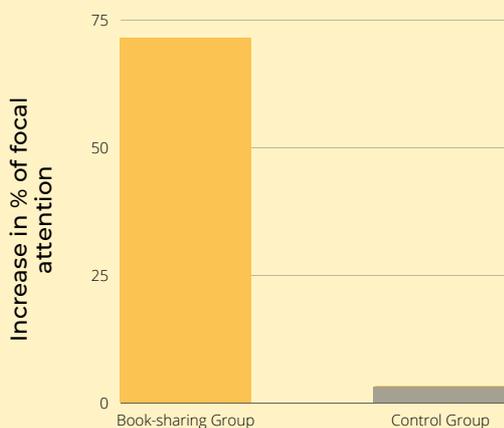


The child's behaviour was recorded on video, and two different researchers watched the footage to record each child's visual focus during this task.



The performance of the children whose carers received the book-sharing training was compared before and after the training. Additionally, the performance of these children was compared to the performance of the children whose carers did not receive the training.

What was the outcome?



For the children in the control group, there was no change between the first and the second assessment in the amount of time they looked at the screen.

The children whose carers had received the book-sharing training, in contrast, almost doubled their attending to the screen compared to before the intervention.

Conclusion

The study found that the impact of the book-sharing training on infant attention was "particularly striking".

The group of children whose carers did not do the book-sharing course showed no change in the attention measure. The training group, in contrast, evidenced an improvement in attention that was both "reliable and substantial". This finding is very important.

Children's ability to sustain their attention is a good predictor of their later cognitive development and educational achievement

About this series

The "Making Sense at Mikhulu" infographic series summarises our research as follows:

- #1** How we gathered data for our first major research project on book-sharing in South Africa
- #2** Book-sharing improves children's language skills
- #3** Book-sharing improves children's attention span
- #4** Book-sharing improves carer-child relationships
- #5** Book-sharing makes children more emotionally aware
- #6** Book-sharing has an especially large benefit for children with the lowest language and attention skills
- #7** Could book-sharing contribute to the challenge of reducing levels of violence?



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