

Giving children with Down Syndrome the tools they need to learn

13 September 2018

Children with Down syndrome could benefit from new research at the University of Reading that is teaching children and adults how to learn.

Prof Vesna Stojanovik at the University of Reading has found through a study of children with Down syndrome (DS) aged between one and two years old that giving parents new tools that help to break down barriers to learning can improve [language development](#) in these children.

Vanessa Nicholls, mother of a child with Downs syndrome, who lives in Berkshire, founded a charity called Breakthrough Learning to transform the lives of children and adults by developing learning and thinking skills. She is collaborating with Prof Stojanovik on research working with school age children with DS. The project will test a mediated learning intervention that will give DS children a strategy for understanding how learning takes place.

Prof Vesna Stojanovik, Associate Professor at the University of Reading says:

"Children with DS learn and develop skills in different ways—they may not develop [language skills](#) in the same way as other children, but given the right learning environment their [language development](#) improves."

Helping children with Down syndrome to develop language skills differently is more likely to be effective according to a new paper that has been published by Prof Stojanovik.

The article in *Research in Developmental Disabilities* found that there were significant differences between typically developing children and those with DS in terms of skills and ability that may predict language development.

The group of typically developing children demonstrated that they are able to follow cues

such as following a pointed finger to pinpoint an object from their parent or carer, and these cues help them label items; this is one of the first steps towards building vocabulary.

Prof Stojanovik continued:

"Our research has suggested that infants under two (from 9-10mths) generally pick up cues, but that some [children](#) with Down [syndrome](#) often don't pick up on these cues as effectively. Children with DS who were better at picking up on these visual cues at 18 months had better language skills 12 months later."

Provided by University of Reading

APA citation: Giving children with Down Syndrome the tools they need to learn (2018, September 13) retrieved 20 September 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-09-children-syndrome-tools.html>

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