Emergent literacy skills are thought to develop through transactional relationships between child characteristics and environmental variables. Child characteristics suggested to contribute to literacy learning include speech and language development, cognitive processing profile, social-communication skills, joint engagement, and the absence of maladaptive behaviors. Environmental variables supporting emergent literacy include opportunities for interactions with others in high-quality literacy and language environments. The emergent literacy skills of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are characterized by strong visual and phonological memory, variable decoding proficiency aligned with variable cognitive skills, and poor language and reading comprehension.

This study presents data from five children (ages 4-6) with ASD in response to an adapted group shared reading intervention, that addressed emergent literacy. This study had three aims: First, to characterize the group adapted shared reading intervention and to determine the strength and significance of relationships between intervention methods and child performance variables (i.e., emergent literacy quiz, and per-session measurements of joint engagement and maladaptive behavior). Second, to explore trends in child performance variables in response to intervention, and to evaluate the effects of
intervention methods on child performance variables. Third, to determine if child participants demonstrated significant differences on emergent literacy measures from pretest to posttest. Intervention methods and relationships between variables were characterized and evaluated using descriptive and correlational analyses. Individual and group trends were explored using visual-graphic analyses. Effects of intervention on child performance variables were determined using three Poisson generalized linear mixed effects models. Dependent t-tests were used to determine if there were significant differences between pretest and posttest on indices of emergent literacy. Results suggest group-level improvements in emergent literacy, high levels of joint engagement and low levels of maladaptive behavior; but with significant individual variability. Implications regarding the feasibility of a group adapted shared reading intervention model are discussed.