

## **Developing a new consortium for outreach activities**

Juliana Gerard (Ulster University), Shauna McGill (Ulster University), Tandy Haughey (Ulster University), Victoria Singer (Ulster University), Victoria Simms (Ulster University), Raffaella Folli (Ulster University), and Jocelyn Dautel (Queen's University Belfast)

This demo session will reflect on a series of outreach activities conducted by a newly formed consortium of child development researchers across two UK institutions: Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast. We note the fundamentally collaborative and interdisciplinary nature of the series, which has fostered further connections both between the researchers in the consortium and with external stakeholders. The demo itself will feature an outline of planned activities for increasing engagement at future events, including a website redesign and recent focus group findings on expectations for outreach events.

Our research consortium was established in 2023, with the aim of taking a unified approach to delivering outreach activities for local families. The consortium members focus on a range of areas in child development; in addition to language, these include literacy and primary education, mathematics, physical development, and social development. While the research areas span different department and institutions, these connections have since produced a number of research collaborations. Moreover, the shared research interest on child development has allowed for more coordinated approaches to participant recruitment.

Since forming the consortium, we have delivered outreach activities at local community centres on a semi-regular basis. The activities consist of interactive demonstrations of research methods or accessible activities to communicate research results. For example, activities on language development involved a colouring task to demonstrate research on research passives and relative clauses in bilinguals. The activity included colouring books with pictures adapted from Adani's (2011) picture selection task (see also Gagliardi et al., 2016), as in Figure 1. Rather than pointing to one of the characters, children are prompted to colour them in, based on instructions which contain one of the relevant sentences as in (1) and (2); the instructions are formatted to look like a children's picture book so that parents can participate with their children. At previous events, parents have expressed interest in the method, which has also facilitated further discussion on crosslinguistic variation and bilingual acquisition. Other activities have included a discussion of bilingual acquisition with parents, a phonics walking tour, self-regulation app to promote Child Wellbeing and an app to support the development of the Fundamentals of movement.

Next, while the in-person outreach activities have been well-attended, we are aiming for future activities to combine these activities with online elements. This is important, given that the activities have largely been delivered in urban areas. By including online elements, we encourage engagement from families who are less likely to travel to the in-person activities, thus reaching a broader proportion of the population. To promote this engagement, we have partnered with an external stakeholder who conducted focus groups with parents before our outreach event in February; we will share key insights of these focus groups at the demo.

Finally, we aim to develop a resource for delivering outreach activities "from scratch": particularly for early career researchers, it can be daunting to know which connections to make. At the demo, we will present the consortium's previous and planned activities, and collect corresponding examples from other research consortiums. Common themes will be shared following the conference on our consortium site for researchers.

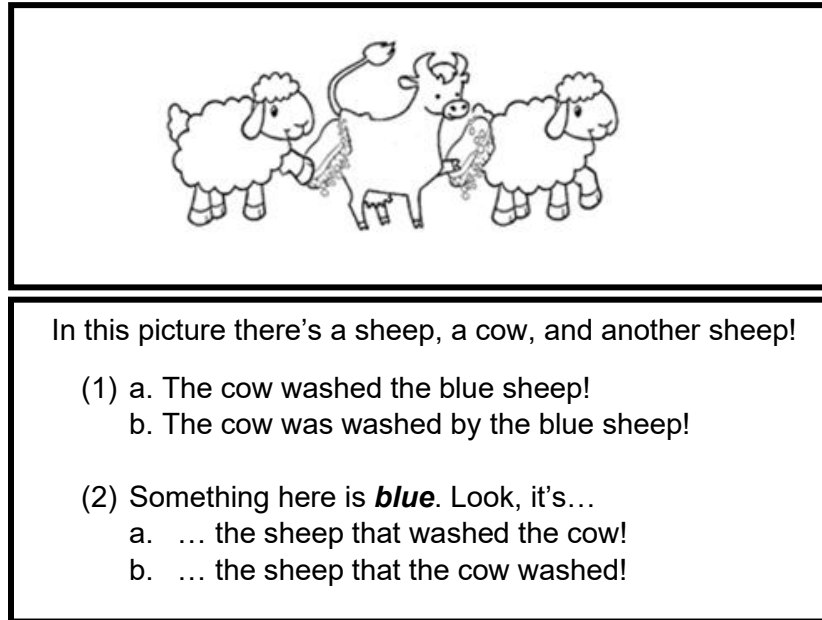


Figure 1. Colouring book pages

- Adani, F. (2011). Rethinking the acquisition of relative clauses in Italian: Towards a grammatically based account. *Journal of Child Language*, 38(01), 141–165.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000909990250>
- Gagliardi, A., Mease, T. M., & Lidz, J. (2016). Discontinuous development in the acquisition of filler-gap dependencies: Evidence from 15- and 20-month-olds. *Language Acquisition*, 23(3), 234–260.