



Nottingham Trent
University

Movement and Storytelling

24/11/2025

The Team

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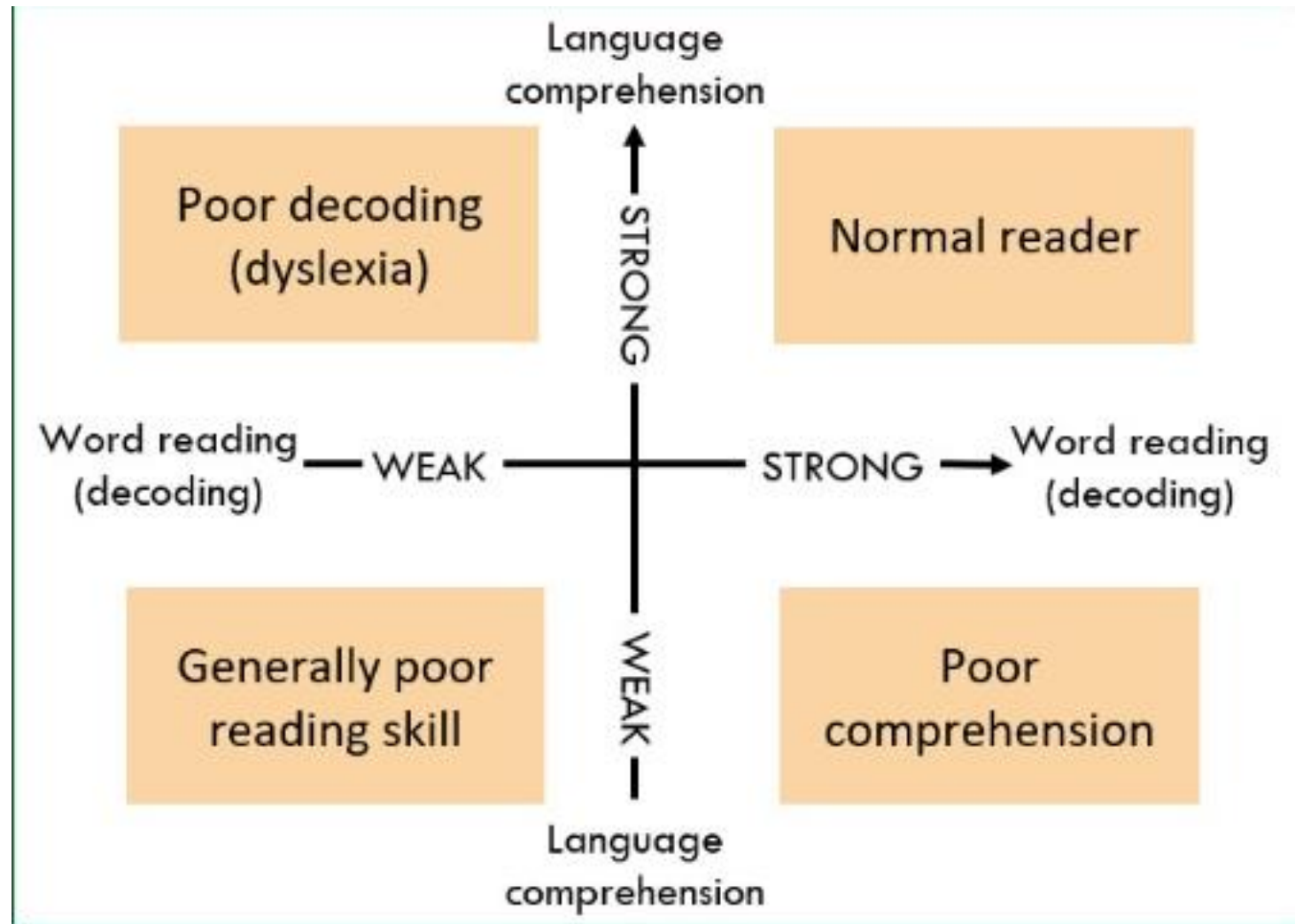
Why Sharing Stories is Important...

- Interventions that enhance language skills in early years have been shown to improve communication and social skills (Glonek and King, 2014) and reading comprehension (Fricke et al., 2013).
- Engaging children in story-telling leads to benefits in language development (Kory and Breazeal, 2014), including in culturally diverse populations (Goodman and Dent, 2016; Peterson and Spencer, 2016).



Language Underpins Reading Ability

- Interventions that enhance language skills in early skills improve reading comprehension (Fricke et al., 2013), which is associated with better academic outcomes (Oakhill et al., 2016).



Fundamental Movement Skills

- Locomotor: walk, run, hop, skip, jump, side-step, gallop
- Object (with a ball): catch, throw, bounce, roll, kick, strike
- FMS are key to being more physically active (Jaakkola et al., 2015).
- Increased physical activity and fitness has been linked to better academic performance and self-regulation Haapala et al. (2017).



Why Combine Movement and Stories?

- **Brain activation:** movement and physical activity increase blood flow to the brain. Therefore, the immediate period post-activity is an ideal time for learning (Donnelly et al., 2016; Voss et al., 2014).
- **Executive function:** movement and language share same underlying processes of self-regulation (Diamond and Lee, 2011).
- **Embodied cognition:** sensorimotor experiences gained through bodily actions within the environment are important and useful for developing cognitive capabilities and cognitive processing (Engel et al., 2013).

EYFS

Characteristics of Effective Learning

Playing and Exploring

ENGAGEMENT

Finding out and exploring
Playing with what they know
Being willing to 'have a go'

Active Learning

MOTIVATION

Being involved and concentrating
Keep trying
Enjoying achieving what they set out to do

Creative and Critical Thinking

THINKING

Having their own ideas
Making links
Working with ideas

Areas of Learning and Development

Birth to 5 Matters Aspects

Prime Areas

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

Making Relationships
Sense of Self

Understanding Feelings

Physical Development

Moving and handling
Health and Self-care

Communication and Language

Listening and Attention
Understanding

Speaking

Specific Areas

Literacy

Reading
Writing

Mathematics

Mathematics

Understanding the World

People and Communities
The World
Technology

Expressive Arts and Design

Creating with Materials
Being Imaginative and Expressive

(birthto5matters.org.uk)



The Structure of a MAST Session

Priming
(5 mins)



Movement (10-25 mins)



Embedding
(5 mins)



12-week programme, whole-group, twice a week.

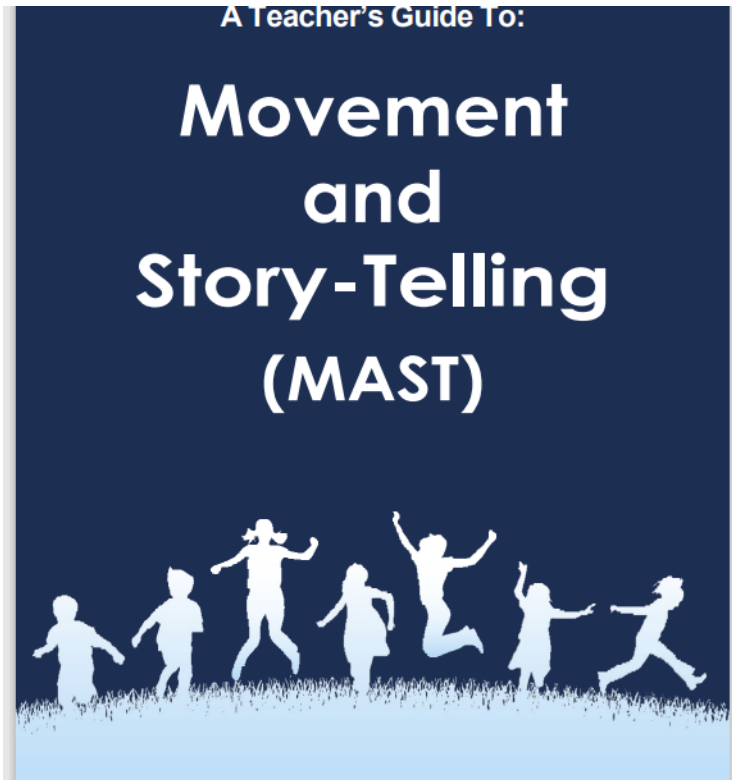
Why Use Games to Build Capability?

- Significance – ‘we are built to play, and built through play’
- Voluntary – ‘safe and pleasurable’, intrinsically motivating
- Challenging – overcoming unnecessary obstacles
- Uncertain – potential for improvisation, holds our interest
- Failure – games provide a safe (and satisfying) place to fail
- Community - play builds connection
- Constraints – finding the hidden potential in ordinary things



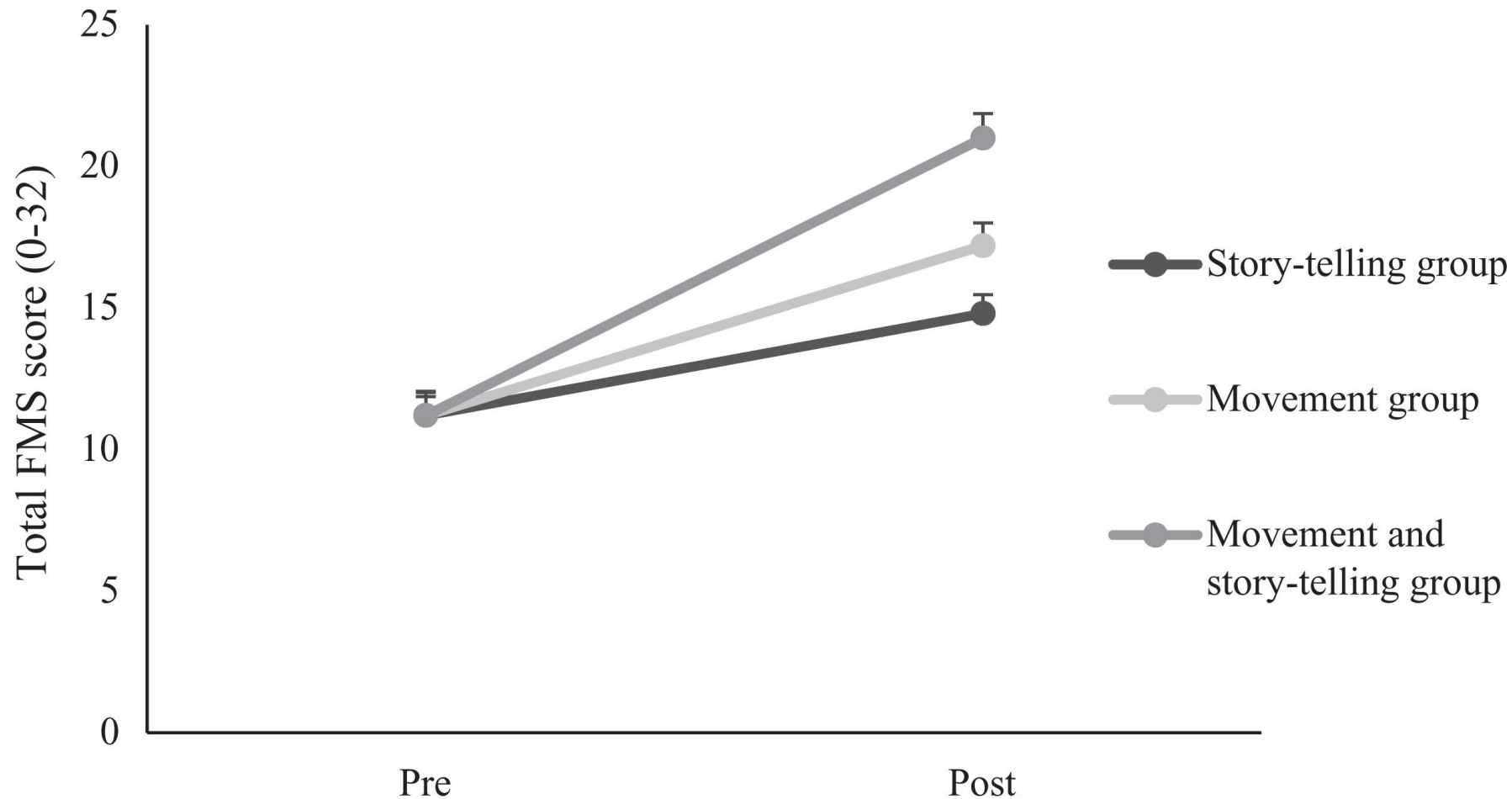
Watkins, D. & Moseley, A., (2022) “Envisioning research through a lens of play”, *The Journal of Play in Adulthood* 4(1), 52-71. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5920/jpa.997>

Funded Evaluation Projects



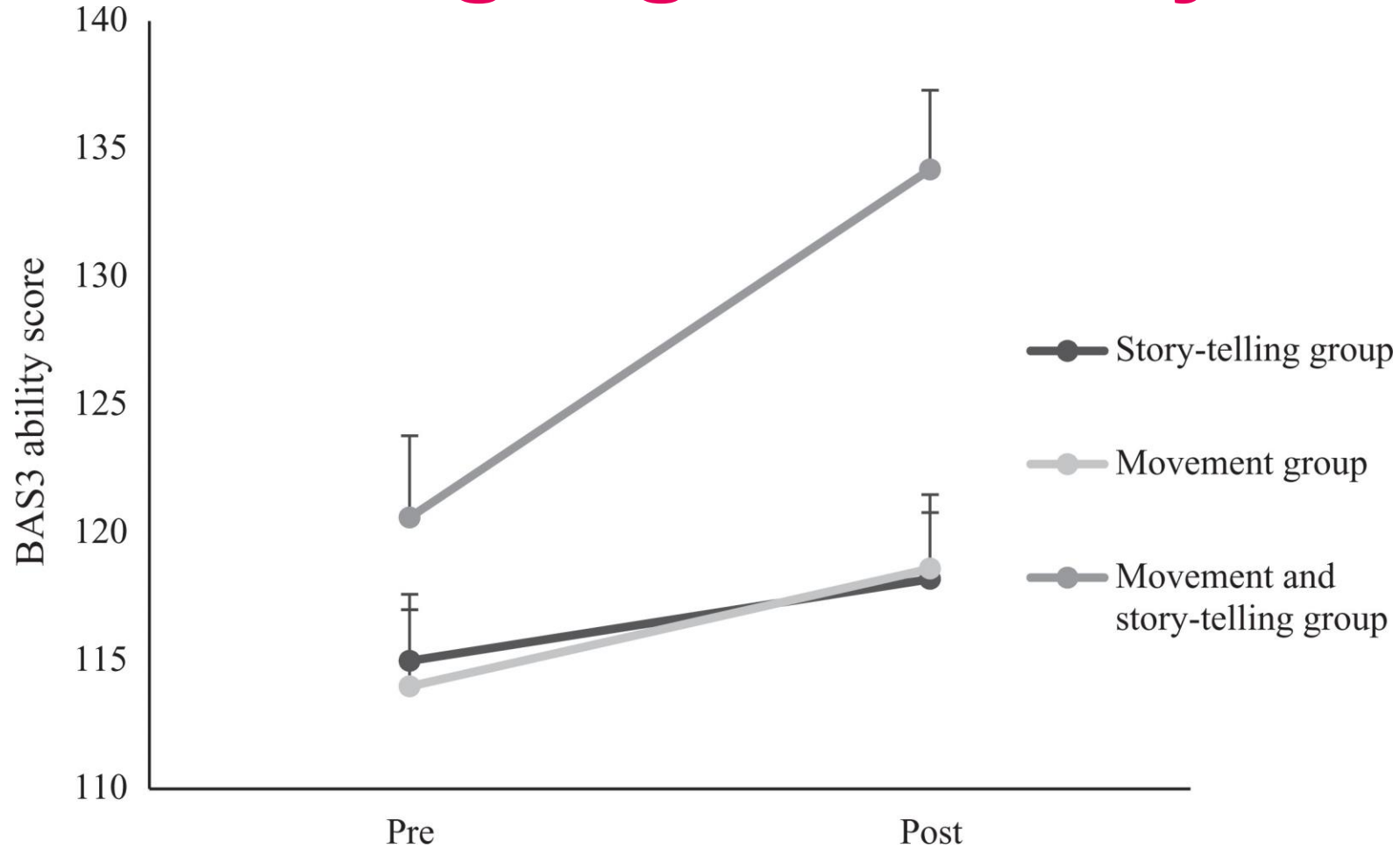
- One in pre-school settings (3-to-4-year-old children)
- One in reception classes (4-to-5-year-old children)

Impact on Motor Skills – 3 to 4 year-olds



Duncan, M., Cunningham, A., & Eyre, E. (2019). A combined movement and story-telling intervention enhances motor competence and language ability in pre-schoolers to a greater extent than movement or story-telling alone. *European Physical Education Review*, 25(1), 221–235.

Impact on Language - 3 to 4 year-olds



The Reception Teacher Study

- Nine schools, random allocation to control or MAST
- One day training for reception teachers, plus peer support WhatsApp group
- 12 week programme – Locomotor (Gruffalo) and Object Skills (Stick-Man)
- Teacher Guide with session plans

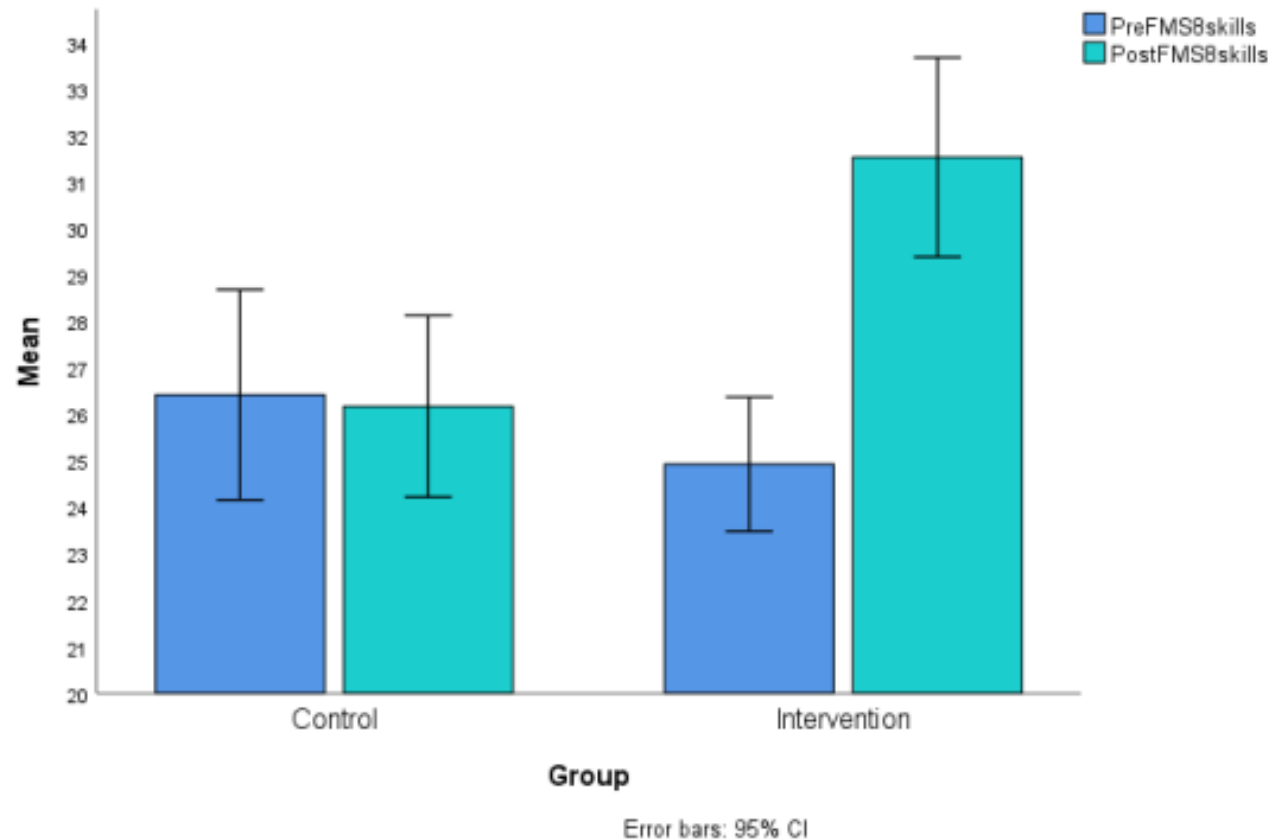
Table 1. Participant characteristics at baseline.

Variable	Intervention (M(SD)/%)	Control (M(SD)/%)
Age (months)	56.4 (3.8)	57.0 (4.4)
Gender (boys)	56.4%	46.9%
Pupil Premium	22.6%	23.5%
EAL	24.1%	42.0%
Height (cm)	107.5 (16.4)	109.5 (5.2)
Weight (kg)	19.1 (3.0)	18.6 (2.7)

Note. Intervention n=133, Control n=81.

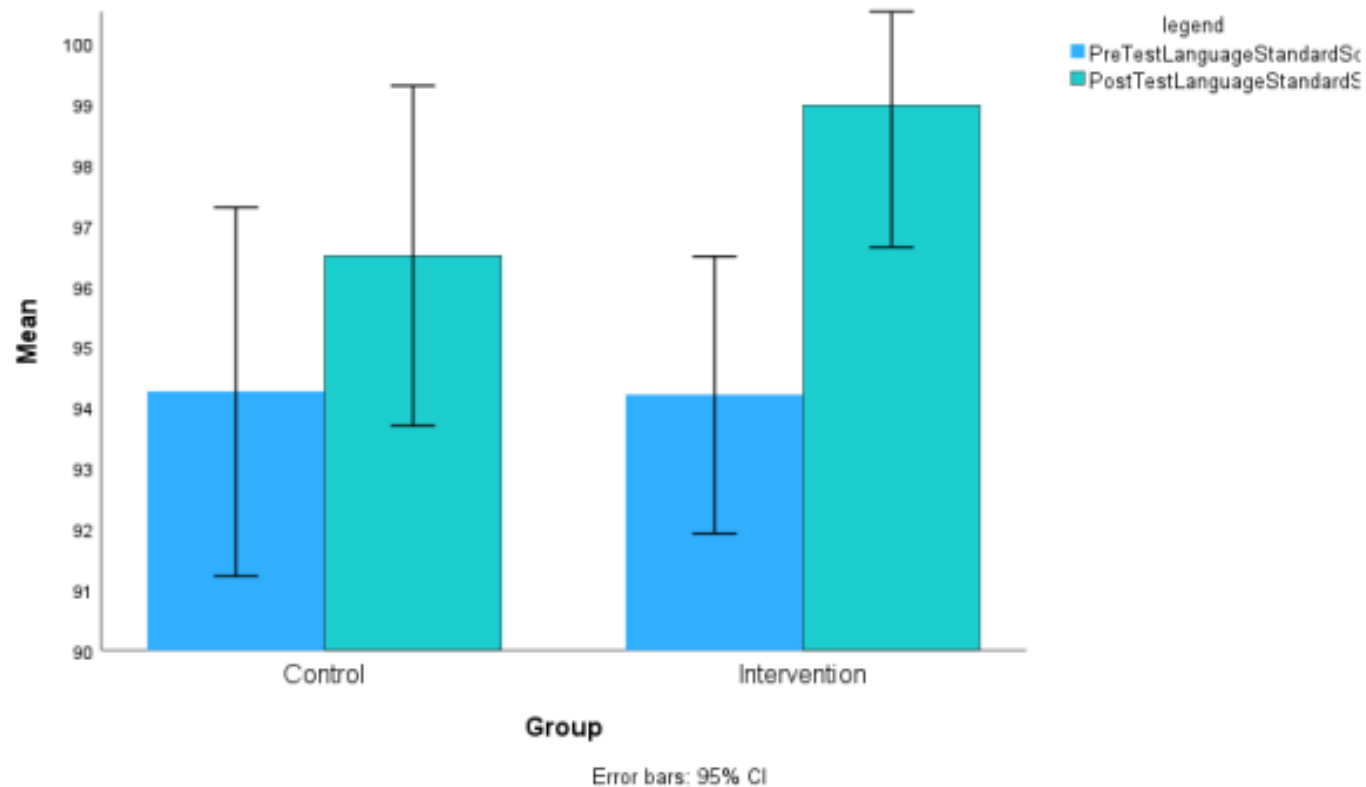
Impact on Motor Skills – 4 to 5 year-olds

Figure 10. Graph to show increase in FMS scores from pre- to post- test across groups.



Impact on Language – 4 to 5 year-olds

Figure 9. Graph to show increase in language scores from pre- to post- test across groups.



Selecting Suitable Books

- Rich Illustrations
 - Supports conversations about word meanings, locations and narratives
- Rhythmic / rhyming narrative is preferred
 - Creates a predictable frame to support 'chiming in'
- Familiar Stories are helpful
 - They reduce memory demands which allows children to think about characters, story and words more deeply
- Favourite and / or Relatable Characters
 - Allows children to connect to the events of the story more readily.

Guide for Language Work

- **Overall support children to...**
 - Understand the character
 - Understand the environment
 - Understand the story
 - **Name or identify** things or characters
 - **Describe** objects, people, environments
 - **Model** sentences for the children
 - **Show** emotions or movements
 - Allow children to use gesture to 'talk'
- **Priming Phase Questions**
 - Who is this?
 - How might they move?
 - Where do they live?
 - **Embedding Phase Questions**
 - What can you see in the picture?
 - Why do you think that they feel this way?

Let's see MAST in action...

- Video of Matt delivering MAST in Manchester
- Catch Session based on 'Stick-man'
- 4-5 Year Olds, Low SES, high SEND school catchment

- All Video resources are available here:
- <https://www.youtube.com/@mast7208/videos>

















Now design your own lesson!

- Pick a book to work with.
- Select from one of the templates on your table.
- Plan how you would structure the priming and embedding phases.
- Think about how you would integrate movement activities
 - Adaptations for the available space?
 - Adaptations for your children?

If you are interested in more

- We offer a full day of training and follow on support to schools who want to try using MAST
- Email me if you would like to set up bespoke training for your setting

- Respect copyright
- Stay in touch

- clare.wood@ntu.ac.uk



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Thank you

Analysis

Table 3. Regressions predicting post-test scores.

Outcome	Post-test Language				Post-test FMS				Post-test HTKS			
	Predictor	b	SE	t	ΔR^2	b	SE	t	ΔR^2	b	SE	t
Intercept	17.76	8.29	2.14*	0.66**	5.67	12.96	0.43	0.19**	36.62	15.35	2.38*	0.51**
1. Pre-test score	0.79	0.04	19.95**		0.42	0.17	2.41*		0.71	0.09	7.48**	
1. Age	0.12	0.16	0.76		0.20	0.22	0.92		-0.37	0.31	-1.19	
1. Gender	-0.76	1.58	-0.48		3.38	1.53	2.20*		-0.12	1.04	-0.12	
1. Pupil premium	-2.15	1.23	-1.74		-1.60	1.88	-0.85		2.57	1.74	-1.48	
2. Group	2.67	0.96	2.77**	0.01**	5.62	0.96	5.84**	0.10**	1.02	2.04	0.50	0.00