



RIDDLL

WINTER 2025

NEWSLETTER



Happy New Year ✨

The Research in Developmental Disabilities and Language (RIDDLL) Lab wishes you a happy new year going into 2025!

Thank you all so much!

We are so grateful for everyone who takes the time to participate and support our lab. All of our work is possible because of your time and effort.

Follow our new Instagram!



@uw_riddl_lab

On our Instagram, you will find weekly posts with lab highlights and updates!

Involvement

If you are interested in the work we are doing or would like more information on how to get involved, please reach out to us at:

riddll@waisman.wisc.edu

Or visit our website!

<https://riddll.waisman.wisc.edu>



RECRUITING PROJECTS

LEAF Study

Autistic or Fragile X Research Participants Wanted!

For a study on language & executive functions

- 8-12 year old girls with a Fragile X OR Autism diagnosis

Why?

- To address a gap in information about FXS & autism in females
- To assess how executive functions & language impact academic achievement & adaptive behaviors

Study Participation Involves:

- 2 in-person visits
 - 2 years apart
- Language & behavioral testing
- \$200 compensation
- Families receive a report with their child's assessment results

Click on the study title and follow the link to interest forms!



LEADer Study

Children Needed for UW-Madison Study on Language Impairment

They may be eligible if they:

- Are **4-8** years of age, have a **speech, language, or learning impairment OR** a diagnosis of **developmental language disorder (DLD)**, **do not** have **autism** OR
- Are **4-8** years of age, have a **speech, language or learning impairment** and a diagnosis of **autism** OR
- Are **9-17** years of age, **male**, have **fragile X syndrome**
- Speak primarily **English**
- Speak in at least **2-3 word phrases**

Study participation:

- 2 timepoints, 2 years apart at the Waisman Center
- 6-8 hours of activities (with breaks) completed in 1 or multiple visits
- \$150 total for participation at both timepoints (\$75/visit)
- Travel compensation for families > 10 miles outside of Madison, WI
- A standard report following testing



The TOMI Project

Concerned about how much your child is talking? We are looking for:

- 2-3-year-olds
- Behind in talking
- Primary language in home is English
- No known developmental disability

Study Participation Involves:

- Complete audio and video recordings in your home
- Research staff will come to your home for two hours to test your child
- You will receive \$150 for completed participation



LAB MEMBER SPOTLIGHTS



Megan Tennesen

Research Assistant

Megan graduated from UW-Madison in 2024 with degrees in Communication Sciences and Disorders, and Theatre and Drama. Megan is interested in child language development in children with disabilities and improving intervention opportunities. Megan is an examiner on the LEAF project which is focused on Language and Executive Functioning in autistic girls and girls with Fragile X syndrome (FXS). Megan also supports data collection and analysis for the TOMI project, Leveraging Technology to Identify Outcome Measures for Young Children with Down Syndrome. Megan is currently applying to graduate school to pursue a MS in Speech-Language Pathology. In her free time, Megan enjoys acting in plays, playing rugby, crafting, and going on hikes.

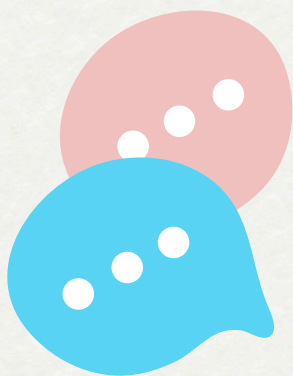
Latifatu Mohommed

PhD Student

Latifa is a second year PhD student at UW-Madison, originally from Ghana, West Africa. She has her Masters in Speech and Language Therapy from the University of Ghana. She is interested in understanding social communication and parent-child interactions and how these influence language development, assessments and intervention practices. Currently, Latifa is an examiner on the LEAF project which is focused on Language and Executive Functioning in autistic girls and girls with Fragile X syndrome (FXS). Her first project is focused on understanding conversational skills, particularly the question-response behavior in autism and FXS. She has presented some of her findings as posters at both the SRCLD 24 and ASHA 24 conventions. When she is not working, Latifa enjoys cooking and hanging out with her friends and family.



SUMMARIES OF RECENT FINDINGS



Opportunities to Respond During Dyadic Caregiver-Child and Naturalistic Family Interactions Among Children with Down Syndrome: A Preliminary Investigation

We often find that caregivers provide lots of great opportunities for their children to communicate, and we wanted to know more about these opportunities including how often and why they happen. We looked at this in interactions where it was just the child and one caregiver and also when both caregivers and sometimes siblings were present.

We found that children with Down syndrome had more opportunities to respond to their caregivers during one-on-one interactions compared to more naturalistic family contexts. This is important information to have when we think about child learning opportunities in caregiver-implemented communication interventions.

Citation: Elmquist, M., Ford, A. L. B., Lorang, E., & Sterling, A. (2024). Opportunities to Respond During Dyadic Caregiver-Child and Naturalistic Family Interactions Among Children With Down Syndrome: A Preliminary Investigation. *American journal of speech-language pathology*, 33(4), 2041–2050. https://doi.org/10.1044/2024_AJSLP-23-00179

The Complexity of Opportunities to Respond Used by Mothers and Fathers of Children with Down Syndrome: A Preliminary Investigation

We also wanted to know more about how these opportunities to respond looked like. So, we looked at the complexity of questions caregivers ask their children. For example, questions related to something the child can see (e.g., what color is the ball?) or questions about something that happened in the past (e.g., what did you do at the zoo?). We looked at this across one-on-one interactions and naturalistic family contexts.

We found no differences between mothers and fathers in the complexity of questions they asked their children during one-on-one interactions. We also found that while children heard less questions during more naturalistic family contexts compared to one-on-one interactions, there wasn't a difference in the complexity of the type of questions they heard.

Citation: Elmquist, M., Ford, A. L. B., & Sterling, A. (2024). The complexity of opportunities to respond used by mothers and fathers of children with Down syndrome: A preliminary investigation. *Journal of child language*, 1–14. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305000924000370>



SUMMARIES OF RECENT FINDINGS



The Impact of Autistic Traits on Joint Attention in Young Children with Down Syndrome During Mother-Child and Father-Child Interactions

Joint attention is when two people are both paying attention to something at the same time. It's a great opportunity for children to learn new words. We were interested in how mothers and fathers engaged their young children with Down syndrome in joint attention and how children responded to it. We also wanted to know if children who had Down syndrome and autism had different ways of using joint attention.

Moms used joint attention more often than dads, but the children responded to joint attention the same way with both parents. Autism did seem to impact how often children used and responded to joint attention.

Citation: Sterling, A., Lorang, E., Reis, K., & Elmquist, M. (2025). The Impact of Autistic Traits on Joint Attention in Young Children With Down Syndrome During Mother-Child and Father-Child Interactions. *American journal of speech-language pathology*, 1–11. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1044/2024_AJSLP-24-00041



LAB ACTIVITIES

The lab has been to lots of events this past year! Check out all the places we've been to recruit, share our research, or volunteer to support our research community!



RIDDL Lab members & friends celebrating Audra being recognized as an ASHA Fellow



Latifatu and Claudia at the 2024 SRCLD Conference.



Marianne and Emily from the LAB lab at Science on the Square



Claudia, Danny, Amy, Alyssa, and Gigi's members at the GigiFit dash for Down Syndrome.

WHO'S IN THE LAB?

We've grown in the past year! Meet some new folks (names underlined), see some familiar names, and celebrate our lab alumni who have gone on to amazing new positions.

Audra Sterling: Lab Director

Susen Schroeder: Lab Manager

Marianne Elmquist: Research Scientist

Amy Banasik: Speech-Language Pathologist Researcher

Claudia Schabes: PhD Student

Tiffany Chavers-Edgar: Post-doctoral Researcher

Latifatu Mohammed: PhD Student (see lab member spotlight!)

Sydney Meyers: First-year MS-SLP Student

Megan Tennesen: Research Assistant (see lab member spotlight!)

Alexandra Towle: Capstone Student

Ellie Engels: Undergraduate Student

Bailey Finch: Undergraduate Student

Brooklyn Friederick: Undergraduate Student

Danny Variano: Undergraduate Student

Grace Wanzong: Undergraduate Student

Ashely Capizzi: Undergraduate Student

Recent Lab Alumni



Grace Geyso

Currently a speech-language pathology graduate student at Marquette University



Alyssa Ewell

Graduated with a MS in Speech Language Pathology
Completing CF in Seattle at a pediatric outpatient clinic



Kylee Commet

Graduated with a MS in Speech Language Pathology
Completing their clinical fellowship year at a pediatric outpatient clinic in Ann Arbor, MI.