

Using the hookboard with preschool children with Down syndrome

Denise Pattison

Special Needs Assistant, UK

The hookboard is a new resource to help develop fine motor skills, colour recognition and hand/eye co-ordination

Introduction

As a Special Needs Assistant, I work one-to-one with two children with Down syndrome in a pre-school play group setting. Both children are to be included in mainstream schools. I introduced the hookboard to play sessions and use it at two-week intervals.

Oliver is four years old and has good general health. He has about 20 words. His gross motor skills are very good. He runs, kicks, throws and climbs with confidence.

Siobhan is three years old and her general health is also good. She has poor vision and wears glasses to correct this. She walked at three years old. Her communication, speech and language skills are developing well and she uses around 50 spoken words and Makaton signs. She loves books and has a good attention span.

This article details my observations of the children across a number of sessions with the hookboard

Oliver – 10 minute session:

With the hookboard assembled, I rock it back and forth to make the cubes swing until they eventually fall off. Oliver helps me pick up the cubes and I hook them back onto the board, naming the colours. As I do this, I ask him for the red or blue cube to see if he can select the colours accurately. He has not been consistent with naming colours yet. This continues until all the cubes are in place. So far in this session, Oliver has not been successful in hooking



on any of the cubes. He then takes all of the cubes off the board, one at a time, using both hands. He seems to have more difficulties with some of the cubes as they are hooked to left or right. Oliver then tries to hook on a cube but realises he has to move it from hand to hand to position it with the hook uppermost in order to locate its position on the board. He tries this several times without success. Sometimes he does not let go of the cube at the correct moment and does not get the hook at the correct angle. Eventually, his persistence pays off and he is successful. Finally, his peers arrive and join him in

hooking on the cubes. Then I show Oliver how the cubes are stored in the hookboard feet (tracks), and he helps me put them in.

Oliver – next session 15 minutes

Oliver can now hook on all the cubes, although not yet in their correct colour position. When asked to hand me a green or red cube, he is not yet able to select the colours accurately but he now relishes his new ability to hook the cubes onto the board. He arranges the cubes in the feet without assistance at the end of the session.



Oliver – next session 10 minutes

With support and modelling, Oliver can now match the coloured cubes to the correct hooks. He has developed his accuracy and the speed with which he is able to hang the cubes and he does not drop them as frequently as he did in previous sessions. He lines up the cubes with hooks all facing the same way and, with help, turns the cubes on their sides to build a tower.



Oliver – observations and progress

At each subsequent session, Oliver appears to remember and build on what he has achieved. I have introduced number, i.e. “put two red cubes on the board first, then one green cube”. He still needs some help with colour differentiation but in our most recent session he has said “red”, “ue” (blue), “green” and an approximation to ‘yellow’. Oliver still enjoys the sessions and his peers have also enjoyed using this resource.

Siobhan – first session

I introduced the hookboard to Siobhan and in her first session she found difficulty in taking the blocks off the board. She uses one hand to pick up a cube and attempts to hang it holding it by the hook. She eventually manages to unhook all the cubes with help. When asked to hand me a red or blue cube, she is right four times out of five. She is not accurate with yellow and green cubes and cannot identify the orange cube yet.

During later sessions, Siobhan learnt to align the hook by passing from hand to hand and turning the cube in her preferred hand until ready to locate the hook.

She enjoys lining up the cubes and sorting the colours. She can now name all of the colours except orange.

Subsequent sessions

At each session, she shows improvement in dexterity, and has great pleasure in her achievements. Her colour recognition is improving, as is her ability to complete an instruction.

Summary

In my opinion, the hookboard is colourful and tactile and its components are pleasing to handle. It helps develop the fine motor skills and hand-eye co-ordination, important skills for drawing and writing. It helps language development and understanding the prepositions: *next to; beside; on top; in front; behind; under; left and right; between*. It has provided a resource through which to teach and reinforce colours and number skills. It can also be used to develop the children’s ability to follow instructions, thus developing their verbal short-term memory.

The resource proved to be popular with Oliver and Siobhan’s typically developing peers, who were keen to join in and work as a small group, providing opportunities for interaction and independent learning. It is a multi-sensory toy which, when used with creative support, can simultaneously help many aspects of development in a child with Down syndrome.



The hookboard costs £24.95 including VAT and postage.

For more information, contact:

SAS Plasmart,
Dell Cott Complex,
Burgh Heath Road,
Epsom, Surrey, KT17 4LJ,
UK.

Tel: +44 (0) 1372 728181
Fax: +44 (0) 1372 726460

Visit our website at
www.sasplasmart.co.uk
or email us at
info@sasplasmart.co.uk