Adapting Interactive Shared Reading Interventions for Young Learners With Autism Spectrum Disorder: RECALL

> “Lindsay, a 4-year-old girl with autism, struggles to stay actively engaged in and, therefore, benefit from the shared book reading activities.”

Elizabeth M. Jackson, PhD
Eastern New Mexico University

Mary Frances Hanline, PhD
Kelly Whalon, PhD
Florida State University

Melissa, the teacher in an inclusive preschool, recognizes the importance of early literacy and embeds literacy-related activities throughout the day. She uses books to introduce and expand thematic units, set the stage for play in center activities, and facilitate transitions. She schedules time each day for whole and small group shared reading. Melissa has noticed that Lindsay, a 4-year-old girl with autism, struggles to stay actively engaged in and, therefore, benefit from the shared book reading activities. She does not answer questions or initiate social interactions about the book, even though Melissa structures her shared reading to encourage children's participation.

Melissa, like many early childhood educators, uses the evidenced-based practice of interactive shared book reading (ISBR) to promote the development of important communication and literacy skills (Rezzonico et al., 2015). ISBR for preschoolers has been shown to build both vocabulary and conceptual knowledge, which in turn contributes to later language and reading comprehension development (Mol et al., 2009; National Early Literacy Panel [NELP], 2009). A critical role of an educator is to ensure that every child is able to access and participate in general curriculum learning opportunities and make meaningful progress. Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC, 2014) Environment Recommended Practice E3 recommends that “practitioners work with the family and other adults to modify and adapt the physical, social, and temporal environments to promote each child's access to and participation in learning experiences” (p. 9). The modifications in ISBR could, for example, include using adaptive seating so the child can better point to a picture on a page of the book, having a peer model appropriate social behavior while reading, and providing a shorter length of time for the reading activity.

While Early Childhood Special Educators (ECSE) recognize the importance of engaging in ISBR with their students, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often struggle to meaningfully participate in ISBR because of the children's difficulties in language/communication, joint attention, and social reciprocity (Fleury, 2015).

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Although these characteristics of ASD may make it difficult to establish and sustain the child's active engagement in a range of learning experiences, shared reading creates a context for educators to specifically support the development of these skills.

ISBR may help young children with ASD learn the skills necessary for future reading development (Fleury et al., 2014; Whalon, 2018), as ISBR holds the potential to increase children's oral language skills and expand their vocabulary skills necessary for later reading success (Blewitt et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, What Works Clearinghouse, 2018). ISBR also can be adapted for children with ASD to adhere to the DEC Instruction Recommended Practice INS 4 as educators “plan for and provide the level of support, accommodations, and adaptations needed for the child to access, participate, and learn within and across activities and routines” (p. 12). For example, providing a prompting strategy for correct responding and error correction for incorrect responding while requesting children to answer questions about the book is an additional level of support that could be used during ISBR to enhance a child's participation and opportunity to learn.

School age children with ASD often develop the decoding skills necessary for word recognition, but struggle to comprehend text (e.g., Brown et al., 2013; McIntyre et al., 2017). For children at risk for reading comprehension difficulties (such as students with ASD), instruction addressing language comprehension should begin early to potentially offset some of these challenges associated with reading for meaning (Kim, 2017). ISBR is a strategy that can be used “within and across routines, activities, and environments to provide contextually relevant learning opportunities” (DEC, 2014, INS 5, p. 12).

The purpose of this manuscript is to describe an approach to support children with ASD to engage in ISBR to build oral language skills (e.g., vocabulary knowledge and comprehension) and ultimately to support later reading comprehension (NELP, 2009). The approach is RECALL: Reading to Engage Children with Autism in Language and Learning. This article describes the RECALL ISBR approach, explains how to implement RECALL, and provides information on additional enhancements that support social communication engagement.

RECALL Implementation

As the name implies, RECALL is a form of ISBR that specifically focuses on the use of strategies to enhance the engagement and, thus, learning of children with autism in shared book reading experiences and is an adaptation of dialogic reading (DR). DR is a form of ISBR that embeds a specific instructional approach to elicit quality adult–child discussions about the text (Hogan et al., 2011). In DR, the adult engages the child in discussions about illustrations, the meaning of words, the sequence of events, and the relationship between events in the book and events in the child's own life by asking specific types of questions while reading the book with the expectation that the children will take on an increasingly active

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role over time (Whitehurst et al., 1994). RECALL is conducted in small groups or 1:1 and embeds visual supports and systematic instruction strategies as it implements the components of DR. Thus, RECALL incorporates the DEC Instruction Recommended Practices (INS) 6 in that it provides for the use of “systematic instructional strategies with fidelity to teach skills and to promote child engagement and learning” within DR interactive storybook reading.

Studies have shown that DR improved the language and literacy skills of children and has more causal evidence than other ISBR interventions (Swanson et al., 2011). While the reciprocal interactions required in DR are inherently difficult for children with ASD, emerging research shows that they can benefit from DR and adapted versions of DR (Fleury & Schwartz, 2017; Hudson et al., 2017), including RECALL (e.g., Whalon et al., 2015, 2016).

RECALL Instructional Sequence

RECALL uses the five DR question types when engaging in ISBR. The five types of questions are (a) **c**ompletion, (b) **r**ecall, (c) **o**pen-ended, (d) **w**h-questions, and (e) **d**istancing, referred to as CROWD. In DR, books are repeatedly read and the level of questions is altered over time. The levels and type of question asked at each level are as follows:

- Level 1 (CROWD wh-questions) emphasizes vocabulary development by teaching object names, functions, and parts/attributes (e.g., “What is this?” “What does it do?”).
- Level 2 (CROWD open-ended questions) extends language through open-ended questioning (e.g., “What is happening?” “What do you see?”).
- Level 3 (CROWD distancing questions) targets understanding of plot elements and relating story content to child experiences (e.g., “Why is the cat dancing?” “How would you feel if you lost something you love?”).

Table 1 provides definitions and examples of each of the question types.

In RECALL, the same book is read repeatedly across the span of approximately 4 days per week. The levels of questions progress in each repeated reading with initial questions in Level 1 targeting the vocabulary necessary to respond to more advanced questions about the text (Flynn, 2011). The level of questions progresses as the text is repeatedly read and is a natural scaffold to begin addressing more advanced inferencing skills. That is, children are first taught the vocabulary necessary to answer questions (Level 1); then they are given opportunities to use that vocabulary through open-ended

Table 1
Examples of DR Questioning Prompts

CROWD	DR level	Defined	Example
Completion		A blank is left at the end of a sentence for the child to fill in with the predictable, repeated word or phrase.	"My buttons, my buttons, my four groovy _____."
Recall		Questions about the events or main idea in the story.	"What happened to Pete's button?"
Open-ended	Level 2	Question that requires the child to describe the events depicted in the story or picture.	"What is Pete doing?" "Where is Pete walking?"
Wh-questions	Level 1	Questions that ask the child to label vocabulary and provide a definition or function.	Label: "What is this?" Function: "What keeps Pete's jacket together on his stomach?"
Distancing	Level 3	Questions that ask children to relate events from the story to their own experiences.	"Pete is a cat. What kind of pet do you have?"

Note: Excerpts were taken from the book by Litwin & Dean (2012).

questions (Level 2); and, in the final level, they use their increased understanding of the story to answer questions that require inferencing (Level 3).

Research documents that repeated readings of books as is done in RECALL allow children to learn to answer the more advanced types of questions and focus more on the content and understanding of the story line than on labeling (Alber et al., 2005). Children usually first attend to new vocabulary and concrete aspects of the story (e.g., Level 1 questions for Readings 1 and 2), but, as the book is read repeatedly, children ask more questions and engage in more dialog about the book (e.g., Level 2 questions for Reading 3; Pappas, 1991) and begin to understand more abstract concepts in the book (i.e., cause and effect relationships, character motivation and underlying story structure; for example, Level 3 questions for Reading 4; Phillips & McNaughton, 1990).

Vocabulary Selection

The selection of vocabulary is as intentional as the selection of questions. For children with ASD, vocabulary can be strategically selected based on the needs of the learners to include words that (a) are emphasized in the text (stated and clearly illustrated in a picture), (b) are used frequently in text and conversation, and (c) aid in the understanding of the content.

> “Melissa identifies words that she can talk about in text or in pictures on multiple pages of the book. She also selects words that will support Lindsay’s understanding of the book.”

Melissa is preparing for next week’s small group shared reading lessons. Her monthly theme is animal habitats, so she plans to read “Bear Snores On.” Melissa is intentional when selecting words for Lindsay. She knows that Lindsay recognizes and labels some nouns. Melissa wants to build Lindsay’s vocabulary knowledge and ask questions that provide Lindsay with multiple opportunities to engage with and learn new words. She plans to begin Level 1 questioning by asking questions to teach Lindsay nouns, verbs, and mental state terms (e.g., scared, think) she can later use to respond to Level 2 and 3 questions. Melissa identifies words that she can talk about in text or in pictures on multiple pages of the book. She also selects words that will support Lindsay’s understanding of the book. She picks the words cave, snore, share, friend, and unhappy. When the word is depicted in an illustration or discussed in text, Melissa asks Lindsay to label the word, action, or mental state (e.g., “How does Bear feel?”) and provide the function (e.g., “What is something that makes you unhappy?”). During subsequent readings as Lindsay begins to learn the target words, Melissa plans to introduce Level 2 questions by turning to a page that describes or illustrates a target word and ask an open-ended question (“What’s happening?” and “What do you see?”) so that Lindsay has the opportunity to use her new vocabulary. As Lindsay begins to use the words, Melissa will ask Level 3 questions that require plot understanding and/or inferencing (e.g., “Look [pointing] *Bear is not unhappy anymore. Why?” and “How would you feel if your friends had a party without you?”).*

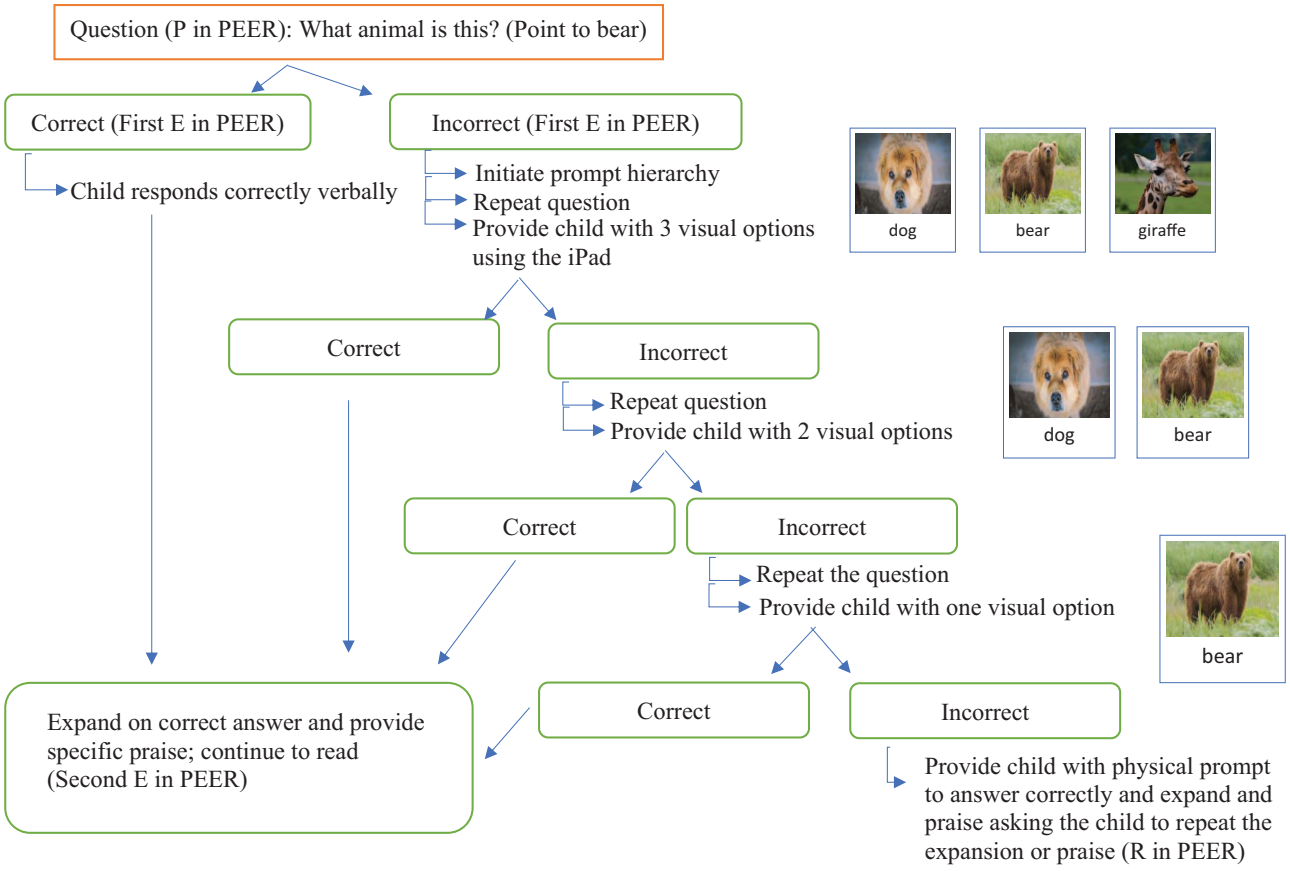
Because the selection of vocabulary for Level 1 questions and the types of questions asked is intentional and should be selected based on the needs of individual children, teachers may want to determine the types of questions and pages on which the different questions will be asked prior to reading to children. Writing the questions on sticky notes and affixing the notes to the book pages can be helpful in implementing RECALL procedures with fidelity.

RECALL Instructional Strategies

RECALL uses the DR instructional sequence and adds adaptations designed to support the engagement and learning of children with ASD. The instructional sequence of DR involves four steps, referred to as PEER (prompt, evaluate, expand, repeat). The asking of one type of CROWD question (referred to as a “prompt” in PEER) starts the PEER sequence. Next, the adult ***evaluates*** the child’s response to the prompt and ***expands*** by rephrasing or adding one or more words to the response (e.g., the child says, “Bus” and the adult expands by saying, “Big yellow bus”). The adult then asks the child to ***repeat*** the expansion.

RECALL assures that the child with ASD participates in a complete learning trial. In RECALL, a complete learning trial (Schreibman et al., 2015; VanDerHeyden et al., 2005) begins with an opportunity (i.e., CROWD question prompt) for the child to engage in a target behavior (i.e., answering the CROWD question prompt) and ends with contingent feedback from the adult that either confirms (e.g., “Yes, [pointing] yellow bus!”) or ensures the correct response (i.e., prompting). This creates an

Figure 1
Flowchart



> “Regardless of the level of prompt, the adult expands and praises the child’s correct response.”

errorless learning opportunity as the child may demonstrate the target skill independently or with support provided in the form of visual supports and a least-to-most prompt hierarchy.

Figure 1 presents the RECALL instructional sequence. If the child responds correctly without the use of the visual supports when asked a question, the adult expands on the child’s response and provides praise. If the child does not respond correctly, three visual response options are shown to the child and a least-to-most prompting hierarchy is used. That is, the child is provided with three visual response options (three photographs or other visual representations of one correct and two incorrect responses) and the question is repeated. The adult points to the visual response options, identifying each verbally. If the child does not respond correctly by pointing to or verbalizing, one incorrect option is removed, and the question is repeated with the adult labeling the remaining two options. If the child does not respond correctly with the two visual response options, the other visual response option is removed, with only the correct response option remaining. The question is then repeated. If the child does not respond correctly, a physical prompt is used to assist the child to point to the correct visual response option. Regardless of the level of prompt, the adult expands and praises the child’s correct response.

> “RECALL adapts DR by embedding prompts designed to secure a child’s attention into the ISBR activity.”

It is her fourth day reading “Bear Snores On,” and Melissa has noticed that Lindsay consistently identifies a cave and different animals that live in a cave whether independently or when presented with three visual options. She turns to a page where Bear is sleeping in the cave and asks the question on her sticky note, “What do you see?” Lindsay tries to turn the page. Melissa places an iPad on the book with a PowerPoint slide showing three options, “What do you see [pointing]? *Do you see Bear in a tree, Bear in a cave, or Bear in a tent?” Lindsay points to Bear in a tent. Melissa removes that option and says, “I don’t see Bear in a tent [pointing at the book]. What do you see?” Melissa presents the two remaining options and, while pointing, says, “Bear in a tree or Bear in a cave?” Lindsay points to the visual and says “cave,” Melissa confirms and expands, “Yes* [pointing to the book], *Bear lives in a cave.”*

In RECALL, the evidenced-based least-to-most prompt hierarchy is used as it has been particularly effective for learners with ASD (Wong et al., 2015). Although RECALL embeds a least-to-most prompting hierarchy, depending on the learner, a teacher may choose to reverse the order of the prompting hierarchy initially providing a greater level of support. For example, the learning trial may begin with the CROWD question prompt immediately paired with a controlling prompt (a 0-s time delay) that consistently results in the correct response (e.g., taking the child’s hand to point to the visual representing the correct response). After a predetermined number of trials, the teacher begins the trial with the CROWD question prompt and introduces a wait time (e.g., 5-s time delay) for the child to respond. Regardless of the type of prompting used, it is important the learning trial is complete and ends with the child engaging in the target behavior. Another adaptation may include the number of visual response options provided, with some children responding better to two or four options than three.

RECALL Enhancements

Children with ASD may experience difficulties in language/communication, joint attention, and social reciprocity. These difficulties, in turn, may impact the child’s ability to actively engage in a range of learning experiences including shared reading. Thus, in developing RECALL, additional enhancements that specifically support social communication engagement have been identified and are described in the following sections.

Engagement Prompts

The difficulty young children with ASD have establishing a common frame of reference (joint attention) can interfere with their ability to learn from others (Mundy et al., 2012). Therefore, to secure the child’s attention and enhance learning opportunities, RECALL adapts DR by embedding prompts designed to secure a child’s attention into the ISBR activity. The adult initiates an attention prompt by pointing to a picture, looking at the child, and requesting the child to, “Look,” while waiting for a response from the child. The adult may also use a pause prompt by intentionally pausing prior to or after turning the page of the book at an exciting point in the story to encourage the child to

Table 2
Examples of Inferencing Questions Focused on Emotions

Example	Response options
Why did Pete say, "Oh no!" Pete lost his button. How do you think he feels?	Hurt, Happy, Sad
How would you feel if you lost something?	Excited, Happy, Sad
Look at the monkeys, they are crying. How do you think the monkeys are feelings?	Sad, Happy, Mad
Oh no, look at these dragons. How do you think they feel?	Happy, Angry, Sad

initiate a social interaction, communicating to the adult to continue reading. Child responses are reinforced with expansions and/or praise. For example, the adult may respond to a child's communicative attempt after a pause prompt by saying, "You want me to turn the page? All right, I'll do that"; or respond to a child's response to a joint attention prompt by saying, "Yes, that is the red button that fell off Pete's jacket." The attention and pause prompts occur approximately 5 times during each book. Adults may want to plan ahead for when they will use the prompts, placing a sticky note on the pages where these strategies will be used to assist in implementing RECALL with fidelity.

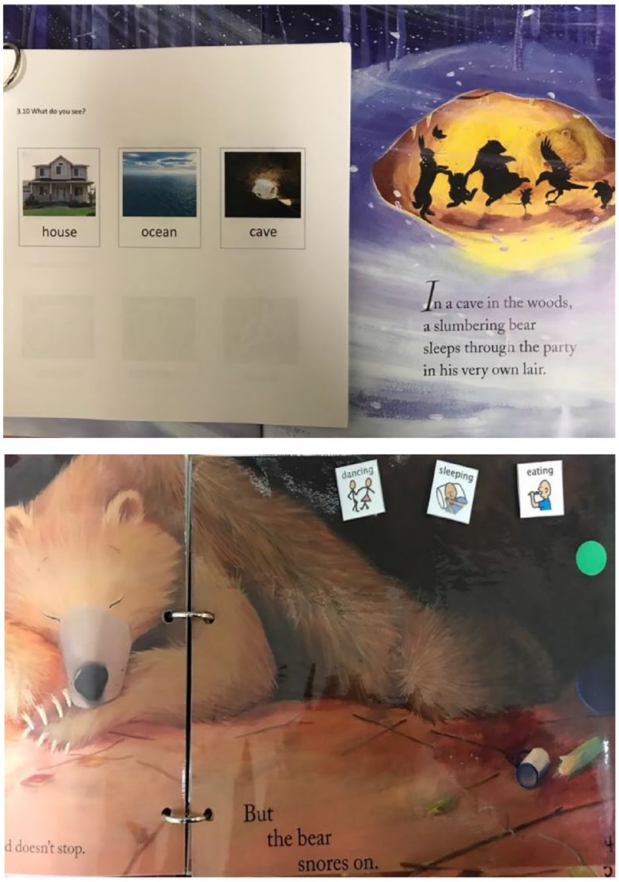
In her small group reading, Melissa wants to encourage Lindsay to initiate. She put a sticky note with the letters SA on pages with an exciting picture or illustrating one of the target words as a reminder to secure attention. When she turns to the page with Bear waking up and growling, Melissa says, "Uh oh, look!" pointing at Bear and looking expectantly at Lindsay with her eyes wide. Lindsay looks at the picture and says, "Bear." Melissa says, "Yes, an angry bear" while making a growling noise. Lindsay looks at Melissa, smiles and then growls. The two peers in the group are also growling and one says, "He is angry!" Melissa confirms, "Yes, when bears get mad or angry, they growl [making growling noise]."

"Melissa says, "Uh oh, look!" pointing at Bear and looking expectantly at Lindsay with her eyes wide. Lindsay looks at the picture and says, "Bear."

Inferential Questions as Context for Understanding Emotions

RECALL emphasizes inference questions that ask the child to identify the emotions of characters in the book and interpret the cause of those emotions. A child's ability to make inferences emerges in early childhood and this ability is predictive of future reading comprehension (Tompkins et al., 2013; van der Brook et al., 2017). By the age of 4 to 5 years, children are able to make inferences that require identifying the causal connection between events in a text and character goals, mental states, or emotions (Cartwright et al., 2016). For children with ASD, addressing their ability to make inferences early may be especially important (McIntyre et al., 2017). Therefore, RECALL questions intentionally include asking children inference questions that focus on the emotions of book characters. Table 2 provides examples of inferencing questions focused on emotions. Children may need to learn emotion vocabulary depicted in the reading to respond to Level 3 inference questions about emotions.

Figure 2
Visuals attached to and separate from the book



Note. Photographs were taken from the book by Wilson & Chapman (2014).

“She reviews the book, identifying and marking places with a sticky note where she can ask inference questions related to character emotions”

Melissa has noticed that the children in her small group are enjoying the book “The Bear Snores On” and Lindsay is responding to open-ended questions with some of the new vocabulary. Today, Melissa is particularly interested in asking Lindsay questions that require an inference. She has posed some to Lindsay’s peers previously and wants to support Lindsay’s ability to infer character emotions. She reviews the book, identifying and marking places with a sticky note where she can ask inference questions related to character emotions such as, “How do you think Bear feels alone in the cave?” She has prepared a PowerPoint slide with three visual options of the emotions unhappy, scared, and excited in case Lindsay is unable to answer the question independently and Melissa needs to use her prompt hierarchy.

Visual Response Prompts

Often when using the RECALL approach, the teacher will find that they need to create visual response options for questions. Response options can be placed directly on the page of the book being read when the question is asked or displayed apart from the book. Figure 2 provides an example of each way to display visual response options. If visual response

options are placed directly on the pages of the book, removing pages from the books and laminating them can make the books more durable when the visual response options are attached with Velcro® to the pages.

Another way to present visual response options is to use an iPad. When visuals are presented on an iPad, the child is able to point to or look at the correct response or can drag the correct response to a predetermined position on the iPad screen. Programs such as PowerPoint and GoBook by Attainment Company can be used in presenting visual response options.

Conclusion

ISBR a frequently-used instructional setting in early childhood programs. In order for young children with ASD to engage in and learn from this activity, evidence-based supports may need to be planned and embedded into carefully planned ISBR activities. RECALL provides one approach to providing individualized supports for young children with ASD through an adapted form of DR. The prompt hierarchy, in addition to secure attention and intentional pause prompts, can provide learning opportunities for young children with ASD to become more engaged in ISBR. Implementation of these individualized supports can provide young children with ASD the foundational language skills needed to answer questions through ISBR and provide more social communication skills through the use of RECALL prompts.

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ORCID iD

Elizabeth M. Jackson https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5866-012X

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