

Are Diagnosis and Setting Type Associated with the Social Interaction of Children with Severe Developmental Disabilities?

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Background

- ★ The social interaction of children with developmental disabilities (DD) is often not as robust as that of their typically developing (TD) peers
 - ◇ Children with DD may participate in fewer social activities, have fewer friends, and have lower social status compared to TD peers (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010)
- ★ While some research exists in this area, social inclusion remains a difficult construct to measure and interpret
- ★ However, certain factors have been found to impact social inclusion in children with DD
 - ◇ Previous research has provided evidence for deficits in social behaviors in children with autism as compared to children with Down Syndrome (DS) (Sigman & Ruskin, 1999)
 - ◇ Evidence has also been found for increased social interaction in children with DD when paired with TD children (Guralnick et al., 1996)

Method

- ★ Data were collected using an interval coding scheme developed for the GO4KIDDS Social Inclusion Research Project (Bebko, Perry, & Minnes, 2009)
- ★ Children were observed for a total of 15 – 30 minutes in various environments (school, community, playground) during unstructured time
- ★ Initiations, responses, and sustained interactions were collapsed
- ★ For **research question one**, data were examined for 14 children with a diagnosis of either DS ($n=5$) or ASD ($n=9$)
- ★ For **research question two**, data were examined for 24 children with DDs in three different setting types: mixed ($n=9$), TD peers only ($n=7$), and peers with DD only ($n=8$)

Discussion

This research is notable as the research currently available on the social inclusion of children with DD is very limited.

Impact of Diagnosis

- ★ For **question one**, no significant results were found for social interaction between children with ASD and children with DS
- ★ However, results are in the expected direction – children with DS had twice as many interactions (37%) as those with ASD (18%)
- ★ This may be due to greater deficits in skills such as social skills, verbal communication, and joint attention in children with ASD

Impact of Setting Type

- ★ For **question two**, no significant results were found for social interaction in settings with varied peer composition
- ★ However, results are again in the expected direction – children with DD who were observed in settings with only TD peers available demonstrated the greatest amount of social interaction
- ★ Social expectations may be higher in settings with TD peers leading to increased social inclusion for children with DD

Future Directions

- ★ Additional research is needed in this area in order to increase social opportunities for children with DD
- ★ Effective **integration of children with DD** may be an important factor in the development of social interventions
- ★ Specific **child needs** should also be a key focus – deficits in skills that may contribute to lack of inclusion should be noted on an individual basis so that appropriate supports can be provided

Purpose and Research Questions

Purpose: To examine factors that may influence the level of social inclusion experienced by children with DD using a novel coding scheme

Research Question One: Is diagnosis associated with increased social interaction in children with developmental disabilities?

Research Question Two: Is setting type associated with a greater amount of social interaction in children with developmental disabilities?

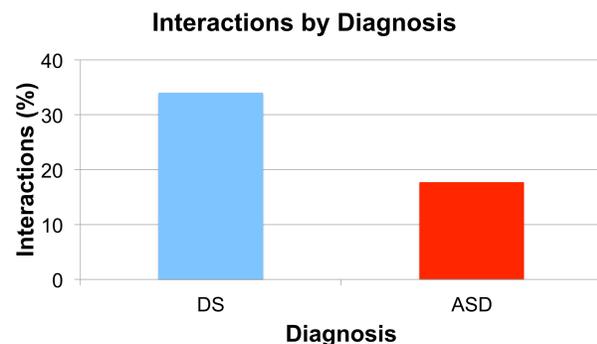
Hypotheses:

1. Children with Down Syndrome (DS) will demonstrate a greater amount of social interaction than children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).
2. Children with DD will experience more social interaction in settings with typically developing (TD) peers than in settings with children with developmental disabilities.



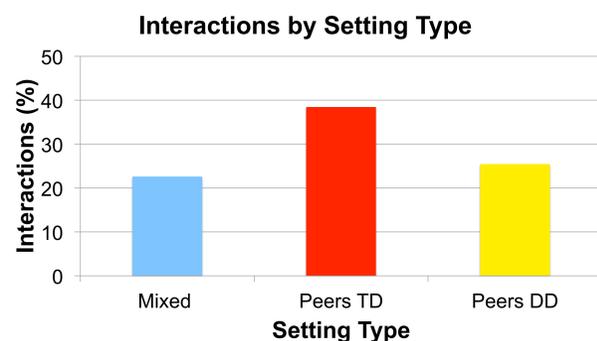
Results

Question One



Children with **Down Syndrome** had more interactions overall (37%) than children with **ASD** (18%) but this difference was not significant.

Question Two



Children with DD who were observed in settings with **TD peers only** had more social interactions (38%) than those in settings with **peers with DD only** (25%) or in settings with **mixed peer composition** (22%) but differences were not significant.



Acknowledgments

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