

Background

- The social inclusion of children with developmental disabilities (DD) is challenging to define and measure.
- A typical definition: the person is present and accepted during an activity with peers.
- It is possible that a child can be physically present at an activity without actively participating or interacting with others (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2010).

The current study explores the experiences of social inclusion of a child with DD through an in-depth case study describing multiple data sources.

Method

The Social Inclusion Project involved:

- 27 children with DD aged 6.66 to 17.5 years
- Interviews: parents (n=21), teachers and educational assistants (n=46) and community leaders (n=33)
- We also interviewed the child with DD when applicable.
- Observations using a structured interval coding scheme (Bebko, Perry & Minnes, 2009) at school and in the community
- Observers rated children's overall social inclusion, types of play and amount of social interaction

Case Study

- 13-year-old female with ASD and ID
- Cognitive functioning: approximately level of a 2-year-old
- Language < 1-year level
- Adaptive behaviour: 2.25 year level
- Maladaptive behaviour: not significant

Observations: **school** (1) (free time on the playground), **community activity** (1) (group activities, e.g., bowling, doge ball)

Interviews: Jordan's parents; community program instructor; respite worker; special education resource teacher, educational assistant



SCHOOL

Jordan was observed during free (unstructured) time on the playground

Predominant types of play: alone, proximity (peers close by, but no interaction)

"With ASD, [other children approaching and interacting with Jordan] doesn't happen as much as you want it to. If so, by fluke."

- educator

"No real interaction"

- observer

The observer rated Jordan's social inclusion a 2 out of a maximum of 5

The teacher said Jordan is a great student and a joy to have in the class.



COMMUNITY

Jordan was observed while participating in semi-structured community activities (e.g., bowling, dodge ball)

Predominant types of play observed: parallel, joint engagement

The observer rated Jordan's social inclusion a 4 out of a maximum of 5

The observer commented that Jordan is non-verbal but still communicates through gestures

"She actually participates; no problems with participation; she is equal."

- community leader

"In this program there are kids who love her – hold hands, participate in activities."

- community leader

Using a coding scheme developed for this study, Jordan was recorded as interacting for...

4%

School

43%

Community

of the observation intervals

Discussion

- Jordan is a child with severe developmental disabilities; yet she was able to participate and be included with other children in the **Community** setting. Her limitations did not preclude her from being included.
- However, her social inclusion varied across situations.
- In spite of the presence of peers in both (and thus, the opportunity for social interaction), she was more "included" in a real sense in one setting than another. Thus, the child's limitations did not preclude social inclusion.
- Additionally, the mere presence of typically developing peers did not ensure true social inclusion.
- Future research should focus on environmental factors, rather than child factors. While this study illustrates some factors related to children's social inclusion, there is still much work to be done using various research methods
- Future interventions could be designed to target and increase factors in the environment that facilitate social inclusion for all.