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Examination of the effectiveness of a one-week camp on social interaction for youth with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Maureen O'Brien

Background. Persons with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) each have unique abilities and limitations, but all experience challenges interacting with others. Most studies examining intervention approaches to improve social interaction for children with ASD occur in artificial contexts and for short sessions over an extended period of time. Furthermore, effectiveness of intervention typically measures a child's social competence by parent report (Reichow, Steiner & Volkmar, 2013; Case-Smith & Arbesman, 2008). **Purpose.** The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an intense one-week, natural camp designed to promote the quality of social interaction for 15 children with ASD. **Methods.** I measured change using the Evaluation of Social Interaction (ESI) (Fisher & Griswold, 2014), an objective measure of social interaction, based on observation in natural context before and after the camp. During camp, I observed activities and counselor strategies to support social interaction. Participants were observed twice before camp, to establish a baseline, and once after camp. Once all data was collected, I compared the ESI measures to the standard error for each evaluation to compare the change in quality of social interaction for each participant (Harvill, 1991). I also compared the difference of the means for the three times using *t*-tests. **Results.** There was no significant change between time 1 and 2 for any participants ($t = .000$; $df = 14$; $p \leq 1.000$), establishing a baseline, but there was a significant difference between times 2 and 3 ($t = -4.121$, $df = 14$; $p \leq .001$). Furthermore, participants with lower functioning ASD, demonstrated no difference between times 2 and 3 ($t = -.752$, $df = 5$, $p \leq .486$) while campers with higher functioning ASD did demonstrate a significant improvement between times 2 and 3 ($t = -10.000$, $df = 8$, $p \leq .000$). Camp activities and counselor strategies are presented as descriptive data, and modeling and cueing were strategies used predominately. **Implications.** The results of this study support the value of occupation-based intervention in a short period of time to influence the quality of social interaction in a natural context post intervention.

References

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