

Factors affecting Social Skill Maintenance following a Group-Based Video Modelling Program for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

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Abstract

Video modelling has been demonstrated to be an effective tool in teaching social skills to children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD); however, research regarding the maintenance of these skills has previously been neglected. While some work has focused on the short term maintenance of skills post-intervention, the long-term effectiveness of these interventions remains unknown. The present study investigated social skill maintenance for eleven children either 9, 18 or 30 months post-intervention, following their participation in a group video modelling program. It was conducted as a follow-up to the research completed by Harries et al. (2012, 2013) regarding the Telstra Foundation iModeling Project (TFiP), as run by Autism SA. The present research aimed to test whether skills had been maintained, including the extent to which they had been maintained, and also to identify contributing factors to the maintenance or deterioration of skills. Six parents completed both the Social Skill Improvement System (SSiS) and a detailed questionnaire, whilst five parents completed a short online survey, which was developed to encourage participation and improve accessibility. The six SSiS responses were compared with baseline, post-intervention and 3-month follow-up data on both social skill and problem behaviour scales. Findings supported previous research, with statistically significant improvements in social skill scores found between baseline and 3-month follow-up, but there was no evidence to suggest that skill maintenance existed beyond the 3-months following completion of the program. A thematic analysis of all eleven responses indicated several key factors in the maintenance or deterioration of skills. These factors include access to ongoing programs, the role of peers and parents, maturity/hormones, and the amount of perceived support from schools. Unfortunately, the poor response rate (13.9%) limited data analyses and generalisability, particularly as the SSiS scores obtained demonstrated large variability between individuals. It was therefore recommended that further research be conducted into the long-term maintenance of social skills following a group-based video modelling program for children with ASD. It was also recommended that the TFiP, and other such programs, be implemented at different stages in a child's development in order to optimise skill learning and maintenance, as well as to ensure that skills remain age-appropriate as the child's social dynamics change. It was suggested that this would be best achieved in a school setting, as this would provide consistency in program delivery for individual children.