

1-30-2012

Using social networking to increase independent social functioning in a student with autism

Daniel Kilgallon

Let us know how access to this document benefits you - share your thoughts on our feedback form.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kilgallon, Daniel, "Using social networking to increase independent social functioning in a student with autism" (2012). *Theses and Dissertations*. 207.

<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/207>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact LibraryTheses@rowan.edu.

**USING SOCIAL NETWORKING TO INCREASE INDEPENDENT
SOCIAL FUNCTIONING IN A STUDENT WITH AUTISM**

By Daniel P. Kilgallon

A Thesis
Submitted to the Department of Special Education and Reading
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Special Education
at
Rowan University

Thesis Advisor: S. Jay Kuder, Ed. D.

© 2011 Daniel P. Kilgallon

Abstract

Daniel P. Kilgallon
USING SOCIAL NETWORKING TO INCREASE INDEPENDENT SOCIAL
FUNCTIONING IN A STUDENT WITH AUTISM
2011
S. Jay Kuder, Ed. D.
Master of Arts in Special Education

The purpose of this study was to examine if engaging a student on a social networking site with his peers would increase social functioning in other settings. In this study social interactions were measured by reciprocating greetings, initiating greetings, and total numbers of social interactions during lunch and more social classes like gym. Both independent and prompted interactions were recorded. The student was required to log into Facebook and make a minimum of three interactions per day. Interactions that were recorded did not include interactions on Facebook. The subject showed marked improvement in reciprocating greetings and minimal increase in initiating greetings and total number of interactions. Results and implications of using a social networking site in the classroom are addressed.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
List of Figures	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	4
Chapter 3: Methodology	14
Chapter 4: Data Review	19
Chapter 5: Conclusion	23

List of Figures

Figure	Page
Figure 1.1	19
Figure 1.2	20
Figure 2.1	21
Figure 2.2	22

Chapter 1: Introduction

Autism is defined by the Autism Society of America as a severe lifelong disability. Its symptoms include a breakdown in the rate of appearance of physical, language and social skills, an abnormal response of the senses, deficiencies in speech and language development, and difficulties relating to people and the environment. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM-IV) describes autism as impairment in social interaction and to sustain social interaction at an appropriate peer level, impairment in communication, and restrictive repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior. In this study, the use of technology, its impact on the way we view communication and its use for people with disabilities will be examined.

Children with Autism have deficits in displaying age appropriate skills. Because of these deficits it can be very difficult for children with Autism to maintain friendship and experience typical social experiences. Difficulty with social greetings will inhibit a student's ability to make friend and have conversations with peers. Without initiating or responding to greetings it would be difficult for a student with ASD to maintain friendship and opportunities for friendship. (Simpson, Langone, Ayres, 2004)

Persons with autism also display stereotypical behaviors which in co morbidity with social isolation can have a collateral relationship in early social development. (Lee, Odom, Loftin, 2007) Stereotypical behaviors are behaviors which carry no apparent adaptive effects. (Lee, 2007) These behaviors can be motor behaviors including rocking, hand-

flapping, and repetitive manipulations of objects. It might also involve verbal or oral behavior such as repeating of meaningless sounds or words (delayed echolalia). This would also include mouthing objects. Sometimes these behaviors could manifest themselves as self-injurious behaviors. (Lee, 2007) These behaviors, along with adversely affecting academic performance and everyday activities, also can develop a social stigma and reduce the opportunities for inclusion. Researcher suggests that engaging student in social interactions could less to a decrease in stereotypical behaviors. (Lee, 2007)

Computers have proven to be an effective instructional tool for people with disabilities and specifically ASD. The internet is increasingly become a place for person with disabilities to communicate with each other and create self-advocacy groups. (Brownlow, O'Dell. 2006) Some of these groups are even challenging the view of their disabilities and how people perceive them. By creating these advocacy groups the persons with ASD even challenge the labels of autism and discussed being equal with typically developed person or even superior.

Facebook is a social networking website founded in 2004. It has over 400 million users worldwide. Users can use the free web-based communication site to post messages, chat, upload pictures, and interact with other approved friends in a social mapping environment. Facebook's reach has permeated everyday life for a large part of society. Over 35 million users update their status each day. The average user has 130 friends on the site and spends over 55 minutes a day on this site. (www.facebook.com, 2004)

This study will examine the effect of using Facebook on the social interactions of a person with Autism. The study will be a single study based research design. There will be a two-week baseline period followed by a 4 week intervention. Data will be taken on the subject's independent response to social interactions and probe data will be taken on the subject's initiation of conversation.

This study proposes that by instructing the student to make friends on Facebook, update status, and interact with peers his social interaction with his peers will be increased. The rise of popularity of Social Networking could provide many opportunities for people with ASD. Facebook provides a way to initiate and respond to greetings without the added triggers of face-to-face conversations and the distractions in the settings it is utilized. It also provides an opportunity for coaching and editing through appropriate responses and greetings. Sites such as Facebook are constantly updating to provide a more universal approach with ease of accessibility in mind. Many support groups and networking groups centered on Autism and Autism Advocacy can be found on sites such as Facebook. Facebook is also changing the way the typically developing community interacts and communicates. By creating learning opportunities for people with ASD to utilize these websites we are providing them a chance to join in the developing way the world is connected and communicating.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Impairments in social functioning along with impairments in communication and repetitive behavior are the three main components for being diagnosed with ASD (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). An effective and best practices education model would address all three of these issues. However, many programs for people with ASD are missing effective, empirically driven ways to address social skill development (Bellini, Hopf, 2007).

Brownlow and O'Dell (2008) have proposed that by taking away some of the demands of face-to-face conversation and using available technologies such as the internet we can change our perspective on how we categorize and view the functional communication skills of individuals with Autism.

Impairments in social interactions for people with ASD can be defined in many ways. These include: difficulty in initiating or joining in of social activities, verbally expressing their emotions and opinions, and being able to comprehend the other people's point of view. These impairments are also displayed in conjunction with the behavior of people with ASD that could be viewed as socially unacceptable. These behaviors might include: repetitive self-stimulation behaviors, inappropriate comments, and commenting only on topics of personal high-interests. (Bellini, Hopf, 2007) These social skill deficits impair a person to establish meaningful social relationships which will likely lead to a life of loneliness and isolation from society. (Bellini, S; Peters, J; Benner, L, Hopf, A, 2007) Since social skills are an essential part of a person's development, more effective social

skill programming should be implemented in educational programming for students with ASD.

Using computer based instruction has already been researched as an effective way to teach social skills for students with Autism. In 2004, Simpson, Langone, and Ayres examined the effect of video and computer based instruction on social skills for students with Autism. The students with Autism watched video of the target models of appropriate social behavior. These videos were contained within a computer based lesson.

The study examined the teaching of three social behaviors: sharing, following teacher directions, and social greetings. The four subjects were elementary aged in an urban school for students with Autism. The video modeling used the four participants and 2 typically developed peers.

Each student interacted with the computer based-program for 30 minutes a day. The computer was in a cubby-like structure so that none of the other participants could view the video outside of their scheduled interaction with it. The teacher sat with the student to keep on task or provide help utilizing the computer. The baseline and experiment sessions occurred in the special education classroom. The data was taken during three scheduled small group activities which comprised of solely the four participants. All instruction was at the same table with the teacher sitting across from the students. During instruction each student was given four opportunities to display the target behaviors of sharing, greeting, and following teacher's directions.

The computer program used was Hyperstudio 3.2. The program was chosen by the researchers because of ease of use, and access to easily embed video and other multimedia into the program. The lessons were comprised of “stacks of cards” customized by the instructors. There was a seven step sequence in the cards. The first card was a title card about the instruction, “How to Get along in School.” The second card is a “declarative statement about the target behavior in relation to its function.” (Simpson, Lamgone, & Ayres, 2004) The third card was a simple definition of the target behavior. The next three cards were video clips demonstrating examples of the target behavior. The seventh card had a picture still of all three video demonstrations and a summary. The pictures were then clicked on again for the students to view the video clips a repeat time. This sequence was repeated to teach all 3 target behaviors.

The results of this study showed that the students with Autism marked improvement over baseline data for 3 subjects. The fourth subject demonstrated a steady increase beginning in baseline data. The authors surmises this could be the result from spacing of the instruction. The subject had observed others being taught these skills before her. They also considered that the subject may be getting training in the target areas outside of the classroom. The three subjects’ demonstrated increased frequency of the target behavior after computer based instruction showing it to be a useful tool in teaching social skills to learners with autism. (Simpson, Lamgone, & Ayres, 2004)

The role of the teacher in utilizing a social networking program would be similar to the role of the teacher in using computer based video instruction (CBVI). Ayres describes the role of the teacher or the adult interaction in CBVI as integral because they are responsible for setting up the instructional video or computer model and are to assist

the student from CBVI to *in-vivo* practice. (Ayres, McGuire, & McClimon, 2009) In this study the role of the teacher would be to transition the student to the social networking device, to set up the checklist to ensure interaction on the site, and to provide support and positive feedback during *in-vivo* practice.

The instruction and the role of the computer model in this study are also similar to the instruction in a CBVI model. The activity requires prompting from the instructor or computer. It also provides an opportunity to practice parts of the target behavior. This results in the instruction becoming a rehearsal for the target behavior. (Ayres, 2009) The computer provides an opportunity for the student to engage in a behavior closely related to the desired behavior with the chance for the student to engage in the target behavior absent of *in-vivo* instruction. Ayres, (2009) investigated if students can acquire a functional skill using CBVI and then generalize that skill in the natural environment without the need for additional instruction.

The participants in that study were three 7-9 year old adolescents (two males, one female) with low-moderate functioning Autism. The study examined the effectiveness of using CBVI to teach functional life skills of making a sandwich and making soup and then examining if the student demonstrated improvement in *in-vivo* situations without further instruction. First, the researcher divided the skills into a task analysis. Then they acquired baseline data by testing student response in the *in-vivo* situation. The student was scored on a correct response of complete an individual step with 5 seconds of the previous step. If the student got a step wrong in the task analysis, then the response was provided by the instructor and instructed to continue with the next step. All participants scored below 60% in the desired steps of the target behaviors.

The student was then instructed on the behaviors using a computer based instructional program. The program is “*I can! Daily living and community skills*”, which was manufactured by two of the authors. The program gave instruction for each step of the task analysis which was identical to the task analysis of the *in-vivo* response. Each click of the mouse could provide a correct response of the task analysis. Incorrect responses were correct by a prompt procedure in the computer program mirroring a least-to-most prompt hierarchy.

1. Independent- student begins and finishes response within 10 seconds of the previous step or instruction.
2. Verbal- the computer program tells the student what to do.
3. Model- the computer shows a video model of a live actor completing the step.
4. Stimulus Prompt- (relative to the partial physical prompt) a “halo” is given around the location where the student needs to click.
5. Full physical- the computer controls the images on the screen and shows the student what to do.

All three participants showed an increase over baseline after intervention. The two males in the study had a baseline average from 11-73% for the target behavior. In post-intervention both males reached mastery criteria and had an average of 90-100% independence. The female in the study showed great improvement also. She showed high levels of improvement but not above mastery criteria set for the study. She had an average of 79% independence in post-intervention probes. One of the male participants repeated the verbal prompts from the software during the probes. The results of the research show a positive relationship between the use of CBVI and an automatic generalization in *in-vivo* practice.

CBVI is an integral part to acquiring functional community skills to foster independence. Mechling, Pridgen, and Cronin (2005) used CBVI to teach students with moderate disabilities to order from a cashier in fast food restaurant. Students showed marked improvement in their purchasing skills learning solely from an interactive video model that simulated the real environment. (Mechling, Pridgen, & Cronin, 2005).

Another study (Lau, Higgins, Gelford, Hong, Miller, 2005) that looked at teacher facilitation on social interactions during computer activities showed that students with and without disabilities show more positive and effective social interactions. In this study neurotypical students were paired with students with multiple disabilities. The students were then separate into two groups, one with a teacher to facilitate social interactions during computer time and one without. The students played with interactive Sesame Street software during their regularly scheduled computer time in a free play format. The teacher in the experiment group instructed students to initiate engagement in the activity, to redirect maladaptive peer behaviors and to keep students on task for allotted time period on computer.

The researchers measured eight specified behaviors such as responding to an initiation. The teachers also assessed social behaviors pre- and post-intervention. The data showed that although the students with and without disabilities displayed the same observed social behaviors, all students in the teacher facilitated group had more positive and effective social behaviors and interactions. (Lau, 2005) This study shows that students with disabilities benefit from teacher facilitated social interaction and suggests a computer can be an effective catalyst for social peer interaction.

Computer based instruction can also be a delivery system for other research based intervention. Sansotti and Powell-Smith (2008) studied the effectiveness of using computer presented social stories and video modeling to increase social communication skills in students with high-functioning ASD. Social stories are stories written from the individual child's perspective to explain and coach students through identified challenging situations. (Gray, 1998)

The participants of the study were three males aged 6-10 years. All three students were identified on the ASD. They all had scores which placed them from low-average to above average on standardized ranges. None of the students had communication difficulties as scored on a standardized assessment. They were all enrolled in general education for 100 % of the school day. Each participant was observed during recess, observing the setting for the target behaviors in the study. (Sansotti & Powell-Smith, 2008)

A social story was developed for a target behavior for each student (joining in, greetings, and sharing). The stories were developed and presented using Microsoft PowerPoint. The slides on PowerPoint included symbols to enhance the meaning and make the story more reinforcing. The stories were between 5-9 pages. Video models were incorporated into the computer presented social story. After the participant advanced through all of the slides a video clip presented the same target behavior using a peer model. Each clip was under 1 minute long. During the first week of intervention all students answered comprehension questions with 75-100% accuracy. Each student watched the video everyday right before the targeted setting (playground). The researchers took observational data, recording the independent usage of target behaviors

in a 15-20 minute time span, 2 times per week. During intervention, data was taken in the same way. The intervention was altered for two of the participants during intervention because previously targeted behavior had reduced in occurrence. The students were coached by their teacher to use the skills taught before the target setting. Reinforcement was also given to peers to ensure they were compliant with the target behaviors (asking to play). The intervention was faded, follow-up data, and generalization data was taken.

Observational data was also taken on the participants' peers to compare the incidence of the target behaviors in the peer group with the participants. During the follow-up and generalization the rate of incidence of the target behaviors for all of the participants correlates to the rate of their peers. When peer data increased or decreased so did the data for each participant. Two of the participants increased the rate of target behaviors and were on par with their peers for that setting. One participant increased his rate over baseline and leveled off but was not consistently on par with his peers. The researchers attribute the inconsistency to the peers in the study denying or ignoring the participant when he engaged in target behaviors (requesting to play).

This study showed that CBVI is effective in delivering proven intervention for social interactions. It showed that by using readily available software minimal human resources would be needed once a routine was established. This service model could be delivered by a variety of professionals within a general education environment. (Sansotti, Powell-Smith, 2008) This intervention as well as other computer based interventions relies on the motivation of the learning environment that is created through the instruction. (Ayres, Maguire, & McClimon, 2009)

Computer based tools can also be a medium to present proven effective interventions. In one study (Xin, Sutman, 2011) researchers used a smart board to create and present social stories to two subjects. A smart board is an interactive whiteboard that operates like a large touch screen where the user can manipulate the screen with touching as they would use a mouse. Smart boards can project images from a computer onto the screen and the screen can be marked with a pen-like device and eraser.

The researchers used the smart board to present customized social stories to address two distinct social skills to two different students with ASD. The stories were created by the students' teachers and each addressed a distinct replacement skill. The stories also included pictures of the students demonstrating the desired replacement skills. Both students demonstrated an increase of the desired behavior after the intervention. The researchers suggested that a smart board and an interactive learning process can increase the engagement of students with ASD. (Xin, 2011) Using technology and tools that is readily available in the classroom such as a smart board or computer networking site can be beneficial to teaching independent functioning to students with disabilities.

The researchers noted all show that technology can serve a vital function in enhancing the social skills of special needs students. In all studies the researchers used commonly used technology without the need for a lot of expertise. The instructional practices were also strategies that can be found in special education classrooms. The CBVI and technology utilized implanted strategies such as rehearsal, coaching, social stories, and other well-supported interventions. The technology used provided an engaging environment with limited face-to-face contact, opportunities for rehearsal, and

immediate feedback. All interventions suggested that the use of technology enhanced the learning of the student.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The subject of this study is a 14 year old male. He was diagnosed with Autism at approximately 19 months of age. He took no medication and was in good health. He had a one-to-one Special Education Teacher and an aide. He also received 10 hours per week of home/community based learning through a trained discrete trial therapist. He received speech therapy five times a week for twenty minutes and occupational therapy once a week for 45 minutes. He attended a medium sized public Intermediate School. The school is located in the neighboring town, and the subject rode the school bus daily with his typically developing peers and a one-to-one aide.

The subject is described in his related IEP documents as being able to perform best when working with a lot of visual supports and stimulation. He typically worked for short periods of time with a highly motivating contingency. He typically worked with supports such as a token board, activity schedule, and checklist. The subject displayed a variety of high interests. These included things centered on Disney and Marvel companies, Lego building, using Google image search engine, and community outings. Last year, he also participated on his school basketball team.

The subject's communication is constricted in the area of back and forth exchanges. He often engaged in delayed echolalia (consisting solely of dialogue of movies and TV shows) and did not let many people join in. The subject independently used language for requesting and protesting. When asked to name his friends in school

the student the student would give the same 3-4 names of his classmates. The student would sit at lunch and during other unstructured times with these students but still needed prompting and assistance to interact with them.

The subject often ignored greetings of others and rarely initiated greetings to others. This was even more evident in people that he saw on a daily basis but is outside of his “friends” and assigned teachers. When the subject was engaged in a highly preferred activity he rarely would break his attention to interact with others without additional prompting.

The student was enrolled in a partial inclusion, partial resource room setting. The student received resource room instruction for math, language arts, and social studies. The student attended Science class with a regular teacher with an individually assigned special education teacher. The student went to the special area classes; such as gym and art, with the assistance of a one-on-one Special Education aide. He also attended lunch with a one-on-one aide and sat with typically developed peers. The student appeared to be well liked by his typically developed peers but did not reciprocate in a large part of his interactions.

This study examined the effect that having a student use a social networking site had on his social functioning. Social functioning in this study was measured in three ways: percentage of independence in initiating social greetings, percentage of independence in reciprocating social greetings, and total number of independent social interactions at lunch at lunch and core classes. Core classes are defined as gym, art, physical education, woodshop, etc. These classes took place an hour a day and lunch

took place 45 minutes each day. Initiating greetings was measured by every time the student initiated a common greeting to a person who walked into the classroom or to a person in the classroom when entering the room or sitting at a table. This was a previously social skill worked on in vivo and in practice. Reciprocating greetings was measured by the subject appropriately responding to a greeting that was directed towards him. Total number of social Interactions at Special classes and lunch was measured by the total number of interactions with another person excluding one-on-one aide. This was divided into interactions that are prompted and interactions that are independent.

The data was taken by the student's one-on-one aide every day. The data was tabulated on a daily tracking sheet. Each targeted behavior such as reciprocating greetings was divided into prompted and independent. A hash mark was placed in the appropriate section each time the targeted behavior occurred. The total numbers were calculated at the end of each day for this study.

The student was administered a Facebook account by his teacher. The student was required to log on to Facebook and make at least three interactions with his set friend list. The friend list was set in collaboration with his teacher and one to one aide. His set list was comprised of his known friends and relatives and some various professionals outside of district employees that the subject has worked with. The teacher and aide were not included in friend list to stay in compliance with school policy. The student was transitioned to this activity within a set activity schedule for his afternoon routine, interactions on Facebook were not tallied within the data collection.

Each day the student was required to interact on the social network site, he was required to make a minimum of three interactions on the site. The interactions were tallied by a checklist. The interactions could be defined as a status update, interacting (saying a greeting) on a friend's wall or responding to a post from a friend on his wall. The role of the teacher is similar to the role of the teacher in the CBVI studies. The teacher acted as a prompter and gives the student opportunities to practice the target behavior through the social networking site.

When the student was required to use Facebook it was through the use of an activity schedule. Facebook was introduced after the baseline phase was finished. Every task on the activity schedule had a picture or word representing the required task. As the student finished the required task it was removed from activity schedule and the student was required to do the next sequential task. Once all of the tasks were done the student could acquire an agreed upon contingency, often time on the computer.

The student was required to utilize the Facebook site on days when his behavior and overall social adjustment seemed to be average. The student would be directed to log onto the site using an activity schedule, the Facebook logo was used as an icon on his activity schedule. When the student was to be engaged on Facebook, a check was used to help direct the student to interact. The check list was written by the teacher to ensure the student did a minimum of three interactions. The check list was numbered with a 1, 2, and 3, each time an interaction was accomplished a number was checked off. Interactions were defined as the subject saying hello to a friend, responding to a greeting, or updating his status about a salient event or how he was feeling that day. The checklist

and rules were written out and presented to the student when he was expected to engage in the social networking site.

The teacher acted as a coach similar to the role that Ayres (2009) and Lau (2009) described as the teacher was responsible for transitioning the student to the desired technological intervention, in this study the computer and Facebook website, to redirect maladaptive behaviors and to keep students on task, in this study setting up the checklist to define how the student interacted with the website. The teacher also helped spell words and read items aloud for the student when requested.

Chapter 4: Data Review

Data on reciprocated greetings, initiated greetings, and total social interactions during lunch and core classes was taken over a 3 week period during ten days. On days when the student displayed a high concentration of maladaptive behaviors and therefore was restricted in opportunities for interactions due to programmatic concerns no data was taken. The student's one on one aide recorded all data in during the study's time frame. The aide is a trained ABA therapist who is overseen by an Educational Consultant with a Ph. D.

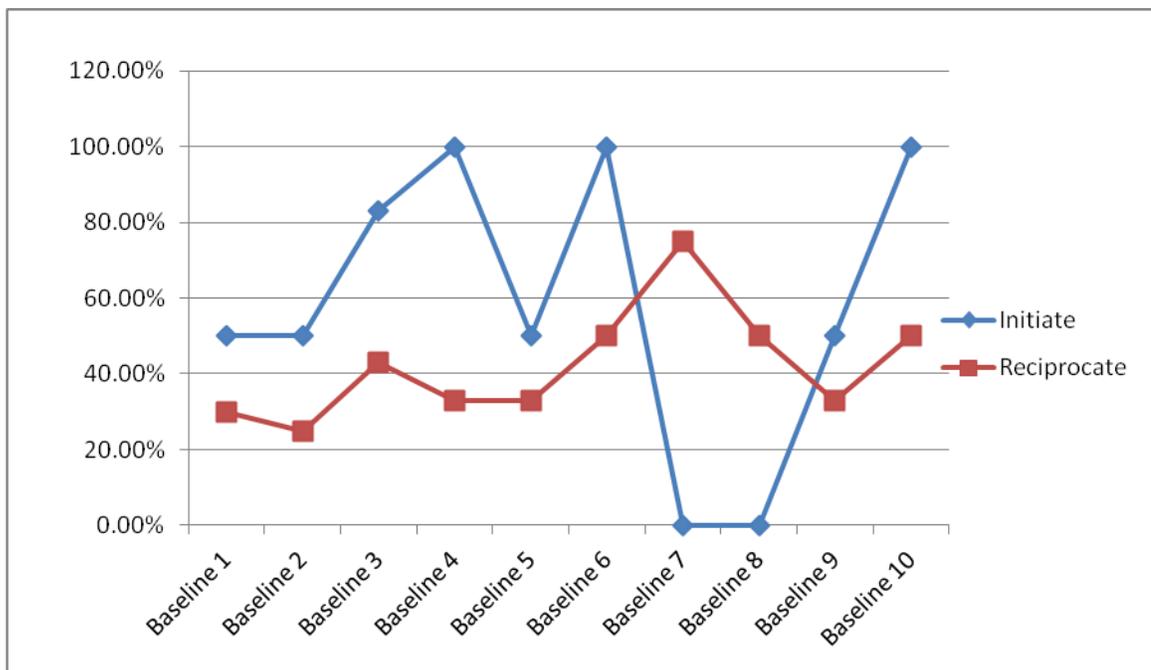


Figure 1.1 Percentage of independence in initiating and reciprocating greetings by the subject over baseline period.

Baseline data was taken for 10 days over three weeks before student was engaged in social networking site. *Figure 1.1* shows that the subject had an average of 58 % independence in initiating greetings and 42% independence in responding to greetings. The subject also showed a total average of 8.7 interactions at lunchtime and core classes, 5.4 of these interactions being independent.

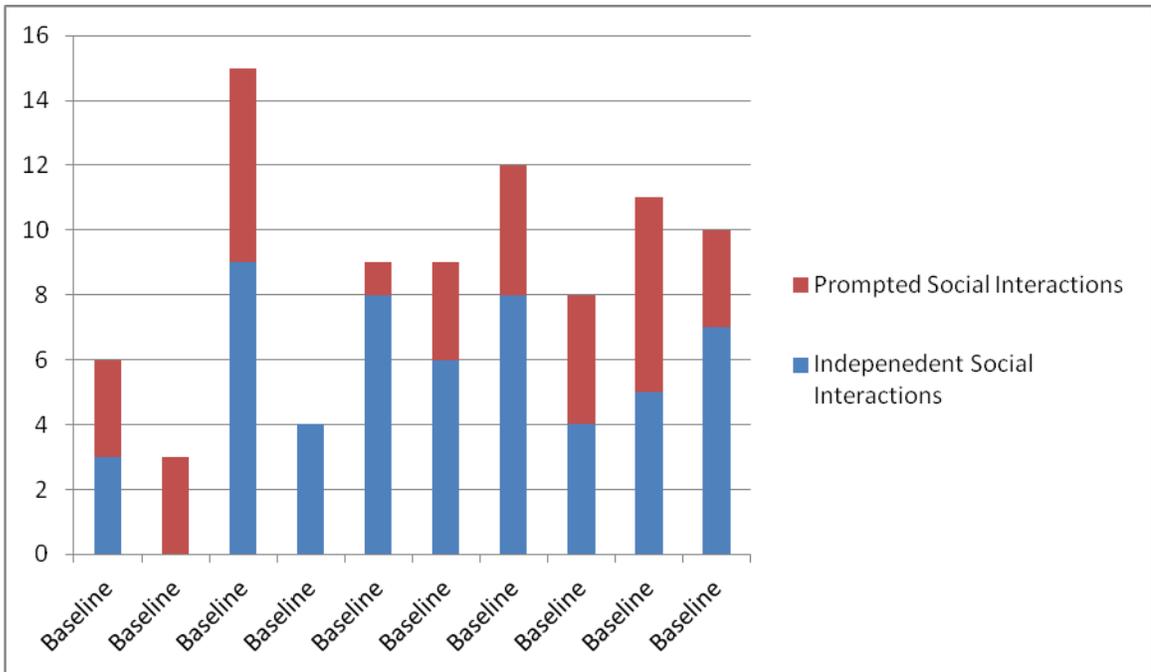


Figure 1.2 Number of recorded social interactions over baseline period.

Figure 1.2 shows that the subject also showed a total average of 8.7 interactions at lunchtime and core classes, 5.4 of these interactions being independent..

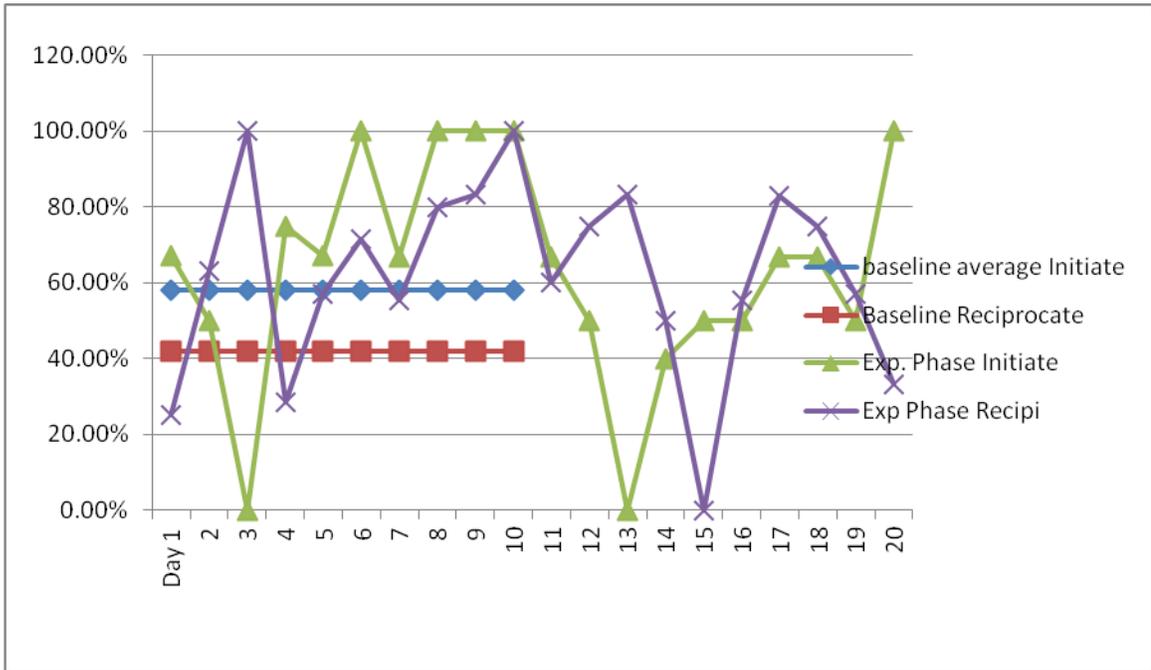


Figure 2.1 The experimental phase of initiating and recording greetings compared to the baseline phase.

Figure 2.1 demonstrates that during the experimental phase the percentage of independence in initiating greetings used by the subject went from the baseline average of 58% to 63% independence. The percentage of independence for reciprocating greeting went from the baseline 42% to 62% independence. This shows a minimum increase of 5% independence in initiating greeting and a moderate increase of 20% in reciprocating greetings.

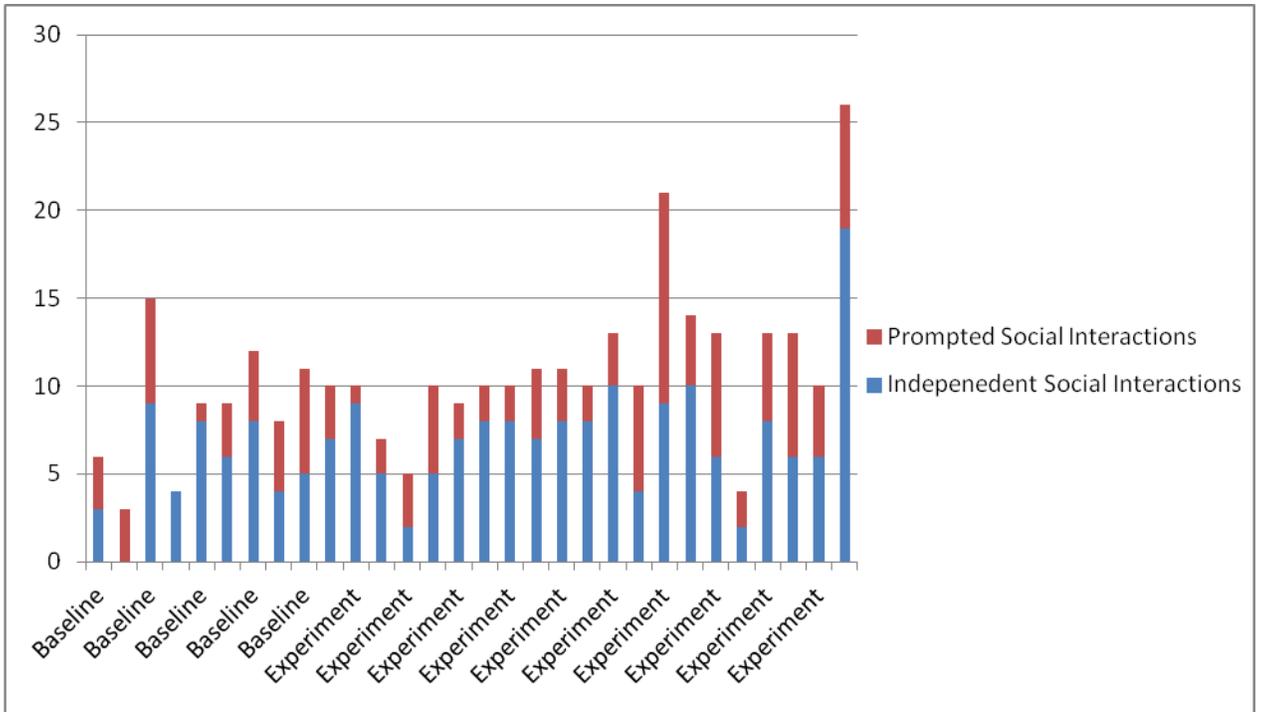


Figure 2.2 Total number of daily social interactions during baseline and experimental phase.

In *Figure 2.2* it can be seen that the total number of interactions for the subject during lunch and core periods increased from an average of 8.7 interactions to an average of 11.5 interactions per day. The total percent of independence of interactions went from 60% independence to 65% independence.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study shows that engaging in social networking can lead to an increase in independent functioning. The largest gain that was seen is an increase in reciprocating social greetings. The easiest explanation for this increase was that prompting the subject to interact through the social networking site acted as a practice for the desired target behaviors. Another explanation is that because the student was on the site with many of his peers that he had minimal interactions with previously, his being a part of the social networking gave him a little social validity with his peers. While participating in this study many of the subject's classmates mentioned how the subject was engaged in the site and could we ensure that the subject accept their friend request.

In looking at this study as a way to improve social interaction with other students I would make a few adjustments. I would take data on the total number of interactions from each individual. For example, the subject might only interact with the same four people every day. I would then compare the experimental phase to the baseline to see if more students were interacting with the subject after they were on the social network. This would help to prove that subscribing and being a part of a mutual network would give the subjects some form of social validity. This point can be suggested in study's data of the total number of interactions at lunch and core classes. The total number of

increase went from an average of 8.7 interactions to 11.3, this show an increase of over 30% of total interactions for each day.

Another change I would make would be to look closer at the teacher's role. In this study the teacher worked as a facilitator for the student to the network and also prompted the student to communicate through the site. The role of the teacher and the prompt level would have to be defined more clearly. The teacher would also benefit from a more solid definition of their role because of the stigmatism that social networking carries in the educational field. Communication between students and teachers on a social networking site is often against school district policy. Social networking and the way our students typically communicate, share ideas, and gain knowledge is often ignored in the classroom.

This study raises many issues even if it does not carry enough empirical data to prove social networking will result in increased communication. Social Networking is becoming even increasingly more popular and shows no sign of fading away. It has permeated our everyday life. It affects the way news is reported, how products are advertised, and it is even apparent in our daily language.

Social networking also carries a whole other set of hidden norms, rules, and procedures. When dealing with students who are often unaware of the hidden curriculum within their school environment, social networking might just be another big, confusing place where the rules and expectations are not clearly outlined for people with ASD. It should be the educator's responsibility to educate this population how to operate in this cyber world in the same way that it is the educator's role to cover topics as social skills,

personal hygiene, and sexual awareness. The world is a big confusing place, when living with ASD, makes it difficult for some of our students to navigate. The cyber world and the internet seem to be to the educator an even bigger and scarier place because our role, responsibilities and acceptance in this world is not clearly defined. As professionals we must further examine how social networking can be beneficial to our student and we must define how we can guide them through this world to assist in fostering their social development.

References

- Autism Society. (2008, January). *Autism through the lifespan*. Retrieved from Autism Society website: <http://www.autism-society.org/living-with-autism/lifespan/>
- Ayres, K., Maguire, A., & McClimon, D. (2009). Acquisition and Generalization of Chained Tasks Taught with Computer Based Video Instruction to Children with Autism. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities, 44*(4), 493-508.
- Bellini, S. Hopf, A. The Development of the Autism Social Skills Profile: A Preliminary Analysis of Psychometric Properties. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 22*(2), 80-87.
- Bellini, S., Peters, J., Benner, L., & Hopf, A. (2007). A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Social Skill Interventions for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Remedial and Special Education, 28*, 153-162
- Brownlow, C., & O'Dell, L. (2006). Constructing an Autistic Identity: AS Voices Online. *Mental Retardation, 44*(5), 315-321.
- Lau, C., Higgins, K., Golfar, J., Hong, E., & Miller, S. (2005). The Effects of Teacher Facilitation on the Social Interactions of Young Children during Computer Activities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 25*(4), 208-217.

- Lee, S., Odom, S., & Loftin, R. (2007). Social Engagement With Peers and Stereotypic Behavior of Children with Autism. *Journal of Postive Behavior Interventions*, 9(2), 67-69.
- Mechling, L., Pridgen, S., Cronin, B. (2005) Computer-Based Video Instruction to Teach Students with Intellectual Disabilities to Verbally Respond to Questions and Make Purchases in Fast Food Restaurants. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*. 40(1). 47-59
- Sansotti, F., & Powell-Smith, K. (2008). Using Computer-Presented Social Stories and Video Models to Increase the Social Communication Skills of Children with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Positive Behavior Intervention*, 10(3), 162-178.
- Simpson, A., Langone, J., & Ayres, K. (2004). Embedded Video and Computer Based Instruction to Improve Social Skills for Students with Autism. *Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities*, 39(3), 240-252.
- Xin, J., Sutman, F. (2011). Using the Smart Board in Teaching Social Stories to Students With Autism. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 43 (4). 18-24
- www.facebook.com*. (2004). *Facebook statistics*:
<http://www.facebook.com/facebook#!/press/info.php?statistics>