Lab Overview

The MSU Autism Lab was founded in 2007 by Brooke Ingersoll, PhD, BCBA. Our lab is interested in studying social communication development in children with autism. In particular, we study how nonverbal skills such as imitation and joint attention, which usually are significantly impaired in children with autism, can affect (or are related to) the development of later emerging language or social impairments. We use this information to develop and evaluate more effective interventions for young children with autism. We are also interested in identifying child characteristics that can predict which children are likely to respond most favorably to different interventions.

Summer is Almost Here!

School is almost out, and for those families whose children are not attending an extended school year, summer can be a time of searching for fun and exciting activities that maintain their child’s skill levels while also learning new skills. Below is a list of a few summer activities and camps that serve children with autism and other special needs.

Eric RicStar Music Therapy Summer Camp: Provides opportunities for musical expression, enjoyment and interaction for all people with special needs and their siblings. Call Cindy Edgerton at 353-6426, or e-mail at edgerto3@msu.edu.

www.cms.msu.edu
Summer Activities:

**Autistic Children’s Treatment Network:** “Conditioned Caterpillars” provides a group-learning environment for autistic children in the summer months. For more information, call Jessica Rogers at (248) 559-5820 or jrogers@actnetwork.org.

[www.actnetwork.org](http://www.actnetwork.org)

**Autism Collaborative Center (ACC) @ EMU:** Summer programs and camps for children with Autism. (734) 528-1692 ext, 23010. [www.emich.edu/acc](http://www.emich.edu/acc).

**Able Abe’s Summer Camp:** A day camp for children with special needs ages 4-10 years in Birmingham, MI (suburb of Detroit). Therapeutic environment with physical, occupational, and speech therapists on staff. Can register for one to six weeks. For more information, call The Abilities Center at (248)855-0030.

**Children’s Therapy Corner:** Offers therapy programs for children on the autism spectrum, including music therapy and aquatic therapy. For more information, call (989)835 – 6333.

Summer Camp Inclusion:

Summer may also be a time of increased stress and frustration concerning the lack of appropriate services and programming that support children with autism. Research supports the benefits of an inclusive environment in the education and programming for children with autism. This should also include summer programming, camps, and community activities.

A full-inclusion summer day camp program was developed to support children with autism in a recreational setting as well as target social development with typical peers (Brookman, Boettcher, Klein, Openden, et al., 2003). Several key points below, discussed by the authors of this article, addressed what made this inclusive summer program successful to the individual children with autism that participated (4 to 10 years), and to their families.

*Goals were to maintain children’s current functioning, and promote new skills.*
Summer Inclusion:

*One paraprofessional aide was provided for every one to two children. These aides, as well as general camp staff, were provided with ongoing training and support regarding the implementation of individualized behavioral and social goals. For this particular program, four graduate students provided feedback and instructions to the aides throughout camp activities, in order to facilitate immediate implementation.

*Priming: Providing the campers with a preview of upcoming events to increase familiarity and understanding concerning expectations, and to help with transitions throughout the day.

*Peer involvement strategies; Peer involvement between campers with autism and their typically developing peers were facilitated and encouraged throughout the camp day.


Current Projects

**Reciprocal Imitation Training:** The largest study taking place in the lab looking at the effects of a developmentally based intervention that teaches imitation within a social communicative context. If you are interested in learning more, or how to become a participant, call Nikki Bonter at 517-432-8031.

**Sibling Reciprocal Imitation Training:** This study involves teaching an older sibling to implement Reciprocal Imitation Training with their younger sibling with autism. If you should have any questions regarding this study, call Katie Meyer at 517-432-8031.

**Project ImPACT:** Trains early intervention and early childhood special education providers to teach parents of children with autism spectrum disorders evidence based strategies for improving their child’s social communication skills during ongoing family routines.

**Naturalistic Language Interventions:** A series of single subject design studies, comparing naturalistic language
interventions, and their ability to target different language functions.

*IMFAR:
In May 2009, our lab will be attending the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) and displaying three poster presentations on the current studies taking place in our lab. We are very excited!

*Spring/Summer Potluck: June 2, 2009 at the Children’s Garden at MSU campus. Call 517-432-8031 to find out more.

Family Tidbits:

In this section of our newsletter, we would like to highlight little family stories, or exciting “tidbits” concerning your child with autism. It can be anything that brings a smile to your face; an accomplishment; a new word; a happy day; a funny happening.

When you have something to share, please e-mail it to bontermi@msu.edu, and we will be sure to add it to one of our upcoming newsletters. Thank you!

Logan, 3 ½y

*Since his diagnosis in May 2008, Logan has made great strides. He is in preschool, and has participated in MSU music therapy school which he really enjoyed. Logan is working on learning PECS and has a large vocabulary of signs/gestures which helps him communicate his wants and needs. He even is starting to form the words “Dada” and “Mama” again! Now, Logan can sit down and do a puzzle, color a picture/draw, look at a book for longer than in the past, and follow multiple step directions. Logan’s family is very appreciative of everyone involved in his care and thinks “God gave us one special boy and knew we would stop at nothing to make sure he was getting everything that he needed.”

Way to go Logan! Keep up the awesome work! ☺

Cooper, 4y

*Cooper is potty trained! Over Christmas break, the whole family, including Cooper’s 3 sisters helped with “wet/dry checks around the clock.” On a trip to Lowe’s, Cooper saw the bathroom stools/vanities, and wanted ON ONE OF THOSE POTTIES!! He said “I go potty…I go potty…” Mom rushed him to the bathroom as he said this loudly and repetitively through the store! And yes, he did indeed
Dominic, 4y

*Dominic's dad talks to his mom every night at the same time on the phone. He always puts

Dominic on and they recite the same 10 words or so. For a while now, when Dominic gets on the phone with Grandma, he says all the words in the same order with no prompts from dad! How cute!

*On a trip to Maryland, Dominic started calling his dad “Daddy, Larry” in the car on the way. This made the family laugh so hard. Way to go Dominic, you funny guy! ☺

Jacob, 4y

*Jacob is counting everything! They have ABC magnets on the back of their door and Jacob brings mom and dad specific letters that they ask for. With the few letters that he does not know, he will bring the letters over so mom and dad can tell him what they are.

*Jacob is also imitating many new actions and words!

Way to go Jacob! ☺

*Thank you to all families who shared stories with us. Please send in stories and tidbits as they come up. We LOVE to hear them, and will add them to our next newsletter!