

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition that affects a person's ability to communicate and interact socially, resulting in a range of repetitive behaviours, focused interests and a desire for predictability. A phenomenon commonly observed in autistic children is that they are drawn to electronic screen media, which provide them with a focused and predictable way of engaging with information. This has led to the development of a range of screen-based interventions to be used with autistic children, designed to teach social skills to them. Whilst these interventions seem to be effective in developing their communication, they risk suppressing individual communicative behaviours in favour of encouraging the imitation of more socially desirable behaviours.

This research study investigates how the process of film-making can be used to support the development of social communication in autistic children, in a way that allows them to express themselves verbally. The research was conducted in two stages. In Stage One, the researcher delivered film-making activities with groups of autistic children in an out-of-school environment. He identified some types of social engagement that took place during these activities, and the techniques used to deliver the activities. The methods used to make the films during the Stage One activities informed Stage Two, in which the researcher investigated the work of another practitioner, who was working in a school-based setting with two pupils working as a pair. The data gathered from Stage Two was then analysed. This analysis resulted in two things; firstly, the film-making process was separated into a set of sub-processes; secondly, using the person-centred educational framework of SCERTS®, instances of social communication that took place during each sub- process were identified. What the research found was that several types of social communication took place during the film-making activities, which changed depending on what the pupils were doing. The data also suggested that the pupils' social communication become more spontaneous over the course of the film- making sessions. Overall, this research demonstrates that film-making provides autistic children with a screen-based, creative activity that can help to develop their spontaneous social communication.