The Early Student-Teacher Relationships of Children with ASD in Relation to School Adjustment
session 2085, Thursday, Aug. 1, 9 to 9:50 a.m. HST, room 303 A, Level 3.

Authors: Abbey Eisenhower, Ph.D. [1], Jan Blacher, Ph.D.[2], Geovanna Rodriguez[2]
[1] *Department of Psychology, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston, MA*
[2] *Graduate School of Education, University of California, Riverside, Riverside, CA*

The early school years set the stage for children's long-term trajectories of social, behavioral, and academic adjustment (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). The quality of early relationships with teachers during this time may be particularly influential in children's positive adaptation to school (Griggs et al., 2009). Little research has been conducted on the early student-teacher relationships (STRs) experienced by children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD); however, the social and communicative difficulties associated with ASD may make closeness with teachers harder to achieve. There is a need for research on factors that predict baseline STR quality as well as improvements in STR quality over time for these children. Research with neurotypical children suggests that behavior problems (BPs) may exacerbate STR quality over time (Doumen et al., 2008), while parental involvement (PI) in school may promote positive STRs for (McWayne et al., 2004). Finally, STRs may relate to children's development of academic skills, particularly literacy skills, over time. We examine these associations over 1.5 years among 4-7 year old children with ASD, as part of the Smooth Sailing Study. The cross-lagged design, covering three time points, multiple school years, and in most cases multiple teachers, allows us to detect potential causal associations.

In our initial sample of 37 participants, concurrent associations between STR quality, BP, and PI were supported, as well as associations across two time-points within each construct. Children's behavior problems predicted change in STR quality across the school year (B=-.41, p=.04), while baseline parental involvement did not. Data collection with the full sample (N = 113 to date) is underway, to be completed in Spring 2013. Cross-lagged panel analyses with the full sample will test a transactional association between BPs, literacy skills, and STR quality, as well as a potentially protective effect of parental school involvement on STR quality over time.

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