university of groningen / faculty of behavioural and social sciences

November 15 - 17, 2016, Groningen

Communication and Deafblindness
10th anniversary Master Groningen

Touching Conversations: Using tactile communication to foster social inclusion and encourage social interaction between members of the deafblind community who use different methods of communication

1. Research Question:

Can tactile communication be successfully used to increase social interaction between people who are deafblind who use spoken language and those who use sign language, and lead to feelings of social inclusion?

2. Background

- Our brains are hardwired for social interaction (Lebreton 2009)
- 53% of people with disabilities feel lonely, 6% have no friends at all (Sense 2015)
- On average we spend 80% of time in company but a study with a student who is deafblind found interaction to be only 85 minutes for them (Romer & Haring 1994)
- Most research has aimed to integrate people with disabilities into mainstream society but this goal is not shared by all people with disabilities (Hall 2010)

3. Theoretical framework

- The theoretical framework that underpins this study is the theory of dialogicality with particular emphasis on the view that communication is more than mutual understanding and an exchange of messages, but an activity through which every human being expresses their agency.
- It is not enough that an individual receives a given message, but that they are also able to participate fully within the communicative project in which they find themselves.

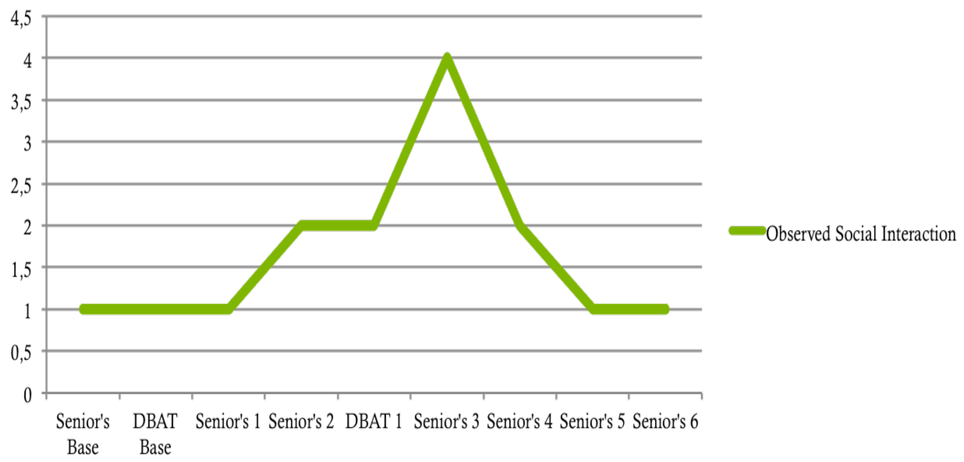
4. Method

- This study used a mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data. Throughout the study the researcher used a combination of field notes and video recording, and a semi-structured interview took place at the end of the study.
- This study included 1 adult male who is deafblind and who uses spoken language and has no usable vision who was the main participant, 1 researcher (author of the thesis), 3 trained intervenors, 2 intervenor students, and several participants with deafblindness who used sign language.
- The participant in the study was intructed to feel the hands of sign language user, in a tactile sign language fashion, when interacting with them. Their intervenor simultaneously interpreted for them.

  [This is in contrast with the intervenor interpreting the message but the two individuals communicating not being in touch]

5. Results

I. Observed Social Interaction



IV. Number of Sign Language Users Interacted With

- No lasting differences were noticed in the amount of social interaction between the participant and the sign language users of the group, nor did the participant feel more socially included with this segment of the deafblind population
- Possible bias response may have led to initial increase in overall social interaction.
- There was an increase in confidence in seeking social interaction with other peple, and in stating communication needs.

6. Conclusion/discussion

- Although there was a possible bias response that may have led to initial increase in overall social interaction, this may show the importance of the intervenor-consumer relationship and how they can positively impact the people they work with.
- The participant developed "tactile resourcefulness" meaning that they explored alternative ways to use their tactile senses in contexts beyond the study (ex. Using a tactile hockey board to follow a hockey game)
- The attitudes and beliefs of intervenors need to be further explored to determine how they impact social interaction.
- There seems to be a very big correlation between the type of activities that the person who is deafblind is engaging in and the amount of social interaction. Some activities, specially those that require using hands, can get in the way of social interaction.

References

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KEYWORDS: Deafblindness, social interaction, tactile communication, tactile sign language