

Title: “I do lots of things”: Children with disabilities’ perceptions of competence for everyday activities.

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Major Finding: Children’s competence was supported when the environment and activities matched their abilities, needs, and interest. For children, competence was “doing lots of things”.

Participants: N = 5

- Children ranged in age from 7 years, 11 months— 17 years, 1 month.
- All children identified as having cerebral palsy.
 - 2 children used both augmentative communication devices and mobility devices.
- Children were from urban and suburban environments; 3 reported family income over \$80,000.
- Children represented a range of ethnic/racial groups, including Caucasian, Hispanic, and Multi-racial.

Method: Children completed 2 participant observations, 1 semi-structured interview with narrative elaboration, and 1 cognitive interview using the COSA. Children and the researcher took photographs.

Analysis: Content analysis of each case, constant comparative method to identify themes across cases.

Findings: Five themes emerged to describe competence and the process of gaining competence.

- The first three themes all influenced the process of gaining competence: the physical and social environment, the quality of the activity (whether it was fun and important to children), and the child’s personal characteristics (including impairments and strengths).
- When the environment and activity aligned with the child’s abilities and needs, children engaged in a process of gaining competence (the fourth theme) by practicing and problem solving ways of doing things. Social environments could facilitate problem solving and “doing” with support.
- The result of this process was the fifth theme: a sense of competence for “doing” and a belief in one’s abilities. Children made it clear that they could be competent even if they had impairments that made some actions difficult.

Conclusion: Children feel competent when they know how to do activities and when they are satisfied with their level of engagement in activities that are fun and important. Children’s competence is not limited by impairment or reliant on independent performance. Rather, children gain competence through a process of practice and problem solving solutions to impairment related challenges or environmental barriers. Children’s competence is enhanced by social environments that facilitate problem solving and enable children to engage in activities with support

Implications for future research: Future research should explore how children with other disabilities identify, explain, and demonstrate their competence.

Evidence– based practice implications:

- **Occupational therapists can support children’s sense of competence by teaching children problem solving strategies and providing opportunities for practice during intervention.**
- **Practitioners can work with parents and other adults to identify ways in which they can support children with disabilities to engage in fun and important activities.**
- **Static measures of competence may not fully capture the social processes by which children build and evaluate their competence.**

Kramer, J. (2008). A mixed methods approach to building validity evidence: The Child Occupational Self Assessment (Chapter Three). [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] University of Illinois at Chicago.