INTRODUCTION

• The core symptoms of ASD are deficits in social communication, social imitation, joint attention, social attention, face perception, functional and symbolic play, communication abilities, and restrictive and repetitive behaviors and interests (Mash & Barkley, 2014).
• The social communication impairments in ASD affect multiple domains of social behavior including social interactions (SI) and pretend play (PP). The ability to engage in social interactions, imitate another person or engage in pretend play has an impact on the individual’s ability to learn about one’s social and nonsocial environment (Stone, Ousley, & Littleford, 1997).
• Dance or drama is a practical and feasible option for children with ASD to improve their skill deficits (Behrends, Muller, & Dziobek, 2012; Rosenblatt et al., 2011).
• Previous research has found that the children with ASD who participated in a drama class made improvements in recognizing faces, expressing their emotions, solving social problems, and socially responding to script and procedural cues (Corbett et al., 2011).
• It was hypothesized that participants enrolled in a drama class would improve in their pretend play and social interaction skills over the course of the drama class.

METHOD

Participants

• 3 male children with autism spectrum disorder
• Enrolled in a fall drama class at a local theater
• Two participants were 11, one was 14

Setting & Materials

• The Rose Theater, Omaha, Nebraska
• 20 minute observation sheets with 10 second intervals
• SSIS

Dependent Variables

• Social Interactions
• Pretend Play

Experimental Design

• Weekly observations of participants during their drama class.

Procedure:

• All involved researchers were trained on the operational definitions and procedures of the current study.
• After consent was obtained, parents completed a pre-test measure of the SSIS. A post-test measure was collected after the final drama class.
• Researchers conducted weekly 20 minute observations with a 10 second partial interval recording during a 60 minute drama class from September 12- October 31, 2015.
• Inter-rater reliability was collected for 3 of the sessions.

RESULTS

• The research procedure was implemented with fidelity, however Seth was absent week 6.
• All three participants had increases in occurrences of pretend play and social interactions from week one to week eight.
• AA=Above Average, A=Average, BA=Below Average

DISCUSSION

• Anecdotal notes revealed that all three students improved in the amount they used facial expressions and sound effects while pretending.
• Over time the students also began to spontaneously interact with each other as well as work as a team to complete tasks and do activities.
• As hypothesized, the main findings from this study indicate that attending a drama class at the Rose is an effective strategy for increasing pretend play and social interactions in children with ASD.

References