

Social Justice Seminar Series

The Differential Impacts of Educational Media: Considering Individual Differences across Diverse Contexts Using a Social Justice Framework



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Understanding children's developmental trajectories and the ways in which environmental exposures influence these trajectories demand more contextually sensitive conceptualizations. One way to introduce these conceptualizations is to carefully consider the interplay between individual differences and exposures to early conditions, experiences, interventions, or any other bases for predicting diverging developmental trajectories (e.g., girls' academic performance tends to be stronger than boys). This approach to understanding development is consistent with a social justice approach. Specifically, creating optimal developmental conditions for these at-risk children involves creating exposures that reflect and support their unique strengths and validate their multiple identities. The impact of these exposures is then hypothesized to be more pronounced when they knock children off their expected developmental trajectory (e.g., boys who watch educational TV would demonstrate significant gains). Conversely, the impact of these exposures will be attenuated and harder to detect when such exposures nudge children along their expected normative path (e.g., girls who watch educational TV would demonstrate little benefit). To illustrate these differential impacts, three examples using educational media exposure will be presented. For children whose normative developmental trajectories in a particular domain are less than optimal (i.e., literacy skills for children growing up in poverty, academic grades for boys, language for children who demonstrate greater negative affect), it is hypothesized that educational media exposure will predict larger and more positive developmental gains compared with children whose trajectories are more normatively optimal. Social justice frameworks highlight the importance of matching children's unique strengths and identities with the kinds of resources and experiences that they prefer and value or to which they are frequently exposed. In such settings, the provision of high-quality educational media would be predicted to knock these children off their less than optimal developmental trajectories towards ones that are more positive whereas their peers who are currently progressing normatively along a particular trajectory will demonstrate little to no benefit, or even a negative impact.