

Abstract

Research on play confirms how important it is for young children's development. Play is a self-chosen, non-literal activity, and emotionally meaningful (Trawick-Smith, 2020). All children can play, including those with disabilities. We live in a world full of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. Most of us are able to adapt to these sensory surroundings, without much difficulty. However, children with sensory disorders may have difficulty understanding and experiencing the sensory aspects of typical play environments and interactions. This independent study was conducted to explore the play behaviors of children with perceptual and hearing impairments. It examined early indicators and risk factors of sensory disorders. Intervention strategies, such as parent training and teacher involvement, were studied for effectual outcomes. Finally, implications for teachers and parents were constructed as well as recommendations for future research.

Why is Play Critical for Development?

Social and emotional development—Pretending to be other characters gives children the tools to express and cope with their emotions. Creative play helps social development through interactions with peers.

Language skills—Improves language skills by trying new words and phrases.

Physical development—Creative movement and imaginative play helps development of sensory and motor skills.

Problem solving skills—Develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills when children re-enacts stories.

Risk Factors: Vision Loss

- Impairment in vision could affect and delay overall motor development because of their lack of visual motivation to play with objects.
- Child may have difficulty understanding play with peers-unable to read facial expressions and make-believe action.
- Child can have social anxiety due to poor peer relationships.

Risk Factors: Hearing Loss

- Child's play abilities could be affected by their brains becoming over-taxed with language/actions around them.
- Child's impaired communication with peers in play could build social anxiety.
- Child's hearing impairment could affect social interactions with peers and developing important social skills.
- Hearing loss could lead to vestibular disorders—problems related to balance— can limit motor activities.
- Child's may be more easily distracted by noise and may be less able to focus on and sustain play activities.

Intervention Strategies: Perceptual Disabilities

- Auditory and/or other sensory supports.
- Child may play a game with their peers if auditory cues are included. Example, the memory game may be played with small boxes that have different sounding rattles so the child can match by sound.
- Play objects that make sounds or are highly textured.
- Teacher can serve as visual interpreter to promote peer interaction
- Young children must be taught to move to sound sources to get what they want.
- Talk about positions of sound: in front, behind, beside, left, right, above.
- Provide stimulating toys; tactile and sound
- Active adult support

Intervention Strategies: Hearing Impairment

- Research on devices for families and the home environment
- Family support and coaching on engaging in play in their homes.
- Research on devices with hearing loss with technology and audiology.
- Many children who are deaf or hard of hearing have “residual hearing.”
- Some support devices for hearing impairments: Hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems, captioning, telephone amplifiers, flashing/vibrating alarms, audio loop systems, infrared red listening devices
- Support devices for vision impairment: Recording devices, auditory books, electronic dictionary with speech, audible gym equipment, screen reading software, talking watches.

Implications

- Effective strategies can help children with disabilities engage in play and can facilitate their positive social interactions among all children in a classroom.
- Teachers can help children who are ignored or rejected to learn social skills to form positive peer relationships.
- Teachers must assist typically developing peers to understand, accept, and interact with those who have disabilities.
- Reading books to all students that depict children with disabilities and having a discussion on such disabilities.
- Showing and demonstrating assistive equipment such as alternative communication devices.
- Coaching typically developing children to interact with children with disabilities; especially on getting their attention and initiating play.

Early Indicators: Perceptual Disabilities

- Children with perceptual disabilities or visual impairments may engage in simpler, less frequent, or other distinct forms of play. Other indicators include:
- Difficulty understanding make-believe by their peers Hesitation to engage in active or rough play on the playground
- Being cautious and alert for unseen obstacles and risks Inability to communicate effectively with peers
- Not recognizing non-verbal play cues
- Ignoring invitations to join in play or not knowing what peers are playing

Early Indicators: Hearing Impairments

- Children with hearing impairment may exhibit the following behaviors:
- Feeling overwhelmed by active play groups
- Withdrawing from groups of children talking all at once and not able to understand
- Seeking out one-on-one play
- Motor delays or having trouble balancing
- Showing lack of response to adult guidance/instructions
- Quickly distracted from peer or adult engagements
- Able to watch-copy peers in block play building or visual games

Future Directions

- Research on devices for families and the home environment
- Family support and coaching on engaging in play in their homes.
- Research on devices with hearing loss with technology and audiology.
- Many children who are deaf or hard of hearing have “residual hearing.”
- Some support devices for hearing impairments: Hearing aids, cochlear implants, FM systems, captioning, telephone amplifiers, flashing/vibrating alarms, audio loop systems, infrared red listening devices
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Reference

Trawick-Smith, J. (2020). *Young children's play: Development, disabilities and diversity*. New York, NY, Routledge.