Play Participation of Two to Three Year Olds With and Without Autism: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

- OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this study is to explore caregiver perspectives of play participation in children with and without autism between the ages of two and three.
- METHOD: a mixed methods study was used to explore play participation from the perspective of 15 caregivers. Phenomenology was utilized to code interviews and develop themes and quantitative data was collected by use of the Assessment of Preschool Children’s Participation (APCP).
- RESULTS: Six themes emerged from caregiver interviews. No statistically significant difference was found in APCP score of play participation between children with and without autism.

Play is the main occupation in childhood. Participating in play facilitates the learning, conceptualizing, and socializing process in the development in children. The Occupational Therapy Practice Framework defines play participation as, “participating in play; maintaining a balance of play with other area of occupation; and obtaining, using, and maintaining toys, equipment, and supplies appropriately”. Children with disabilities have shown delays in play compared to their typically developing peers. However, there is a lack of research about play participation in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder specifically. Together caregivers and occupational therapists can help facilitate play participation; the involvement of caregivers during play has been shown to increase participation of the child. The caregiver’s perspectives on play provide insight into play participation in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Theory

- PEOP Model
- Eco-Cultural Model
- The Dynamic Systems Model

Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children with Autism</th>
<th>Typically Developing Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Caregivers; 4 Female, 1 Male</td>
<td>10 Caregivers; 7 Female, 1 Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Children; 5 Males</td>
<td>10 Children; 8 Males, 2 Females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Range: 30-43 months</td>
<td>Age Range: 24-46 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Caregiver Income of Child with Autism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than $25,999</th>
<th>$25,999 to $49,999</th>
<th>$50,000 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 to $25,999</td>
<td>$25,999 to $49,999</td>
<td>$50,000 or more</td>
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Caregiver Income of Typically Developing Child

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<thead>
<tr>
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Discussion

The preliminary results from this research study in progress have the following implications for occupational therapy practice:
- The Assessment of Preschool Child’s Participation is one tool that can be used for caregivers to describe their child’s play participation.
- There are many similarities in play participation between 2 and 3 year olds with and without autism. Occupational therapy practitioners may use these similarities as strengths in the play participation of the young child with autism.
- Caregivers of children with autism value play in a purpose, specifically for learning. These caregivers also describe aspects of themselves and their relationship with their child.
- Caregivers of typically developing children most frequently discussed play for learning and caregiver guidance.
- When describing their child in play, caregivers of children with autism focused more on performance skills, whereas caregivers of typically developing children discussed temperaments.
- Both caregivers of children with autism and typically developing children frequently discussed outdoor places to play and both mentioned that time of day was a significant factor in play participation.

References

3. Lifier, K., Mason, E. I., & Barton, E. S. (2013). Children’s play: Where we have been and where we could go. Journal of Early Intervention, 35, 281-301.

Results

Qualitative Results:
- Caregivers of children with autism spoke more about Caregiver Involvement and Challenges in Play compared to caregivers of typically developing children.
- Both groups spoke most frequently about Play for a Purpose, specifically play for learning.
- Caregivers of children with autism spoke more time about Challenges in Play than caregivers of typically developing children.
- Caregivers of children with autism talked more about child skills rather than temperament; Caregivers of typically developing children talked more about temperament rather than child skills.
- Caregivers of typically developing children talked more (99 times) about Place, Space, and Time of Day for Play when compared to caregivers of children with autism (58 times).
- Both groups talked about Outdoor Play Places most frequently.
- Caregivers of typically developing children talked more frequently about Playing with Others and Sharing.
- Both groups talked most frequently about Object Play in Ways to Play. The second most frequent Way to Play was Physical Play in both groups.

Quantitative Results:
Based upon the independent samples t test, researchers accepted the null hypothesis. Data analysis concluded that there was no statistical significance in caregiver reports of play participation between children with autism and typically developing children, t (22)= -1.032, p = .313.