

CREATING OUTDOOR PLAY ENVIRONMENTS TO SUPPORT SOCIAL INTERACTIONS OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER; A SCOPING STUDY

Christensen, Keith

Utah State University, keith.christensen@usu.edu

Romero, Laura Patricia Reyes

Utah State University, laurareyes29@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a developmental disorder characterized by impairments in social interaction and gestural communication. Various play-based interventions have been used to help children with autism develop social skills. Interventions that consider how children play, instead of the final outcome of the play session, seem to be more effective in addressing each child's needs. But because children with autism display a large range of variability the results of play interventions are usually very unpredictable. Research suggests that play environments for children with ASD need to be structured in order to be effective and structured teaching strategies are often used in the absence of well-structured environments. However, well-designed outdoor play environments may provide the necessary structure to support social interactions, creating an important place where children with ASD can learn social skills through play. The purpose of this study is to explore best practice outdoor play environment design strategies that support the social skills development of children with ASD. To do so, a scoping study was conducted to review the literature involving children with ASD, outdoor play environments, and social skill development. Scopus, Google Scholar, and EBSCOHost were searched followed by ancestral and descendent searches. While there are few studies specific to outdoor play environments, the numerous studies examining the play behaviors of children with ASD can be categorized into four primary areas of impacted development: low motor skills and coordination, sensory integration, generative play, and joint attention. Addressing these four primary areas of impacted development in the design of the outdoor play environments likely plays an important role in creating spontaneous and pleasurable play opportunities for children with ASD, and may well support social interactions, creating an important place where children with ASD can develop social skills through play.

Keywords

Play, autism spectrum disorder, social interaction