

Symbolic Thought: The Play, Language, and Communication Foundation of Autism from Framework to Intervention

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1:45-5:15 pm

Purpose & Goals

- Increase knowledge of the relationship between play and language
- Increase knowledge of how deficits in play influence individuals with ASD
- Develop EBP strategies to address deficits in symbolization
- Integration theory to practice: Developmental, Information Processing and Behaviorism

Things to Remember

- I use many examples. Some may seem like kids you know. I will not confirm this.
- Thank you to the many, many children and families who have taught and continue to teach me.
- Adopt a problem solving orientation: Avoid dead-end words such as: appropriate/inappropriate; self stimulation, preservative, manipulative....need to get beyond this to explore why a behavior occurs and teach an adaptive alternative
- We must always address the immediate with the long term in mind.
- We address play skill development because it foundational to linguistic, academic, and social success.

Organization

- **1:45-2:45 Framework Basics**
- **2:45-3:45 Play, Language, Literacy, Socialization Connections**
- **3:45-4:00 Break**
- **4:00-5:00 Application of Theory to Practice**
- **5:00-5:15 Wrap-up, Questions**

Core Features of Autism

- Stereotypic Behaviors
 - Repetitive acts related to OCD, Developmental Delays, Lack of Ideation, Anxiety
- Deficits in Socialization
 - Interpreting and Demonstrating Emotions
 - Comprehension and Use of Non-verbal Communication Behaviors
 - Higher Level Thinking (Perspective Taking, Theory of Mind)
 - Engaging in Self and Mutual Regulatory Behaviors
- Deficits in Symbolic Thought
 - Play
 - Language
 - Literacy

Theoretical Foundations

- Developmental Theory:
 - Intentionality: Perlocutionary, Illocutionary, Locutionary Stages (Bates)
 - Communicative Behaviors: Gestural Complex (joint attention, pointing, giving, showing)
 - Play Skills: Oral Motor, Sensory Motor (gross motor), Causality (fine motor), Pretend,
 - Cognitive Skills: Attention, Imitation, Causation, Object Permanence
 - Social Skills in Play: Solitary, On-looker, Parallel, Cooperative; Dyadic to Triadic play (along with communicative behavior and intentionality development)
 - Language: Semantics to Syntax
 - Self & Mutual Regulation: use of skills to calm oneself or elicit help from others (trust, predictability)

Information Processing

- Learning Style: Visual Learner, Gestalt Style
- Sensory Processing: Hyper/hypo-sensitivity and influence on organizing of self; comprehension
- Homeostasis: Ability to maintain a calm alert state
- Executive Functions
 - Problem Solving
 - Perspective Taking
 - Interpretation of non-verbal behaviors/affect

Behavioral

- Applied Behavior Analysis: use of multiple techniques for the purpose of increasing adaptive behavior and independence
- A-B-C: antecedent, behavior, consequence
- Strategic manipulation of the environment (antecedent) to elicit a predetermined behavior
- Strategic use of prompts (least to most/most to least) to increase independence
- Programming for generalization: across contexts, materials, people
- Use of positive and negative reinforcement to increase
- Avoid use of punishment as this creates anxiety, avoidance and a power struggle....Skinner said this in his 1946 writing
- Be aware of behaviors we inadvertently reinforce and teach

What is Play

- Self generated
- Self gratifying
- Process over product
- Requires gross motor abilities
- Requires fine motor abilities
- Requires social competence
- Generative
- Symbolic
- A forum for planning and understanding life events; engaging in problem solving, exploring roles and responsibilities of individuals
- A forum through which we learn story grammar

Play, Language, Literacy, & Socialization: Connecting the Dots

- Pretend Play is Symbolic
- Language is Symbolic
- Pretend Play is Story Grammar
- Story Grammar as Conversation: Retelling events, comprehending another's retelling within conversation
- Children with ASD have deficits in play, language, literacy, and socialization

Play and Autism

- How kids with ASD Play and Hypotheses as to Why:
 - Repetitive acts
 - Limited repertoire of play materials
 - Avoidant of sensory materials
 - Enjoyment of sensory motor acts (swinging, running, spinning, chase games)
 - Misuse of fine motor materials
 - Minimal initiation of adaptive solitary play
 - Preference for dyadic vs. triadic play

What to do....What to do?

- Assess, Plan, Treat, Collect and Analyze Data (reassess)
- Assess: Where is/are the underlying problems for this individual?
- Plan: What new behaviors need to be taught and how will these influence core features of ASD

Underlying Problems

- Where is/are the underlying problems for this individual?
 - Intentionality
 - Gestural Complex (joint attention, pointing, giving, showing)
 - Play Level
 - Cognitive Skills
 - Social Play
 - Language
 - Self & Mutual Regulation
 - Learning Style
 - Sensory Processing
 - Problem Solving
 - Perspective Taking
 - Interpretation of non-verbal behaviors/affect
- How are these features manifested in play and what are the long term implications?

Group Problem Solving

- Observable Behavior
- Assessment of Need and Relationship to Long Term Adaptive Functioning
- Target Behavior Defined
- Goal

Treat: How to address these problems!

- How to address these problems?
 - Strategically manipulated, developmentally sound repeated opportunities
 - Keep in mind level of representation (symbol use)
 - Provide multiple opportunities across contexts, materials, people
 - Keep in mind that as energy goes into one aspect the child will have less energy for another aspect
 - Strategically use level of prompts

Methods

- Strategically manipulated, developmentally sound repeated opportunities
 - Play within naturalistic context and daily events
 - Building triadic from dyadic play
 - Create real problems
 - Pause and comment on problems
 - Reassure, praise, and code problem solving attempts
 - Pause before interacting (don't be a child's left hand)
 - Sabotage
 - Scaffold
 - Be proactive with outlets for self and mutual regulation
 - Have trust and respect as foundational to interactions
 - Build upon and reframe aberrant into adaptive

Methods

- Keep in mind level of representation (symbol use)
 - Use visual supports to support learning not as the sole medium of representation
 - Move within and across level of complexity
 - Child size objects
 - Miniature objects
 - Photos
 - Pictures
 - Drawings

Methods

- Provide multiple opportunities across contexts, materials, people
 - Look for opportunities
 - Encourage peer to peer problem solving and interaction
 - Use a variety of materials
 - Scaffold upon immediate events

Methods

- Keep in mind that as energy goes into one aspect the child will have less energy for another aspect
 - Know your goal for the interaction
 - Social
 - Cognitive
 - Linguistic
 - Motor
 - Adjust your expectations accordingly: Old forms-new functions; Old functions-new forms

Methods

- Strategically use level of prompts
 - Never repeat a directive more than twice at any one level of prompts (habituation)
 - Least to Most
 - Verbal
 - Visual
 - Proximity
 - Tactile
 - Physical Assist

Play and the Older or More Competent Child

- Integrating Problem Solving into Individual and Group Work
- Incorporating Planning into Choice Making and Emotional Regulation
- Integrating Self Talk as a way to regulate behavior
- Using theatre as a way to address play skills and schema development
- Using story re-enactment and development to teach story grammar

Questions????????

- Final Thoughts:
 - Never minimize the role you play in assisting an individual with autism claim his/her integrity, achieve his/her potential to develop strong trusting relationships, and advocate for him/herself....to be happy.
 - Thank You