

PLAY FEATURES OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED CHILDREN¹

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ABSTRACT

Playing is a social skill which is particularly important for children's social and language development in early life. Through play children can organize their social relations and interactions in a better way, produce social problems and get the opportunity to practice to solve these problems. Skills that children need for their lives, such as making observations, building cause-effect relationship, planning, having communication and interaction all develop through play. Play is also important for the development of children with special needs. According to the characteristics and types of children's special needs, there are also differences in the characteristics of children's play. In the present study, while focusing on play features of children with visual impairment, some examples of these types of play are also presented.

Keywords: Play, children with special needs, children with visual impairment, children with visual impairment and play, play features in children with visual impairment, visually impaired children

INTRODUCTION

Games in the Preschool Period

Games have an important place in almost every period of life, especially in early childhood. It is considered the universal and basic language of all children. Babies begin to participate in simple game activities after birth and the participating continues to increase during the next 5-6 years of their lives. Children use games as a tool to understand and make sense of life. For children there is no difference between game, learning and tasks. Children are born to play games. They enjoy playing games and can do it constantly. For them, games are natural, spontaneous, and pleasurable. Instead of focusing what happens at the end, one should focus on its meaning (Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2008, Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2014, Mayesky 2006, Skellenger, 1990)

Games allow children to understand the world and themselves better via making use of their own experiences, while it affects every stage of their development, growth and learning significantly. It teaches children how to communicate with people around them, help them organize their social relations and interactions better, and promote the development of skills such as observation, cause-effect relationships and planning. Many games increase children's physical health and improve their mobility. While playing games, children gain the power to do something for themselves, and to control, test and use their skills as well as be able to trust themselves (Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2014; Allen and Cowdery, 2005; Cook et al., 2004; Schmidtchen, 1994).

Games are very important for children with special needs, as well as children who are typically developing. As in children with typical development, play takes place in four

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developmental stages also for children with special needs. The first of these phases is the "simple manipulation phase". At this stage, the children try to play with their fingers, reach out to the objects and take the object to their mouths. The second one is the "relational game" stage. At this stage, the children try to combine two or more objects in a way that is not functional. The third one is the "functional game" stage. Sometimes the game is object-focused (baby's hair), sometimes it is focused on the child himself (combing his/her own hair) or on another person (combing someone else's hair). This kind of this game increases with time and forms the basis of symbolic game. The final stage is the "symbolic game" stage. While playing, children do not just depend on the material available, they act as well. In this stage, children use different objects for different purposes and replace one object with another. For example: they use the dominos instead of money, or a doll replaces a baby sister, or the child feeds the doll, and provides for its needs. In addition, in the symbolic game, children act like the other person in their game and form their own truth. In these four stages of game, a delay is seen in children special needs regarding the learning outcomes. The child's special needs or inadequacy affect the creativity, attention, interest and discovering skills that are essential in playing a game. The development of skills regarding playing games in children with special needs is based on the opportunities they are provided. For instance, the access to toys, the environment where the game takes place, the presence of peers and adults facilitating and encouraging to play (Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2014; Berckelaer-Onnes, 1994; Frost et al., 2008; Tobias, 1994).

The play characteristics of children with special needs differ according to their specific needs. The present study focused on the play characteristics of children with visual impairment.

Game in Children with Visual Disability

Children with visual disability have limited communication with the people around them, often being excluded by their peers and other individuals around them who are usually unaware (Lieberman and MacVibar, 2003).

Children with visual disability can use their hearing and touch sense better through play by focusing their attention. Children with visual impairments are less imaginative in imaginary games and are more likely to be focused on searching and using their physical environment (MEB, 2013).

Visual impairment causes many problems in children's psycho-motor, language, emotional and social development areas, as well as in daily life activities. Significant visual impairment prevents the development of visual skills in children (Tsai et al., 2013). Visual impairment restricts or completely abolishes children's ability to monitor movements. This causes children with visual impairment to be dependent on others to do things. Children without visual disability feel more comfortable and safe in their playing environment, they have fun and they accept transitions more easily (Zanandrea, 1992). However, children with visual disability find fewer opportunities and responses than their peers do (Lieberman and MacVibar, 2003). The limitations of the physical movements of children with visual impairment also limit their behaviors in terms of playing games. This limitation causes children with visual impairment not to know how to participate in the playgroup or prevents these children from participating in supported group interaction (Celeste, 2006, Celeste and Grum, 2010). Children with visual impairment tend to respond less frequently to interactions initiated by their classmates than their peers who can see. They are also more likely to wait for feedback, respond more slowly to different gaming activities and are less inclined to respond to their peers' wishes or to make compliments. Transitions from one playing activity to another are also more difficult. They are also slow in making transitions compared to their peers. Children without visual impairment often interact with each other, but children with a

visual disability usually spend most of their time interacting with adults. In addition, children with visual impairment seem to be less interested in playing close to their peers, as they cannot observe other children and play with them (Celeste and Grum, 2010; Zanandrea, 1992).

There are differences in the game playing behaviors between the children who cannot see/who are significantly affected visually, and those who have no visual disability. Children with visual disability discover objects by holding them close to their bodies, touching them and licking the objects. They do not want to leave the toy they find since it is so hard to find it again. They are also more likely to play with the toy by grasping it physically and rarely make them talk as if they are alive (Vig, 2007).

Young children with visual impairments show delays both in play and social development (Ely, 2014). During infancy and preschool periods, they mostly play a limited number of games. These games usually need repetition, are stereotypical, and are played alone (Frost et al., 2008). During inclusive preschool free play opportunities in pre-school settings, children with visual impairment prefer to play on the playground by themselves and are rarely successful in their relationship with their peers (Ely, 2014). Delays in the development of symbolic and dramatic play are seen in children with visual impairment (Kesiktaş, 2009). Children with blindness or severe visual impairment exhibit considerable delays or deviations compared to other special-needs children, especially in sensory-motor and symbolic play. Various qualitative behavior aspects of games such as spontaneous, creative, attention and discovery, are diminished in children's games who have visual disability (Lee et al., 2012).

Visually impaired children exhibit stereotypical behaviors such as playing less manipulative games. They show behaviors such as swaying or pointing to a spot during play (Celeste and Grum, 2010; Rettig, 1994). Moreover, the development of symbolic games and role-playing games is clearly delayed. They prefer to take part in games with less aggressiveness (Frost et al., 2008).

There are differences in quality as well as quantity in the play of blind children. Children who cannot see use less creativity and imagination in their games (Chapman and Stone, 1988). They have difficulties in initiating and maintaining communication with their peers and need adult support in constructing the game. Significant losses are seen in children who are blind or who have severe visual impairment, in terms of imitating and using an object instead of another one, for example a toy blanket instead of a magical cape (Allen and Cowdery 2005, Celeste 2006, Celeste 2007, Pizzo and Bruce, 2010). In addition, these children are also having difficulty in relating an object to similar experiences and past experiences (Rettig, 1994).

It is difficult for children with visual disabilities to adapt to the field in time, and to distinguish the real from the unreal. For this reason, children with visual impairment need more time to adapt to the playing environment. In addition, children with visual impairment need extra time and experience to fully understand the features of the object (Lee et al., 2012). Children who cannot see, or who see little, cannot respond to the fast and unpredicted movements of the children who can see and perform different activities more slowly. For this reason, changes in playing game activities cause difficulties for children with visual disability (Frost et al., 2008).

Children with visual impairment are able to relate objects about a year after their peers can. They also begin to use an object appropriate to its purpose later than their peers do, such as "using a spoon to stir the liquid in a cup" (Troster and Brambring, 1994).

Children with visual impairments prefer to play with audio and tactile toys, while they refrain from playing with stuffed toys. Children with visual impairments also prefer picture books, colored pencils, dominoes and similar toys (Farrenkopf et al., 1995). They also need to be taught how to play with toys because they cannot imitate or mimic adult behaviors (Frost et al., 2008). Attention should be paid to select toys for the children with visual impairment. The toys should be easy to distinguish when touched, smelled or heard (Özyürek and Koçak, 1996).

During infancy, various toys can be hung on the baby's cradle or somewhere over his head so that the baby can touch the toy. They should be allowed to discover the toys so they should be at a place which easy for them to reach. At older ages, it is necessary to show meaningful things to children with visual impairment. In order to achieve this, the first step should be helping the child to reach the toy and letting him discover it by feeling the toy. Then they should be helped to discover the game by telling how the game works. It takes time for children with visual impairment to discover the toy. For this reason, the child must be given as much time as he needs to discover his toy. However, over time, these children should be taught how to play with their toys in different ways (Recchia, 1997).

Songs, rhythms, listening to the sound of glasses, forks, spoons, toy drums and cymbals to identify living things and objects and asking them, "Which ones are used in the kitchen?" are some examples for auditory games which can be played with children who have visual disability (MEB, 2013). Games that are played with concept cards, puzzles, and educational and other kinds of toys can be played as they help identifying living things and objects by touching.

Some examples of games that can be played with babies and children with visual disability are as follows.

For example:

Sense Experiences

The adult takes the baby in her/his arms and sits at a comfortable place.

The adult can watch what kind of reaction the baby shows when touched with different kinds of cushions on his body parts like hands, feet, arms and legs.

Then the adult continues to touch the baby with the cushion that s/he enjoys the most.

Later on, the baby may be given opportunities to try different smells.

It is possible to concentrate on different kinds of flowers and smelling them by walking around indoors and outdoors (Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2008).

Let's Touch the Animals

The pictures prepared in different textures can be hanged at a place by the bed where the baby can touch easily,

Attention is drawn to the textured pictures

Provide opportunities for the baby to touch the pictures,

By talking about the characteristics of the animals in the pictures,

The sounds of the animals can be imitated,

When the baby touches the animals, the adult can touch the baby's head and pat.

After 1-2 days, the adult can change the places of the pictures or other pictures can be placed in different textures (Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2008).

I am going, Goodbye

The adult sews up the small cymbals and the toy that makes sound on his/her socks.

Wears them in front of the child and

By moving his/her feet, helps the child hear the sound of the toy and attracts his/her attention.

When the child begins to move towards the sound, the adult walks backwards and expects the child listen to it and follow the sound.

During the game, the adult can act out the animals, make them talk and say to the child "... (the child's name) look at me! My name is Tiny Tortoise! I'm going for a walk, why don't you join me too!"

When the child moves towards the sound, the adult can say "Well done! How nice you are crawling/walking" (Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2008).

Our Partner's Voice

In inclusive education this game can be played in small groups, and in individual education it can be played with only the educator and the child.

If played in groups, the children form groups of two,

For example, if there are 6 children, the child with visual impairment and other children (the children without visual disability are blindfolded).

One of the children is handed out the instrument to play. The child goes somewhere safe and appropriate in the class,

And plays the the instrument in his hand.

The child with visual disability (or the blindfolded child) moves towards the sound he hears (Cömert Özata, 2015).

Sing My Birdy Sing

The adult/teacher calls one of the children (a child who can see or see little is blindfolded) and tells him that a friend of his will come to him and you will say "Sing my Birdy, sing" and your friend will sing "Tweet tweet". You will try to guess who s/he is by listening to her/him (MEB, 2013).

I Touched Your Back

The game can be played as a group or just with the teacher and child.

When it is played with the teacher and the child, a drum is given to the child with visual disability.

The teacher goes behind the child.

The child is asked to play the drum and hit as many times as the teacher taps on his back.

If the number of the beats is correct, the child is applauded. If not, then the focus is just on the game.

First it is the teacher taps once and then the child is asked to play the drum and hit once. Then the teacher taps twice or three times so that the child is expected to play the drum and hit twice or three times.

If the game is played in classes with inclusive education, then the teacher can start with a small group of children.

Children line up in a row.

The teacher goes to the end of the line.

The child with visual disability can be placed in the front row.

The teacher gives the child a drum and says "you play the drum and hit it as many times as your friend taps on your back."

Each child taps three times with the tip of his/her finger on the back of his friend in the front.

The child with the drum in his hand up front plays the drum and hits as many times as he is tapped (three times) on his back.

If the child gets the correct number, other children applaud (Cömert Özata, 2015).

Heavy - Light

Several blocks and boxes in different weights are placed on the floor,

The adult and the child sit on the floor facing each other,

The adult gives the child the blocks and boxes one by one and let him/her feel the difference in their weights,

The adult talks about the weight of the object that the child got in his/her hand, and questions are asked about it,

Which one is heavy? Which one is light? / Which one is the heaviest?

"You are lifting it very easily, it must be light"

When the child gives the right answer to the question asked, the adult says "Yes, that's very good! You are right, it is heavy/light" (Aksoy and Dere Çiftçi, 2008).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result, games are important for all children who are developing typically and who have special needs. The development of visually disabled children can also be promoted by using more tactile and audible materials in accordance with the characteristics of the disability. Many games that can be played with children having typical developmental can be played also with children who have visual disability just by making a few changes. Play activities can be planned for children with visual impairment in both individual and small group work, as well as in integrated educational programs that are combined with typical developmental children. When the development of children with visual disability is supported by playing games, these children can use their senses better, participate more effectively in activities, and their learning is encouraged in a fun way.

In the present study, characteristics of the games for children with visual disability are emphasized and some examples of these games that can be played with them from infancy period are presented. In this study, it was emphasized that games can be used especially in sensory education of these children during early stages. In other studies that can be conducted, games can also be used as a method in the education of these children. In the education of children with special needs, studies can be planned for sense and concept education or for self-care skills via playing games. The effect of playing games on gaining these skills can be examined. Game features can be compared in terms of these children's specific needs. Experimental or qualitative studies may be planned to support the education

of children through play. Educational workshops on education via playing games can be organized for families with special children considering their children's needs. Guidance can be provided for families on topics such as developing their children's playing skills, creating suitable environments to play games and selecting toys according to children's developmental characteristics.

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