

Selection Criteria

Studies included for review involved participants between 2 and 7 years of age with a formal diagnosis of ASD. All selected studies analyzed the behaviour and/or play object preferences of children with ASD in one or more play settings. Studies were excluded if focus was on child behaviours outside of the context of play.

Data Collection

Results of the literature search yielded three relevant articles: One case control study (Dominguez et al., 2006), one mixed group design (MacDonald & Hatfield, 2017), and one within groups design (Wimpory et al., 2006).

Results

Dominguez et al. (2006) completed a case-control study compar

Discussion

Findings from this empirical study revealed that the context in which children with ASD play could impact their engagement state. Children were significantly less engaged with their parent in the symbolic play setting than in the gross motor play setting. Additionally, children had significantly more parent only engagement in the gross motor play setting, meaning they spent more of their time in the gross motor play context engaged with their parent than in the symbolic play context. Both statements suggest that when targeting engagement with children with ASD in therapy, a gross motor play context might be more conducive to supporting a child to socially reference and engage with his/her play partner than a symbolic play context.

General Discussion

The purpose of this critical review and accompanying pilot study was to determine if play context impacts engagement with caregivers for preschool children with ASD. Previous literature examined in the critical review revealed mixed findings for play context effects. Most previous studies failed to separate play contexts, making

References

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- Charman, T., Baron-Cohen, S., Swettenham, J., Cox, A., Baird, G., & Drew, A. (1997). Infants with autism: An investigation of empathy, pretend play, joint attention, and imitation. *Developmental Psychology, 33*