Extending the Play of Autistic Children

Learning Intentions:

I am beginning to understand how to support the play of an autistic child.

I can show how the play of autistic children differs from typically developing children.

Shape of the Day:

Introduction

The why behind the presentation

Autism Resources - Video clip

Autism and Play - Video clip

Simulating Play Situations using Identiplay - Puppet Play, Working with Playdough and Exploring Emotions with Teddy

Questions and Answers

Closure

My question:

How can I support students with autism through play?
The Why

I have decided to look at autism and how I can help support the needs of students with autism through play. I have the opportunity to work with a student who has autism during my final practicum. I want to understand how to best support this student and make sure that school is a safe and happy place for him. I need to find strategies that work for this student and that do not add to their frustration.

Autism Facts:

According to Autism Speaks Canada:

- 1 in 68 children are diagnosed with autism
- Boys are five times more likely to be diagnosed with autism
- It is still not known what causes autism
- Those who are diagnosed with autism often struggle socially, struggle with communication and engage in repetitive behaviours

Autism Resources:

Websites: Autism Speaks.ca and Autism Speaks.org. Both websites share information about autism (what it is, facts), research (current science about autism, information about grants), resources for families and teachers, videos etc.

Link to the Modified Toddler Checklist for autism: https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism/diagnosis/mchat

Books: Addressing Challenging Behaviours and Mental Health Issues in Early Childhood Education by Mojdeh Bayat. Chapters 4 and 9 are particularly relevant for autistic students.
Teaching Play to Children with Autism: Practical Interventions Using Identiplay by Nicky Philips and Liz Beavan. Highlights the program Identiplay and how it can help students with autism deepen their play.

Videos: The Child Who Couldn't Play. An episode of the Nature of Things with David Suzuki from 1996. The information in the video is a little dated but it is still an interesting watch.


The Many Faces of Autism. Provides an overview of the different types of diagnoses on the autism spectrum.


Downloads: Resource kits available for download from the Autism Speaks websites. These downloads are particularly helpful for educators:

- 100 Day School Kit for Newly Diagnosed Families of School Aged Children
- Challenging Behaviours Toolkit
- School Community Toolkit

Resources Included in this package:

- Three play examples from Identiplay
- Table from Addressing Challenging Behaviours and Mental Health Issues in Early Childhood Education by Mojdeh Bayat.
- Understanding autism and symptoms, Tips for Teachers and Bullying and Autism (from resource 100 Day School Kit)
- Challenging behaviours and Autism and COPES (from Challenging Behaviours Resource)
- Therapies and Autism (from School Communities toolkit)
Autism and Play

According to authors Philips and Beaven, it is typical for students with autism to:

- Be delayed in social relatedness
- Have challenges in communication and behaviours
- Find using their imagination challenging
- Have challenges in flexibility
- Have a need to be 'in control'
- Have difficulties with problem solving

(Phillips and Beaven, 2007, p. 5)

Autistic children tend to have interesting characteristics in their play as is noted in Teaching Play to Children with Autism. Their play tends to be repetitive and they tend to become very focused on one thing (i.e. boats, cars, blocks etc.) (Phillips and Beaven, 2007, p.5). Autistic children also tend to play by themselves and have trouble engaging in play with their peers, rather they play alongside their peers but WILL NOT enter their peers play (Phillips and Beaven, 2007, p. 5).

Identiplay is a program that teaches children with autism how to play. Each play activity in the program takes place between an adult and a child. The adult models the play for the child using nearly identical toys and a simple script to facilitate conversation. The book stresses the importance of having a dialogue to make the play authentic and to help show children when a play activity has ended (Phillips and Beaven, 2007, p. 7). For more information on this program, please see Teaching Play to Children with Autism: Practical Interventions Using Identiplay.