Learning Objectives

- Recognize how unstructured observations of play are used as part of the evaluation process as outlined in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (2nd ed.; American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2008).
- Recognize how to use data from unstructured observations to create a hypothesis about play deficits, leading to an intervention plan.
- Identify strengths that support play and playfulness of a child with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD).
- Identify factors that interfere with play and playfulness of a child with an ASD.

Importance of Evaluating Play

“Because play skills . . . are critical to successful social participation, play is an important area for practitioners to consider when assessing and intervening with a young child with autism” (Baranek, Reinhartsen, & Wannamaker, 2001, p. 319).
Evaluation Process: Questions to Guide Observations and Interviews on Play


Pay particular attention to the following items:

• Box 11.5: Observations of Social Participation
• Box 11.6: Observations of Play and Leisure
• Box 11.12: Interview Questions Related to Social Participation
• Box 11.13: Interview Questions Related to Play or Leisure

Focus of the Evaluation Process

“The evaluation process . . . is focused on finding out what the client wants and needs to do, determining what the client can do and has done, and identifying those factors that act as supports or barriers to health and participation” (AOTA, 2008, p. 649).

Evaluation Process: Review of the Framework

Stop the CD and read Chapter 8.

Pay particular attention to the following items:

• Pages 204–212
• Figures 8.1 (p. 204) and 8.2 (p. 205).
Occupational Profile

• Demographic data
• Client needs
• Areas of concern about performance areas of play and social participation
• Strengths of the child
• Values and cultural beliefs of the family
• Preferences of the child

Clinical Reasoning

• Upon hearing the family’s story and concerns, the occupational therapist first must determine whether
  – the concerns address play as a means to an end or
  – the concerns address play as an end.
• The therapist then must choose which assessments best address the expressed concerns.

Case Study: Will

• Will was referred to the occupational therapist by his pediatrician on the basis of a report from his speech–language pathologist (SLP).
• The SLP was concerned about Will’s inability to attend, poor play skills, limited interactions with his parents and others, and humming.
Preparing for the Evaluation

• Conduct a record review (basic demographics, referral concern) and interview to obtain an occupational profile of child and family (concerns, goals of family, child’s preferences, etc.; this information may be included in the SLP’s or physician’s report).
• Set up the room for standardized tests and skilled observations.
• Use evaluation methods that will best address the concerns and wants of the family and that match the philosophy of the facility where services are being provided.

Occupational Profile

• Will is 4 years old, is in a two-parent family, and has an older brother and younger sister. The parents value family time but have difficulty including Will.
• The parents’ concerns include Will’s poor tolerance to change, need for rigid structure, poor fine motor skills, and poor attention, causing poor play skills and social skills with siblings and peers.
• The parents want to improve Will’s play with siblings and peers.
• Will’s play preferences include puzzles and climbing.

Goals of the Family

Will’s parents want him to
• Play with his siblings and other children and interact with people without temper tantrums,
• Play with a variety of toys that would afford interactions with his siblings and other children in the neighborhood, and
• Tolerate change in his routine, allowing him to be more flexible within the family structure.
Setting Up the Room for Standardized Tests

- After reading about the family’s primary concerns and the SLP’s evaluation, the therapist chose a small room for testing.
- An analysis of performance (formal assessment) using standardized tests was completed:
  - For the parents: Sensory Profile for Infants and Toddlers (Dunn, 1999).

Setting Up the Room for Skilled Observations

- Will’s play preferences (relational toys, e.g., puzzles, sorters)
- Other items for skilled observations:
  - Functional toys and pretend toys (cups, spoons, kitchen)
  - Make-believe outfits (Batman, Spiderman)
  - Home-like items (laundry basket, plastic containers, action figures, cars, shaving cream)
  - Swings (hard—platform swings; soft—inner tube; soft with poor postural support—hammock swing)
  - Ladders and pillows.

Evaluation Results

- Unable to perform standardized testing due to poor attention and inability to be imposed upon.
- Skilled observations of Will included the following observations:
  - Played immediately with the toy by placing balls into holes; placed balls in a sequence before putting them in a hole
  - Became upset when the sequence was disrupted or added to via hammer
  - Did not imitate my use of the hammer
  - In time, tolerated my playing alongside him during various games.
Evaluation Results (cont.)

– Was unsafe by climbing up on shelving and jumping off
– Was unable to climb a ladder (refined movement and novel)
– Had fear with a pillow over his face
– Sought out spinning
– Communicated via few signs; eye gaze fleeting
– Overstimulated with auditory and visual stimuli
– Behavior consistent in clinic as seen in the home.

Analysis of Play as an End

Stop the CD and complete Learning Activity 1.

• What did Will’s play look like?

• What play domains does Will’s play represent?

Feedback: Play as an End

| Sensorimotor Play? No mouthing or licking; visually inspected toys while in various positions. | Sensorimotor Play? In and out of all positions, on and off of many pieces of equipment, jumped off of high places, moved constantly. |
| --- |
| Object Play? Threw balls into a container (plastic ball game), but when therapist added hammer, he became upset; liked Tommy the Train puzzles, attended well during these games. | Exploratory Play: Will explored his environment for the purpose of climbing and swinging, looked at equipment and seemed to understand their affordances and used them correctly and incorrectly at times. |
| Pretend Play? None noted | Pretend Play? None noted |
| Dramatic Play? None noted | Dramatic Play? None noted |
| Construction Play? Did not build anything; placed balls in a hole repeatedly. | Construction Play? Did not build anything; placed balls in a hole repeatedly. |
| Cooperative Play? Not available except with therapist; did not want to share the toy or the way it was being played with. | Cooperative Play? Not available except with therapist; did not want to share the toy or the way it was being played with. |
| Social Play? Not really, but little opportunity without peers; present with parents and therapist. | Social Play? Not really, but little opportunity without peers; present with parents and therapist. |
| • Solitary Play? Preferred; became upset when I interrupted his flow. | • Solitary Play? Preferred; became upset when I interrupted his flow. |
| • Parallel Play? No | • Parallel Play? No |
| • Onlooker Play? No | • Onlooker Play? No |
| • Rough-and-Tumble Play? Yes, loved to jump after climbing to unsafe places; fell onto floor with little regard to safety. | • Rough-and-Tumble Play? Yes, loved to jump after climbing to unsafe places; fell onto floor with little regard to safety. |
Analysis of Play as a Means to an End Using the Framework

Stop the CD and complete Learning Activity 2.

Feedback: Play as a Means to an End

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Domain</th>
<th>Observed Behavior During the Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client Factors</td>
<td>Mental Functions: Short attention span, follows the same sequence of an activity; emotional temperament—has temper tantrums if imposed on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sensory Functions: Registration of input heightened with stimuli (auditory and visual) and dampened with movement, except with ladder (gravitational insecurity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neuromuscular and Movement Related: Presents with low muscle tone, which seems to influence balance and strength, as noted with climbing the ladder: Unsteady and fearful of having feet leave the ground—is this a vestibular-based issue (gravitational insecurity) or a result of muscle weakness due to low muscle tone?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback: Play as a Means to an End (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Domain</th>
<th>Observed Behavior During the Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance Skills</td>
<td>Motor and Praxis Skills: Difficulty maintaining balance with unstable surfaces (ladder); praxis problems with sequencing play activity other than in a repetitive way; grasping and hand strength are weak (uses open palm when pushing balls into holes); has strength problems getting on ladder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sensory-Perceptual Skills: Oversensitive to visual and auditory input; undersensitive to movement (seeks it out); avoids unstable surfaces—is he gravitationally insecure?</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Emotional Regulation Skills: Deregulated when frustrated or things change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cognitive Skills: Sequenced balls in same order immediately; unable to multitask (used hands to push balls into holes); not able to use a tool (like a hammer) to push balls into hole</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication and Social Skills: Uses sign language; gestures for intent to play; no eye contact or acknowledgment of another person unless that person is exaggerative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feedback: Play as a Means to an End (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Domain</th>
<th>Observed Behavior During the Evaluation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity Demands</strong></td>
<td><strong>Objects and Properties:</strong> Unable to manipulate hammer; unable to push ball into hole with a refined grasp; climbing ladder is too unstable (difficult to maintain hold)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Social Demands:</strong> No eye contact; no interactions with family, peers, and therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Actions Required:</strong> Grasping ladder; stabilizing on ladder and moving swing; tying shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Patterns</strong></td>
<td><strong>Routine Oriented:</strong> Parents report that he establishes play routines with various objects. These routines cannot be interrupted; otherwise, a temper tantrum ensues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Roles:</strong> Son, brother, child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Habits:</strong> Immediately created a pattern of movement with the balls; felt automatic versus established like a routine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feedback: Play as a Means to an End (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework Domain</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Context and Environment</strong></td>
<td>Physical: Required a quiet, closed room with little distractions; visual environment was stimulating, but it was tolerated in a small room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social: Made little contact; engaged with me only when I entered into his personal space and played his game; he did not take turns or share items with me</td>
</tr>
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Interpreting Evaluation Results

- **Strengths noted during the evaluation, including what the parents have stated:** Will has a supportive family, has preferences in play materials, and loves to move. He regulated his behavior after becoming upset and tolerated my proximity; he appears to find meaning in his play.

- **Limitations in play skills:** Will’s play skills are limited to relational play and rough and tumble, and he has little social interaction. He has poor fine motor skills, narrow routines, rigidity during play, praxis issues regarding climbing on novel equipment, and sensory-based issues (vestibular—fearful of feet leaving the ground).
Determining Goals After the Evaluation Process

Stop the CD and complete Learning Activity 3. Keep this Learning Activity for Part 3, Topics 3 and 4.

Descriptive Statement and Hypothesis

- **Statement of concerns:** Limited play repertoire; rigid play; little social interaction; solitary play; appears to seek out intense input; oversensitive to noises, visual input (parent report), and tactile input; upset with eyes occluded; regulates self.
- **Hypothesis for play deficit:** Oversensitivities to various sensory inputs limit engagement in environment; presents with low registration, as noted with seeking input inappropriately; praxis issues as noted with restricted play themes; play skills limited to relational play and rough-and-tumble play.

Problems Identified and Desired Outcomes

- **Problems identified:** Will's limited repertoire of play skills impedes his ability to play with others, including his family and peers.
- **Desired outcomes:** Improve play skills and playfulness when engaged with family and peers, as demonstrated by greater flexibility and variability in his play when socially engaging with others.
Goal Statements

• *Play as an end:* Will will play a board game with his sister, demonstrating sharing and taking turns throughout the game by [date].

• *Play as a means to an end:* Will will tolerate a change in a play theme without incident and incorporate the change into his play theme by [date].

Review of the Evaluation Process

The evaluation process entails the following activities:

• Referral concern
• Occupational profile
• Standardized assessments (In this case, they were not able to be completed, but observations were made while making an attempt.)
• Skilled observations
  – Strengths and limitations
  – Play as an end and play as a means to an end

When the evaluation process is complete, results can be interpreted.

Summary

• Used the information gathered and identified a problem; created a hypothesis, goal statements, and desired outcome on the basis of findings about the case study on Will.

• Applied the various components of the Framework and unstructured observations to the evaluation process.

• Identified strengths that support play and playfulness.

• Identified factors interfering with play and playfulness.
References


