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Introduction

This book is one of the results of the COST Action TD1309 “LUDI – Play for Children with Disabilities” (2014–2018), a multidisciplinary European network of researchers and practitioners who have been working on the theme of play from their different and complementary perspectives.

Following two previous publications, “Play Development in Children with Disabilities” (Besio, Bulgarelli & Stancheva-Popkostadinova, 2017) and “Barriers to Play and Recreation for Children and Young People with Disabilities. Exploring Environmental Factors” (Barron, Beckett, Coussens, Desoete, Cannon Jones, Lynch, Prellwitz & Fenney Salkeld, 2017), this book brings on the LUDI Network’s reflection about play, reviewing the existing knowledge with respect to play evaluation and presenting tools and methodologies for the assessment of play.

In the foreword “Assessing play to pave the way to the child’s freedom”, Serenella Besio considers the role of play for children’s full development and stresses the importance of the right to play for every child, with or without disabilities. The evaluation of play is presented as one of steps to fulfil for building an authoritative knowledge that adults should use to better support play for the sake of play in childhood. The author concludes mentioning the urgent necessity of the concept of play for the sake of play for children with disabilities to be spread and to be implicated in everyday life.

In Chapter 1 “Evaluation tools: notes on definition, reliability, validity and administration”, Paola Molina and Ana Muntean present the main features that characterize the evaluation tools and guarantee their effectiveness. Ethical considerations concerning assessment and child’s play assessment are also discussed. The authors mention important factors that must be considered during the evaluation process, such as cultural differences in test responses and tool adequacy with respect to the specific impairment of the children to observe.

In Chapter 2 “The evaluation of play from occupational therapy and psychology perspectives”, Sylvie Ray-Kaeser, Sandra Châtelain, Vardit Kindler and Eleanor Schneider introduce the distinction between play and play-based assessment: in the first case, play is the direct focus of the evaluation process, whereas in the latter, play is a means to evaluate other competences of the child, such as cognitive functioning, linguistic abilities, emotional skills, etc. Moreover, five dimensions of play and the methods to assess them are presented and discussed: play preferences, skills, activities, playfulness and physical and social environment. The evaluation of play in children with disabilities is deepened, also taking into account the role of parents.

In Chapter 3 “Review of tools for play and play-based assessment”, Daniela Bulgarelli, Nicole Bianquin, Francesca Caprino, Paola Molina and Sylvie Ray-Kaeser

present the results of a literature review which aimed at analysing the existing methodologies and tools used to assess play and playfulness both in research and clinical practice. Twenty-nine tools available in English are presented within a uniform frame including 16 different features, such as the characteristics of the target population, the objectives of the tool, a short description, information about reliability and validity, the procedures to follow and setting and toy materials requested.

In Chapter 4 “Play assessment tools and methodologies: the view of practitioners”, Daniela Bulgarelli and Vaska Stancheva-Popkostadinova report the voices of 107 European practitioners coming from 14 countries, all of them expert in the field of play for children with disabilities. The study focused on the experiences of using methodologies and tools for the evaluation of play and investigated the opinions of practitioners from different fields: special education, occupational therapy, paediatrics, psychology, education, etc. The most used tools present some common features: the possibility to draw a clear description of the child strengths and weaknesses, the possibility to support the intervention planning, the perception that the tools are effective in practice. Nevertheless, most of the respondents were used to assess play through non-standardized instruments, and rarely discussed the limitations of non-standardized tools and methodologies. This result highlights the importance to share the knowledge about the evaluation of play and the tools that have been developed in the past years.

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References

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