

Daniela Bulgarelli (Ed.)

# **Perspectives and research on play for children with disabilities**

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Cover illustration: Inclusive play at school (Camilla, 10 years, Italy).

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## Introduction

This book includes eight chapters reflecting various approaches towards the theme of play for children with disabilities that characterised the work done by the members of the COST Action TD1309 “LUDI–Play for Children with Disabilities”.

Chapter “1. Theoretical models for enabling play from a child-centred perspective” by Carol Barron, Helen Lynch, Annemie Desoete, Marieke Coussens and Karen De Maesschalck focuses on Article 31 and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to address the theme of the children’s right to play and to have their voice given due weight in any matter which concerns them. The paper also presents a sample of theoretical models which may support practitioners or parents to look at play of children with disabilities.

Chapter “2. Empowering and enabling play in differing settings” by Christina Schulze, Hólmdís F. Methúsalemsdóttir, Helen Lynch, Nan Cannon Jones, Ursula Winklhofer and Carol Barron examines the barriers and the enablers to play in different contexts: the home, the early years setting, the school setting and the health-care setting.

Chapter “3. Studies on play for children with disabilities: exploring the interdisciplinary approach” by Nicole Bianquin and Fabio Sacchi presents a systematic review to show the interdisciplinary complexity around the topic of play for children with disabilities, that is studied in different fields, from medicine to human-computer interaction, to education and psychology.

Chapter “4. Children with and without disabilities in disasters. A narrative overview of play-based interventions into the humanitarian programmes and researches” by Mabel Giraldo deepens the psycho-pedagogical literature on the use of play in emergency situations (natural, humanitarian, social, political): this contribution is a preliminary overview of the different play-based interventions promoted worldwide in such emergencies.

Chapter “5. Usability and accessibility of toys and technologies for play for children with disabilities: Scoping review of guidelines and tools” by Rianne Jansens and Andrea Bonarini describes a scoping review carried out to investigate: which guidelines and tools about usability and accessibility of toys and technologies for play for children with disabilities exist; what is their possible use by different stakeholders; what are the strengths and the weaknesses of such guidelines and tools. The study selected 10 guidelines on usability or accessibility of toys and technologies; five of them had a specific focus on play.

Chapter “6. Guidelines for parents, professionals, designers, makers and researchers on toys and technologies for play for children with disabilities: How to take usability and accessibility aspects into consideration?” by Rianne Jansens and Andrea Bonarini is based on Chapter 5 and shows guidelines for usability and

accessibility of toys and technologies for play for children with disabilities, that were developed by the LUDI Working Group 2. The guidelines have a pragmatic aim at supporting reflections and decision-making processes for choosing, adapting, designing or studying a toy or technology.

Chapter “7. Parents’ perspectives on the play of children with sensory disabilities: a comparative study” by Mira Tzvetkova-Arsova and Anna Trosheva-Asenova presents a study that involved 20 families of children with sensory disabilities (visual impairments and hearing impairments) to compare their perspectives, understanding and involvement in play, and to establish whether families of different groups of children with sensory disabilities show different attitudes.

Chapter “8. Inclusive Play and Disability in Early Childhood Education and Care Services. The Experiences of Italian Practitioners” by Daniela Bulgarelli reports a study that describes the strategies practitioners used to foster inclusive play and the difficulties they faced in preventing or overthrowing the barriers to participation in play in some Italian nurseries.

Alongside these multifaceted points of view in play, some theoretical aspects emerged as being their common background. First, coherently with the ICF-CY theoretical perspective, play is mainly seen as an activity children can participate in, thanks to a good interaction between their body functions and structures and the contextual factors (WHO, 2007). Second, as highlighted in the Preface, LUDI promoted the vision of “play for the sake of play” for children with disabilities. This means that adults in their different roles—parents, teachers, educators, rehabilitators, toy designers, researchers—should look at play and should support it as an everyday activity that is important *per se*, not only as a means to reach some improvements in child’s communicative, affective, social, cognitive or motor competencies (Besio, 2017). Third, play is conceptualised as a fundamental right of every child, accordingly both to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). Play for children with disabilities still needs to be supported at different levels: this book aims at contributing to the dissemination of the research in the field, that can mainly impact on adults’ awareness about the importance of play for the sake of play as a strong engine of child development.

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