

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING IN A PLAYGROUND ENVIRONMENT

Learning difficulties

Learning difficulties is a term used to describe a condition where children struggle with one or more fundamental psychological skills (listening, reasoning, speaking, reading and writing difficulties and lack of mathematical aptitude). The reasons behind learning difficulties are not known. The current belief is that learning difficulties are the result of minor brain damage, biochemical imbalance, living conditions and/or heredity. During the first few years of school, between 5 and 20 percent of pupils suffer from learning difficulties.

Learning difficulties are often linked to motor clumsiness. Rehabilitation aims at promoting the development of motor skills and physical abilities. Studies have come up with few findings and outcomes of group rehabilitation, for example, are partially contradictory. The best results have been recorded in connection with personalised, task-orientated and comprehensive programmes that approach each patient (child) as an individual. Physical activity in a playground can be seen as a way of supporting rehabilitation because the children get to practise their motor skills, for example. In a playground children play together but everyone can choose how he or she wants to use the equipment (for example, climbing up a slide rather than sliding down it). A playground gives children the chance to play together with others while also allowing everyone to find their own challenges and experience a sense of achievement.

Learning motor skills

Learning motor skills is a process of control and discovery. This process depends on the environment and the chosen tasks and exercises. The playground (both the equipment and the environment) provides opportunities for different kinds of tasks and exercises. The playground can be used as a confined space, making it a safe environment that stands out clearly from its surroundings. In devising settings for learning experiences it is important to make the experience clearly defined and carefully constructed. This helps to create a structure for the children's games, which makes taking part easier.

Opportunities for learning in a playground environment

Playgrounds are often seen only as places for practising motor skills. However, children also learn important social and cognitive skills while playing. Moreover, it is possible to turn the playground into a set of cognitive tasks that can be integrated into other new skills (mathematics, biology, language teaching, etc). Playgrounds make excellent learning environments. For more information, take a look at our Play Tips section.