

# Augmented play helps autism

February 23 2012

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Playing with interactive toys could help children with autism to improve their social interaction with other children, say University of Sussex psychologists.

Dr. William Farr and Dr. Nicola Yuill, from the [Children](#) and Technology Lab at Sussex, have investigated with Dr Steve Hinske from Zurich in Switzerland how toys might be adapted to be more beneficial to autistic children and perhaps even act as a [therapeutic tool](#).

Writing in the latest issue of the *International Journal of Arts and Technology*, the research team explain how they have examined childhood social play with a Playmobil Knight's Castle toy.

Dr. Hinske added a wireless networking system and [radio frequency identification tags](#) (RFIDs), allowing the Playmobil characters to speak or make different sounds when they are placed in different locations.

Their tests with [autistic children](#) who played with the Augmented Knight's Castle (AKC) showed that the adaptations can improve understanding of and interest in the play set and the Playmobil figures. More importantly, the additions can also boost the level of social interaction and play with other children.

“Children with autism commonly struggle to understand the world around them, which means control over their own environment presents them with daily challenges,” the team say.

By offering a toy that responds with sound to children's play, the AKC could reduce isolation for children with autism by giving them an increased understanding of how to control and engage with objects and - by extension - other children.

The researchers add that the play set could be used therapeutically but also perhaps diagnostically by compiling evidence of play patterns.

The team add: “In our lab we try to use technology to support, rather than replace, [social interaction](#) for children with autism.

“We think this sort of work has huge potential both for children with typical development and with a range of special needs.”

Provided by University of Sussex

Citation: Augmented play helps autism (2012, February 23) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-02-augmented-autism.html>

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