



University of Cyprus
Department of Education



EARLY CHILDHOOD
RESEARCH LAB

PLAY



Play Skills and Teacher Involvement

(Socio-dramatic and imaginative play)

Series: Informational Brochures on Early Childhood Education

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PLAY

DEFINITION:

Instead of a definition, the following elements prevail:

- The child has an inner motivation and chooses freely (what, how, with, who, how much and with what to play)
- The process is more important than the outcome
- It is not related to external rules
- The child-person plays a central role rather than the toys
- The child is actively participating
- It is a child's innate characteristic

PLAY TYPES:

(based on the reformed curriculum for Early Childhood Education)

Socio-dramatic

Children are involved in role play with themes drawn from their personal, social and family context



Imaginative

Children are involved in role play with themes drawn from imaginative situations and with their fantasy they reconstruct the world



Constructive

Children are involved in processes of constructing by combining materials within real and imaginative contexts



Educational / pedagogical material

Children are involved in games with specific rules and are directly related to concepts and skills



Creative

Children are involved in play which is directly related to creation and creativity; making new connections of experiences, expressing ideas and feelings



Experimental/ Investigative

Children are involved in play that involves exploration, experimentation, trial and error, discovery of ideas, concepts, information and skill development



There are common elements in most of the above play types and these are:

- Role playing
- The use of materials in a realistic and symbolic way
- Scenario development
- Adult-child interaction
- Adult intervention (types/levels)

SOCIO-DRAMATIC AND/OR IMAGINATIVE PLAY

With the common characteristics of the different types of play in mind we highlight the child's expected actions in developing roles and scenarios in the following tables. This information can become a tool for the educators to:

- a. recognize children's play skills and plan accordingly their experiences aiming for further development and
- b. reflect on their involvement in play according to the needs of the children in terms of role and scenario development.

CHILD'S ACTIONS DURING ROLE ENACTMENT

Child's Expected Actions

- Uses materials (e.g. a baby doll) and in this way she is led to taking on a role (e.g. mother)
- Pretends that she has taken a role without stating it and uses the relevant materials (e.g. takes a doll, feeds her so she has the role of the mother)
- Says and does things that are connected to the role given to her before or during play, for a short period of time (approx. 5-7 minutes) (e.g. at the doctor's office she has been given the role of the patient. Starts coughing and says "Ouch my tummy hurts, I want to throw up! Doctor...help me!")
- Says and does things connected to different roles assigned to her in the same play context (e.g. one day she says, she is the mom and the other day she is the baby)
- Says that she will take a specific role before the play scenario begins (e.g. I will be the mother and I will cook)

Necessary Skills for role enactment

- Appropriate use of materials
- Ability to pretend
- Thought process planning
- Physical and verbal expression according to the role
- Use the language, movement, voice and materials in order to support the role
- Flexibility
- Co-operation
- Leadership skills
- Self-regulation-accepts other' ideas
- Supports opinion with evidence
- Understands and expresses emotions accordingly
- Uses materials in a symbolic way
- Participates in dialogue



Child's Expected Actions

- Says and does things connected to the role that she said she will take for a short period of time (approx. 5-7 minutes)
(e.g. «I will be the florist»
He pretends to pour water to the flowers. «Would you like me to make you a flower bouquet? We have nice roses»
- Says and does things related to the different roles she chooses to take in the same play context
(e.g. one day she says is the mom and the other day that she is the baby)
- Interacts and invites others to play, having a specific role and converses with the others in order to develop the scenario for a specific period of time (20 minutes)
(e.g. I will be the mother and I will feed the baby, you could be dad and cook the food)
- Differentiates her emotions and actions according to the role and scenario development for a long period of time (at least 30 minutes)

In enacting and developing a role the following actions are highlighted:

- Language use
- Tone of voice and facial expressions
- Use of gestures and body movements
- Use of materials in realistic and/or symbolic ways

Areas of Development
within the context of role enactment

Motor Skills:

Coordination, use and small muscle control

Cognitive empowerment:

Creativity–Creative thinking
Conceptual understanding–representation,
metacognition, skill development,
critical thinking, problem solving

Personal and Social awareness:

Personal and social development

Emotional empowerment:

Controlling, understanding and
expressing feelings



Child's Expected Actions

- Guides other children, in and out of role, and helps them develop a scenario for a long period of time (at least 40 minutes)

- Takes more than one role depending on the needs of the scenario

(e.g. He is pretending to be a customer at the supermarket, and he hears the owner of the supermarket calling for someone to help place items on the shelves; the child who is pretending to be a customer takes the role of a supermarket assistant)

- Child's expected actions in relation to role enactment*
- Declares or/and does not declare the role that she took
 - Uses materials in a realistic and/or symbolic way
 - Reinforces the role by altering the tone of her voice, using gestures, movements and materials
 - Says and does things connected to the role she chooses or are given to her by others
 - Differentiates her emotions and actions to develop her role
 - Makes dialogue and interacts with other children to develop her role
 - Uses the same role for some time
 - Guides other children in and out of a role
 - Accepts the guidance from other children, in and out of the role
 - Takes different and/or non-stereotypical roles



It is expected that children within the context of socio-dramatic and/or the imaginative play, will be involved in the above mentioned actions. We are not referring to a linear course of actions since within the same context of play children can follow suggestions but can also make suggestions. However, it is expected that they will have multiple and rich experiences in which most of these actions will be exhibited and will cover the complexity of the role taking process.

CHILD'S ACTION DURING SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

Child's Expected Actions

- Gets involved in play using real materials, taking on roles without scenarios
(e.g. Using the watering can to take care of flowers)
- Gets involved in play taking on a particular role based on the preset scenarios
(e.g. At the clinic children pretend to be doctor and patient. The doctor needs help to examine the patient so the child takes the role of the nurse)
- Suggests or follows stereotypical types of scenarios
(e.g. Mother-baby scenario as part of the socio-dramatic play)
- Proposes a new idea for a scenario and begins to assign roles
(e.g. «Would you like to be the owners of the Mall of Paphos? So, you will be the toy store manager, you will be in the restaurant and you will be the mall's policeman».)
- Proposes a new scenario, assigns roles and begins to describe what should be done and what each one should do
(e.g. «Would you like to play at the bookstore? You will be the bookseller and you will sell books, you will be mum who brings her child to choose some books and I will be the child who cries because my mum does not buy my stickers...»)

Necessary Skills for the scenario development

- Appropriate use of materials
- Understands and expresses emotions
- Verbal expression
- Accepts to participate in groups
- Ability to join a team
- Planning thought process
- Suggests and supports opinion with documentation
- Describes
- Creativity and imagination
- Leadership skills
- Social interaction
- Collaboration skills
- Ability to develop a dialogue
- Knows and uses the structure of a story
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Types of speech
- Flexibility
- Abstract thought
- Symbolic use of materials
- Creative thinking
- Keeps interested for a long time



Child's Expected Actions

- Enriches the scenario through interaction and uses realistic materials for a short period of time (approx. 10 minutes)
(e.g. *The child takes a hurt dog to the vet and then leaves*)
- Accepts or suggests new ideas that have to do with the flow of events, the heroes/roles, the context where the scenario takes place or the use of materials in and out of the role
(e.g. *«Yes Mr.Vet, I approve of the surgery so that my dog becomes better»*)
- Suggests or responds to the creation of a problem/dilemma in the scenario
(e.g. *Problem: The doctor is sick, who is going to examine the patients?*)
- Interacts with others and is involved in dialogue based on the specific problem/dilemma for a long period of time (at least 25 minutes)
(e.g. *Problem: «The doctor is sick, who is going to examine the patients? Should we bring a doctor from another country? I think we should take the airplane and go, let's go buy tickets»*)
- Accepts or suggests new ideas that have to do with the flow of events, the heroes/roles, the setting, where the scenario takes place, or the symbolic use of materials
(e.g. *«It's a good idea to put a row of chairs to make the airplane»*)
- In or out of a role, guides the others for the development of the scenario
(e.g. *«I think you should be the new doctor and Anna will come to ask you if you could help us»*)

Areas of Development
within the context of scenario development

Motor skills:

Use, coordination and control of small muscles

Emotional empowerment:

Understanding and expressing emotions

Personal and Social awareness:

Personal and social development

Cognitive empowerment:

Conceptual understanding–representation, creativity–creative thinking, problem solving, critical thinking, metacognition



Child's Expected actions

- Suggests or follows the ideas for ending a scenario giving the solution to the problem by interacting with other children (e.g. «The patient will be fine. We will give him his medicine and he will be fine»)
- Suggests or follows different and non-stereotypical types of scenarios (e.g. We are astronauts who happened to be at a strange planet)
- Describes and enacts scenarios following the basic structure of a story: beginning-middle-end, sequence of events, basic problem/dilemma and solution. (e.g. Scenario about the Mall of Paphos. They start by arranging the space, dividing the roles and then enact the scenario. Scenes include sellers and customers, a problem with thieves, the mall closes and will reopen the next day)
- Suggests or is involved in scenarios that last more than one day (e.g. The scenario about the Mall of Paphos is expanded with new adventures)

Child's expected actions in relation to scenario development

- Takes on a role in or out of the scenario
- Follows a pre-set scenario
- Suggests a new scenario
- Follows the right structure of a story/scenario
- Suggests or accepts other children's ideas to
 - develop the scenario through interaction
 - use realistic and then symbolic materials
 - unfold a problem/dilemma for the scenario
 - provide suggestions and resolutions to a problem/dilemma
- Suggests or follows non stereotypical types of scenarios
- Participates in the same scenario for a long period of time



It is expected that children within socio-dramatic and/or imaginative play will exhibit these behaviors. We do not refer to a linear course of actions since in the same play context children can follow a preset scenario or they can suggest a new one. However, it is expected that they will have multiple and rich experiences in which most of these actions would be evident and will touch upon the complexity of the process of developing a scenario.

THE ROLE OF THE ADULT

The adult's role in children's play is very important and literature presents different models of involvement and roles the teacher may take, before and during play. We support teacher involvement before play, during structured activities of the different subject areas, as well as during play. The main aim of the teacher's involvement is to strengthen children's play skills and to promote quality play. We are presenting a new model of involvement (in a pilot form) mostly during play, based on the work of Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot (2011), highlighting the supportive actions of the teacher which aim to satisfy the child's needs in terms of the role and scenario development.

ADULT INVOLEMENT AND ACTION DURING PLAY

OBSERVATION

The teacher observes play in order to locate:

- Needs (play, learning and development needs)
- Play level (role and scenario development)
- Learning outcomes

Direct Involvement

- Sets the scenario
«Go to the next kingdom to...»
Child's need (CN): **scenario creation, scenario enrichment**
- Divides roles
«You will be the travel agent and you will be the customer...»
CN: **role division, collaboration**
- Says to the children how to behave (in terms of movement and facial expression) based on the role they play enact
«Since you are a witch your look must be vicious and your voice should be loud and strict...»
- Gives the exact words for specific roles
«Say to her, "I am the queen, I do not allow you to talk to me this way"»
CN: **appropriate role-performance, enrich drama skills**
- Asks questions or gives information to guide or enrich the roles or/and the scenarios
«How else could you have travelled to the secret treasure island?!»
CN: **Role and scenario enrichment**
- Uses rewards to influence play positively
«I am glad you accepted to have two mums in your scenario! In this way you can all play»
- Reminds the rules and becomes the representative of reality
«Remember that only 4 children are allowed to play»
CN: **Play continuation**
- Responds on behalf of a child when other children invite her to their play
«Anna would love to be the princess!»
CN: **Group entrance, play participation, collaboration, self-confidence**
- Moves children to enrich the scenario or solve collaboration problems
«Go to the shop to buy some food for the birthday party we are having»
- Takes a role to keep or to enrich the scenario, and says so
«Since no one wants to be the wolf, I will be, so that you can play your scenario»
CN: **Play sustainability and scenario enrichment, collaboration**

Indirect Involvement

- Suggests play choices that have to do with the roles or the scenario
«You could be the doctor who examines the baby»
- Restructures the environment in which the children play and offers or suggests materials to enrich the roles and the scenario.
«Places plastic medical tools at the doctor's office»
CN: Scenario, role enrichment
- Verbally encourages children to take a role, or use particular materials
«Here, take this baby doll...»
CN: Role creation, encouragement, self confidence boosting, thought structuring
- Promotes interaction between 2 or more children within the context of the specific scenario or role
«Could the two daddies take together the babies to the playground to play?...»
CN: Scenario and role enrichment within the group, collaboration, acceptance of the other, socialization, flexibility
- Starts pretending to have a certain role and allows space for the children to develop the scenario
- Describes what the child is doing during play or rephrases her words to help develop the scenario
«Anna said you could take the boat to go hunt the shark...»
- Asks or talks with children about their scenario
«What else do you think could happen during this trip?»
CN: Enrich and develop the scenario, language support, acceptance of the other, collaboration
- Asks questions or makes suggestions trying to help a child solve a problem within the scenario context
«You could call the store to check if they have a bigger size of those shoes»
CN: Enrich the scenario and solve a problem
- Asks questions or makes suggestions trying to help a child develop her thinking within the context of the role and/or scenario
«Who do we need to call in order to rescue the baby from the fire?»
CN: Enrich the scenario, thought planning
- Asks subject area questions and uses the proper language that does not interrupt the play
«How many chairs will we need for our 3 guests?»
CN: Maintaining and developing the scenario
- Asks questions to unfold children's play needs
«Who is in the house?»
- Suggests a new solution or provides a new element in the developing scenario
- Creates challenges within the children's scenario
«What can happen now that the wolf has returned?»
CN: Scenario development, creative and flexible ideas
- She exemplifies the use of the material during play (while in role)
Takes the medical tools and examines the doll using the materials in the appropriate way
CN: Realistic and symbolic use of materials, appropriate role performance
- She models appropriate behavior or problem solving within a role
«I am the king, and I do not allow you to talk to me in this way».Or «My princess (and looks at Anna) should come and sit by me».
CN: Appropriate role performance, problem solving, thought planning
- Answers questions and gives information to enrich the scenario or solve collaboration issues
«I think grandpa needs oxygen, it is better to call the ambulance»
- Plays with the children taking a certain role (as co-player or the protagonist) that the children give her or she takes with the children's approval in order to enrich the scenario
CN: Scenario enrichment, collaboration, acceptance of others



Reference

Trawick-Smith, J.T. & Dziurgot, T. (2011). 'Good-Fit' teacher-child play interactions and the subsequent autonomous play of preschool children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26(1), 110-123.



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