

A Comparison of the Pretending Elements between Constructive Play and Pretend Play¹

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INTRODUCTION

Pretending elements are ‘as-if’ elements. Pretending, in that it represents reality in ‘as if’ terms. Pretending elements demand symbolic transformation that is, pretending a role, pretending with an object, and pretending a situation. The term ‘pretend play’ is named as a symbolic play, imaginative play, make-believe play, fantasy play, and dramatic play. Pretend play allows children to explore their fears in a safe setting. A child can begin to overcome his or her fear of doctors by donning a lab coat and stethoscope and becoming the person who scares him or her. He or she replaces his or her fear with a sense of control (Colker, 2015). Through their pretend play, children create new pretend situations. These can contain within them a wide range of seemingly unconnected elements all drawn from the child’s previous experiences. Pretend acts as a way of unifying experiences, knowledge, and understanding, helping the child to discover the links between the individual components. As children control the pretend play, they are also able to control its components. Children bring to the pretend to play existing knowledge, skills, and the understanding of the world, which they then assimilate within an existing scheme or create new and novel interconnections (Kitson, 2015; Wood, 2004).

Constructive play also has pretending elements. Constructive play involves open-ended exploration and gradually more functional, then evolving to ‘make-believe’ transformations. Four-and 5-year-olds often switch back and forth between constructive and pretend play, and it can be difficult to distinguish between the two forms of play (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2007; Drew, Christie, Johnson, Meckley, & Nell, 2008). The block construction, even without clear representational status for cars and trains, are symbolic expressions (Forman, 2006). Both pretend play and constructive play include symbolic modes of representations (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2004).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research questions posed in this study are as follows:

1. What are the pretending elements that appeared in constructive play?
2. What are the pretending elements that appeared in pretend play?
3. What are the teacher’s roles to enhance the pretending elements in constructive play and pretend play?

METHODS

Participants. The participants for this study were ninety-eight 5-year-old children (49 boys and 49 girls) attending childcare center and kindergarten located in A and S city in South Korea.

Observation. The place of block play was set up in an extra room separated from their classroom in the kindergarten and childcare center. The location for ‘pretend play’ was set up in their classroom in the childcare center. Ninety-eight (98) children were divided into 25 groups, 5 or 6 children were placed together, and they participated in block play sessions twice a week, and they participated in pretend play sessions once a week. They were grouped with the same classmates, and 2 girls 3 boys were one group or 3 girls 2 boys, or 3 girls and 3 boys were one group.

One play session lasted for 30 - 40 minutes. During the first 10 of 40 minutes, introduction activities were conducted by research assistants and constructive play sessions and pretend play sessions lasted for 30 minutes. They read storybooks to the children to stimulate constructive play and pretend play. The storybooks provided for block constructive play were *The Three Little Pigs*, *Hensel and Gretel*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Manhee’s House*, and *Block City*. The storybooks provided for clay dough constructive play were *The Story of the Little Mole*; *Who Knew it was None of His Business*, *Cosmos*, *The Man with a Lump*, *The Rainbow Fish*, *Childcare center*,

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Breathing Pot, Transportations, and The Little Penguin Pororo. The storybooks used for pretend play were, *If I have My Mom and Dad, My Mom is Pilot, and Sleeping Beauty.*

Materials for block play and pretend play.

- 1) **Constructive Play.** Unit Block designed by Caroline Pratt, Lego Block, and Clay Dough consisted of five colors (white, black, red, blue, yellow) were provided for constructive play.
- 2) **Pretend Play.** a) House Miniature that consists of living room, room, bed, closet, kitchen, table, chair, refrigerator, garden, car, parking lot. b) Community Miniature that consists of a hospital, a police station, a post office, a big market, buildings, a church, and a street. c) Castle Miniature was provided for pretend play. In addition, props, dolls, and role-play costumes were provided.

RESULTS

1. The pretending elements that appeared in constructive play

Table 1 shows the pretending elements that appeared in constructive play.

Table 1. The pretending elements that appeared in constructive play

Categories	Items	Explanations (Definitions)	Examples
Self-Subjective Pretend Play	Pretending to Play a Role	Pretending of person, or personalized animals or objects	<i>After reading [The Three Little Pigs] fairy tale, a child construct three little pig's house and then point to himself/herself. "I'm the third pig. Oink-oink."</i>
	Pretending Play with an Object	Pretending of un-personalized objects or animals	<i>A child pretend as a tree behavior</i>
	Pretending a Situation	Pretending a time or a space situation	<i>"Here is under the sea."</i>
Projective Pretend Play	Pretending to Play a Role	Pretending of person, or personalized animals or objects	<i>After making a pig by clay dough and point to the construction, "This is the third pig. Oink-oink."</i>
	Pretending Play with an Object	Pretending of un-personalized objects or animals	<i>After making a pot by clay dough and point to the construction, "This is a pot."</i>
	Pretending a Situation	Pretending a time or a space situation	<i>"Now is night."</i>

(Source: Adapted from Exploring the Pretending Elements in Block Play, by J. H. Park and S. S. Han, 2017, *International Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 23(5), 23-38.)

2. The pretending elements that appeared in pretend play

Table 2 shows the pretending elements that appeared in pretend play.

Table 2. The pretending elements that appeared in pretend play

Types of pretend play	Categories	Sub-Items	Explanations (Definitions)	Examples
Theatrical Pretend play	Pretending to Play a Role	Self-Subjective Pretend Play	Pretending a role as pretending of person, or personalized animals or personalized objects by himself/herself or themselves	<i>"I'm a doctor." (Pretending of person) "I'm a breathing pot." (pretending personalized object)</i>
		Projective Pretend Play	Pretending a role as pretending of person, or personalized animals or personalized objects by himself/herself or themselves, at the same time, pretending of person or personalized animals by objects or dolls	<i>"I'm a mom." (point to doll) "You're my baby. I'll give you a bottle of milk."</i>
	Pretending Play	Self-Subjective	Pretending of un-personalized objects or animals by	<i>"I'm a car." (Pretending of</i>

	with an Object	Pretend Play	himself/herself or themselves	un-personalized objects)	
		Projective Pretend Play	As a child pretending a role, he or she pretends objects and uses them	<i>As a child pretending a doctor, he or she pretends necklace as a stethoscope.</i>	
	Pretending a Situation	Pretending a Time	Pretending a time situation	<i>“Now is night.”</i>	
		Pretending a Space	Pretending a space situation	<i>“Here is a company.”</i>	
Doll Dramatic Pretend Play	Pretending to Play a Role	Projective Pretend Play	Pretending a role as pretending of person, or personalized animals or personalized objects by dolls, miniatures, or props	<i>A child holding a doll or a miniature man in his/her hand, and shouts “I’m a powerful king!!” (Child pretends a miniature (sculpture) of a man as a powerful king.)</i>	
	Pretending Play with an Object	Projective Pretend Play	Pretending of un-personalized objects or animals by props, miniatures, or objects	<i>A child holding a block, “This is a car. Honk! honk!”</i>	
	Pretending a Situation	Pretending a Time	Pretending a time situation	<i>“Now is night.”</i>	
		Pretending a Space	Pretending a space situation	<i>“Here is a company.”</i>	
	Mixed of Theatrical and Doll Dramatic Pretend Play	Pretending to Play a Role	Self-Subjective Pretend Play	Pretending a role as pretending of person, or personalized animals or personalized objects by himself/herself or themselves, at the same time, pretending a role as pretending of person or personalized animals by objects, props, miniatures, or dolls	<i>“I’m a mom. (pointing to a doll) “You’re my baby. I’ll give you a bottle of milk.”(as a mom’s voice)</i>
			Projective Pretend Play	Pretending a role as pretending of person, or personalized animals or personalized objects by objects, props, miniatures, or dolls	<i>“I’m a mom. (pointing to a doll) “You’re my baby. I’ll give you a bottle of milk” “Yes. Mommy” “Yummy, yummy!”(as a baby’s voice)</i>
Pretending Play with an Object		Self-Subjective Pretend Play	Pretending of un-personalized objects or animals by himself/herself or themselves	<i>“I’m a car.” “Bung! bung!”</i>	
		Projective Pretend Play	Pretending of un-personalized objects or animals by props, miniatures, or objects	<i>A child holds an object “This is a car.”</i>	
Pretending a Situation		Pretending a Time	Pretending a time situation	<i>“Now is night.”</i>	
		Pretending a Space	Pretending a space situation	<i>“Here is a company.”</i>	

(Source: Adapted from Analysis of Narratives appeared in Young Children’s imaginative Play, by J. H. Park and S. S. Han, 2018, *The Korea Open Association for Early Childhood Education Conference*, 243).

3. Teacher’s roles to enhance the pretending elements

To enhance pretending elements in constructive play and pretend play, teachers should provide enough time, new props, a variety of miniatures and dolls, storybooks, and intervention.

1) Time

Play does not survive when children feel rushed; constructive play must be nurtured by time (Forman, 2006). More extended facilitate more complex and high level of play. Longer play periods were associated with more constructive and dramatic play. The researchers concluded that longer periods maybe necessary for children ‘to become involved in mature, complex forms of play’ (Tegano, Lookabaugh, May, & Burdette, 1991; Park & Han,

2018). Teachers should give plenty of time for pretend and constructive play (Park, 2019).

2) Props

Props can be added in phases to build children's knowledge and hold their interest (Salinas-Gonzalez, Arreguin-Anderson, & Alanis, 2018). Role play costumes, in other words, occupation props, for example, doctor's gown, nurse's hat, police officer's suit, and cooker's hat stimulate pretending elements. Also, prince and princess costumes, dad's shirt and mom's dress promote pretending elements. Teachers should provide basic props and add more props based on careful observation of children's interaction, and should add props that enhance the theme (Salinas-Gonzalez, Arreguin-Anderson, & Alanis, 2018).

3) Miniatures and dolls

A variety of dolls, for example, family dolls (dad, mom, sun, daughter, and baby dolls), a variety of miniatures, for example, people miniatures, animal miniatures, tree miniatures, signs miniatures, and other kinds of miniatures help pretending elements.

4) Storybooks

Before constructive play and pretend play, reading story books for children as an introduction activity is very useful to stimulate pretending elements in constructive play and pretend play. Children's play became more complex and abundant when they have stories related to the play theme (Park, 2007; Park, 2019).

5) Intervention

Intervention in pretend play enables the participating teacher to keep the activity going by motivating the children to persist and to pretend. Teacher intervention in play can have either positive or negative effects, depending upon timing and the role that the teacher assumes. If teachers observe carefully and link their involvement with children's current play interests, they can enrich and extend play episodes and stimulate pretending elements. On the other hand, if teachers take control of the play or try to redirect children toward unrelated themes, the results can be negative effects. While some children engage in such play readily, others need to be guided and encouraged to play a full part. The teacher can help to refocus the story to bring the group together and generate excitement by introducing tension into the story. These are both essential to the development of pretend play but difficult for young children to attain themselves. Interventions into pretend play become the subtle tools of the teacher working with children. Within the play, the teacher can enrich and deepen the play, and open up new learning areas for the children; intervene and structure the learning from within, without significantly reducing the children's ownership (Christie, 2006; Kitson, 2015).

6) Pre-experiences (Field trip)

Teacher's play plans, preparations, interests, field trips, pre-experiences, and encouragement will positively effect constructive play and pretend play. For children, pre-experiences of related the play theme will enhance the high quality of pretending elements in constructive play and pretend play. For example, before 'market pretend play' or 'market constructive play', teachers and children take a field trip to the market. Children observe the role of cashier and costumer, and inside and outside market organization. Thus when children do 'the market pretend play', they represent the role, object, and situation of the market. Or when children do construct the market, it also affect construction related to the mart and their pretending elements. Before 'post office pretend play' or 'post office constructive play', teachers and children take a field trip to the post office. These will affect the pretending elements in 'post office pretend play' and 'post office constructive play'.

DISCUSSION

Pretend play leads to real-life learning. By imitating a firefighter using a horse, a doctor checking a patient's ear, or a construction worker building a skyscraper, children learn about community roles and services and feel proud and satisfied. While acting as mothers and fathers, children can be caring, loving, and responsible. Children learn through pretend play. When they pretend, children create pictures in their minds of past experiences and use their imaginations to think of new scenarios. These thoughts and images let children think about situations and objects that are not right in front of them and events that have not yet happened (Colker, 2015). Pretending elements are essential to cognitive, emotional, social, language, physical, and creative development.

Through constructive play, children learn by making. Constructive play also helps cognitive, emotional, social, physical, creative development. Constructive play is a continuous problem-solving, process and constructive play provides a window into children's thinking (Forman, 2006).

Pretending elements in pretend play were more specific and diverse than in constructive play. The constructive play also has symbolic and pretending elements. But in constructive play, the progress patterns of constructive

play were classified into three types. First, children do only constructive play. Second, children construct construction through blocks or clay, and then they play pretend play using their creations. Third, children do constructive play and pretend to play almost at the same time (Park & Han, 2011). Thus, in constructive play, children tend to focus on construction. So they need more time for construction. Especially during clay dough construction, more time is required than in block construction because clay doughs require more time to make dough compare to block construction. Thus, during the same time, compare constructive play with pretend play, children need more time to construct in constructive play than pretend play. When children do constructive play, they act using the constructions that they create, and props that are provided.

But in pretend play, children almost engaged in pretend play immediately. Sometimes children construct something to use for pretending. Also, they pretend by using dolls, miniatures, and props, or they pretend themselves. So they focus on acting in pretend play rather than in constructive play. And they will do more acting themselves than during constructive play. Because in constructive play, they construct construction and then they use them as pretending. But in pretend play, children pretend not only use props and dolls but also they pretend using (through) themselves. At that time, they often use role play costumes or not. For example, they wear a prince or princess costumes, or they use a doctor's gown and a nurses' hat as the person. Therefore, in pretend play, pretending elements are more diverse and specific than constructive play.

Furthermore, constructive play may be combined with pretend play because children often enjoy making props to support their play, and playing with what they have created (Wood, 2013). When pretend play and constructive play are integrated into the same scenario, higher quality play is achieved (Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren, 2004).

The seeds of imagination are found in early childhood when children engage in pretend play and constructive play. Through teacher's acceptance and nurturance of constructive play and pretend play, children may enter the fascinating realm of possibility (Singer & Singer, 2006). For teachers, pretend play offers a unique privilege and formidable responsibility. The privilege is to enter the magical worlds that children create in their pretense together; the responsibility is to help each child reach his or her potential in the powerful realm of shared pretend (Nourot, 2006).

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