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# PLAY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

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*Second Edition*

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## Chapter 3

# DEVELOPMENT OF PLAY

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*It's been like this before—having to break in a new teacher midyear, after the program is solidly in place and the kids and teachers know each other pretty well. At the first staff meeting, new teacher Sal wants to know about the curriculum and, when told it is play based, expresses some dismay over how to teach in such a program. Sal's background lacks coursework in children's play and early childhood education, so Sal shows eagerness to do any catch-up reading or in-service training necessary to better the program.*

*An interesting discussion ensues, with the director and more experienced teachers sharing an overview of their program's philosophy and foundations. One of the first things they try to get across to Sal is that their program does not view or treat all forms and levels of play the same way. The staff members are "play connoisseurs," who promote and value particular certain forms of play. Sal wants to know how these forms of play are determined—and how you recognize them. The staff members explain that it depends on the child and the situation, the developmental status of the child and where you are in a situation as it is unfolding. Sal ponders what might be the meaning of this—"think, think, think—just like Winnie the Pooh," Sal muses to himself as he makes plans to head to the nearest listing of workshops and to the library after work. ■*

In Chapter 1, we discussed definitions of play and classical and modern theories about the role of play in development, and in Chapter 2, we discussed theoretical and empirical evidence concerning the relation of play with development. We have sought to answer the questions "What is play?" and "What good is play in the child's development and early education?" We have seen that there are different ways to begin to answer these important questions. Now in this chapter, we devote ourselves to another major aspect of the research literature—the development of play behavior in its own right. Obviously, this is an important topic, from a practical point of view. Information about dimensions and normative sequences of play development position us to better appreciate the meaning and significance of play within the context of the growing child. Teachers and parents are able to answer the questions "What is good play?" and "How can we make it better?" only by knowing about the developmental processes and sequences of play during the early childhood years.

In this chapter, we first discuss the concept of play development and then trace the development of play behaviors from infancy through the preschool

years within four domains: (1) play with people, (2) play with objects, (3) play with symbols, and (4) motor play. Second, we discuss developmental changes in play as children make the transition from the preschool years into the primary school years up to age 8. Here, we include extended discussion on the preceding four domains, as well as coverage of additional play or play-related activities relevant to this older age group. This material is organized around what the Consumer Product Safety Commission calls "cognitive play" and "creative play" (Goodson & Bronson, 1985). Cognitive play is the label given for projects and activities in which convergent thinking and epistemic mental activity seem more prevalent than divergent thinking and ludic mental activity. In general, games with rules, use of educational toys and materials, and books and other receptive forms of play are subareas of cognitive play. We define creative play as activities and projects that emphasize imagination and divergent thinking over reasoning and convergent thinking. Arts and crafts, Legos and blocks, narrative and pretense as constructed in microworlds, and musical expression are subareas of creative play.

### CONCEPT OF PLAY DEVELOPMENT

Systematic change in play behavior can be discerned over very small periods of time within a single event. For example, we learn from play observational studies that children often explore single objects before combining or transforming objects. Tempo, intensity, variability, and style of behavior can also change drastically over time—as demonstrated in Hutt's (1966) classic study of specific and diffuse exploration. Here, children's responses to a novel toy were systematically observed for 10 minutes over 6 consecutive days. Children's action patterns and postures and expressions were stereotyped and rigid at first, but usually by the fourth day, children exhibited a more relaxed playful approach to the novel toy and demonstrated considerable response variability. Subsequent work by the late Corinne Hutt and her associates examined children's use of different preschool materials (e.g., dry sand or water) over time, measured in seconds and minutes (Hutt, Tyler, Hutt, & Christopherson, 1989). Studies such as these describe sequential patterns and temporal fluctuations in play behavior or experience over very brief periods of time. The term *microgenesis* refers to these short-term developmental changes.

Developmental change also means shifts in play behavior over much longer periods of time—as in age-related developmental stages of play. The term *ontogenesis* applies in this case. What are recognizable stages and sub-stages of play that unfold over months or years of the child's life? Qualitatively different kinds of play are known to emerge in a stagelike fashion, such as the Piagetian play stages of sensorimotor play, symbolic play, and games with rules. Long-term developmental changes occur *within* each play category, as well. The symbolic play exhibited by toddlers, for instance, is much less developed than the symbolic play displayed by the average kindergarten child. Play ontogenesis occurs within each play behavior category, while different play forms emerge sequentially, forming larger developmental patterns.

These ideas of play microgenesis and play ontogenesis are important both as discrete concepts and as concepts working in tandem for aiding theoretical understanding about children's play behavior development. Information about play microgenesis or about the likely phases or cycles within and across relatively brief play episodes (e.g., examine-reexamine-combine-transform-examine-...) assists in anticipating play behaviors and in making situational arrangements or adjustments to optimize children's play in a given circumstance. For instance, during ongoing play, teachers may judiciously introduce new props or remove play props consistent with where children seem in microgenetic exploration-play cycles.

Similarly, information about developmental norms and milestones in play development is indispensable for creating developmentally appropriate play environments and for making accurate predictions about how children will play. Both kinds of information together enhance even further our ability to comprehend and evaluate what takes place sequentially within a play episode, either for an individual child at a certain developmental level (microanalytic level), or for a group of children of a given age composition (macroanalytic level). How children go through microgenetic play phases or cycles varies as a function of their developmental level (i.e., ontogenesis).

Play-development information is crucial for adults who work and play with growing children. However, this necessary information is not sufficient for achieving adequate working knowledge about children's play or for assuring competence in play interactions with children. Traditional theories of the development of play are quite linear, unidimensional, and decontextualized. As such, they are isolated from the cultural setting. Recent thinking about play development applies conceptual frameworks that are recursively interactive and multidimensional (Monighan-Nourot, 1997). For example, Corsaro (Gaskins, Miller, & Corsaro, 1992) proposes a reconstructive, as opposed to linear, view of social-play development, in which there is a recursive relation (or feedback loops) between developing children's social play and the continual creation and re-creation of *peer cultures*, evolving cultures that in turn affect the social play of individual children. A European root to this line of thinking can be traced to the French play theorist Chateau, who considered play a means for self-affirmation (*l'affirmation du moi*) for younger children. As these younger children grow up, they encounter the "challenge of the elder" (*l'appel de l'aine*) and are motivated to play and behave in such a way as to be accepted into (and, in time, to modify) the play culture of older girls and boys (cited in van der Kooij & de Groot, 1977).

Indeed, most of the play literature in the past saw the development of play as simply unidirectional quantitative and qualitative change in play skill or ability over time. A second criticism of these linear accounts of play development is that they are further limited by being decontextualized and unidimensional. Nowadays, play scholars have reacted by becoming increasingly sensitive to the ecocultural context that surrounds and engulfs the developing child. More common now is using a multifaceted perspective to view play development. Such a perspective allows us to consider "developmental time," as

noted by Monighan-Nourot (1997), in relation to "many contextual factors, including situation, culture, language, and social relationships" (p. 132). (See Chapter 5 in the present volume, "Play in Diverse Cultures.")

Furthermore, knowledge about developmental trends with respect to play behavior and change must be integrated with information and understanding about individual differences (Chapter 4), cultural and social-class contexts (Chapter 5), atypicality (Chapter 6), and environmental factors of various sorts (Chapters 7, 9, and 10). For actually working and playing with children in particular situations, adults need to continually construct and reconstruct their "theories of practice," based on their book knowledge and on their practical knowledge gained from their experiences with children. Theories of practice relating to children's play, to be sure, rest first and foremost on an understanding of the developmental foundations of play—but also on an appreciation of other relevant considerations. We need to have multivariate theories of practice. Both the quality and the rates of development of various play behaviors show wide interindividual variability, due to different social and physical environments, as well as to maturation. Context effects prevail, as exemplified in commonplace observations that although play quality generally improves with development, children of a given developmental status exhibit different levels of play in different social contexts.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL PLAY

By kindergarten age, children normally possess an array of social play skills. They are expected to be able to engage in complex social exchanges during play. Children must learn to assert their wills to achieve personal goals, using behaviors that are acceptable within the peer group. Social competence is required to engage in positive interactions with peers, to become involved in relationships, and to nurture budding friendships. The parent-child "primary socialization system" gradually becomes joined with the "secondary socialization system" of peers, as the home and family become integrated with the microsystems of child care or school, the neighborhood and community.

French ethnologist Hubert Montagner (1984) learned from his extensive observations of young children that socially competent youngsters appropriately combine five types of actions: (1) *actions to produce attachment or to pacify*—behaviors that fall into this category include offering toys, caressing another child, and moving or vocalizing in a nonthreatening way; (2) *actions that generate fear, flight, or tears*—examples are frowning, loud vocalization, showing clenched teeth, and raising an arm; (3) *aggressive actions*—examples are grabbing objects, shaking another child, and hitting or kicking; (4) *gestures of fear and retreat*—for instance, a child might widen the eyes, blink, run away, or cry; and (5) *actions that produce isolation*—such behaviors include thumb sucking, lying down, tugging at the hair, or standing or sitting apart from other children. These behavioral and social actions and interactions are expressions of the child's cognitive abilities and problem-solving skills. Children who are simply dominant and aggressive are not the most socially adept.

In fact, such children tend to become unpopular. The best-liked children, the ones who become social leaders, use affection and power to persuade other children. To what extent are these competencies acquired as a result of social play? How do such social and play skills form? What does the research literature indicate?

Social-play development from infancy through the preschool years has been examined in longitudinal research (e.g., Howes & Matheson, 1992). In addition, a scattering of cross-sectional and short-term studies covering narrower age ranges helps us piece together a fairly comprehensive view of the development of social play.

In general, researchers agree that as a child grows older, there is an increase in interactive play. Interactive play skills develop along with a number of other social skills within the changing social situations of the growing infant, toddler, and preschooler. For example, as the child's social play becomes more complex, specific social behaviors become more pronounced, such as being able to take turns or to initiate, maintain, or end social interactions. Use of language in socially appropriate ways also becomes more elaborate.

Two different research traditions on the social aspects of play have developed. One examines how social play fosters specific social skills; the other focuses on the extent to which social play depends on and reflects these skills (Strayer, Mosher, & Russell, 1981). Although it may seem that this distinction is merely academic, in fact, the two offer rather different approaches for fostering play and development. The accompanying sidebar, "Practical Approaches to Promoting Social Competence in Children," illustrates these approaches.

The social world of the infant is very important for the development of play. Through interacting with caregivers, the child acquires several abilities needed in early games and pretend activities. Ross, Goldman, and Hay (1979) conducted a program to identify the characteristics and purposes behind the social play of infants and their caregivers. These researchers point out that because any interaction between the young child and another person can include mutual involvement, alternation of turns, and repetition, those interactions that highlight the difference between literal and nonliteral events are especially important. Often, simple repetition such as rolling a ball back and forth signals nonliterality or pretense; that is, what is taking place is separate from the usual things that come up in everyday life. After all, why roll a ball back and forth?

Our typical indications that social interaction is to be taken playfully, not literally, include gleeful vocalization and other exhibitions of pleasant feelings or levity. Positive affect often is caused by doing something unexpected, in an exaggerated manner, or not otherwise according to the usual routines. For example, instead of holding onto an object, we drop it; instead of approaching the oncoming person, we run away; instead of opening our mouth to receive food, we close it tight. Pretense in each instance is defined by the social context. Research shows that playful children have playful mothers who are sensitive to changes in their developing children's play skills (Damast, Tamis-LeMonda, & Bornstein, 1996; Fiese, 1990).

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## Theory in Action

### PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO PROMOTING SOCIAL COMPETENCE IN CHILDREN

Sally's parents are concerned about her. She is almost 5 years old and wants to play with other children in the neighborhood. However, when Sally goes next door to play on the gym set or in the sandbox, other children ignore her. She wants to play with other children but does not seem to know how to do so. Her parents and teachers want to help her play and get along better with other children. How can they help?

Teachers and parents can provide ample opportunities for play, as well as specific learning activities and coaching to encourage children to make better use of play time. A number of techniques are possible, based on different views of the relationship between social skill development and the development of social play.

From the point of view that play fosters the development of social skills, it follows that through opportunities, encouragement, and support for play, the child will become more skillful in social situations. Adult-encouraged play and adult coplaying with the young child and infant are important for play development, as are making playthings and once play partners available in structured situations. Simonsky (1968) refers to two types of identification—general and specific—that are important for play development. Children in their home environment need to form positive attachment with parents or other adults to establish basic trust. Beyond this, however, young children also need to be shown specifically how to play and to be encouraged to play with parents in the home. Social skills emerge through playing in social situations.

On the other hand, it is possible that there are social skill prerequisites to being a good play partner. Teachers and parents may have to model and encourage divergent thinking and various social and language skills to improve the child's play skills and foster her or his acceptance by other children. A certain amount of learning and development may be needed to engage successfully in different types of play. For example, children could be taught to perform communication or perspective-taking tasks outside of play to help them in subsequent situations. Exercises in identifying who the other person sees on the other side of a two-way glass, for example, could be helpful. Learning outside of play—through reading, listening to records, watching television, and other shared activities—can help make the child more playful with others in play situations. Parents can help by pointing out good social behaviors in others, as well as by rewarding the child for good social behaviors, such as listening, sharing, standing, and "doing your work." Instead of physical age-appropriate social withdrawal,

**Theory in Action** (continued)

in concrete form, neither of the preceding two approaches is sufficient. Undoubtedly, the relationship between social skills and play is complex and reciprocal. Positive play experience promotes the development of social skills; possessing these skills makes the child more likely to achieve satisfying and enjoyable play experiences. What is critical from a practical point of view is to recognize when a negative cycle exists and to attempt to change it for the better as soon as possible, using any number of possible techniques.

Because children differ from one another both developmentally and individually, it is obvious that the same technique will not be effective for all children. Perhaps Sally needs to be taught how to listen to and observe what others are playing and then be coached to enter ongoing play gracefully and not disruptively by assuming an appropriate role for herself in relation to what others are doing. For example, instead of asking, "Can I play?" perhaps Sally will learn that it is more effective to assume a complementary part in a pretend episode, such as acting the part of another pupil or the principal in a situation in which others are teachers and students. Perhaps puppet play depicting these strategies would help Sally learn. On the other hand, maybe Sally will learn best from storybooks or discussion with her parents or from some kind of reward system aimed at shaping her overt behaviors through reinforcement and praise.

Both Damast et al. and Fiese demonstrated that mothers adjusted their play level to be at or one notch above their toddlers' play level. In general, mothers support more sophisticated play as their children get older. In addition, mothers tend to support the child's autonomy by being less directive and by offering fewer play suggestions as children develop. Damast et al. examined play at home in a sequential analysis of 50 mothers and their toddlers (mean age = 22 months). They found that mothers were sensitive and responsive to their children's play behavior on a microlevel episode-by-episode basis within play sessions. These researchers also estimated maternal knowledge about play development using their Empirical Play Scale (see Table 3.1). Mothers were asked to rank, in order of developmental appearance, 24 actions of infants and toddlers, as shown in the right-hand column of Table 3.1. Mothers who were more accurate on this task tended to appropriately stretch the skills of their playing toddlers to engage in behaviors a bit ahead of their ongoing play.

Singer and Singer (1973, 1990) ditto the idea that the early social context is all-important in the development of play. They emphasize the importance of games such as "This Little Piggy Went to Market" and peekaboo for the baby to get the feel of the special world of make-believe. Such encounters promote not only pretend play skills, but also social skills and social-play skills. The three are interrelated. Learning to communicate the play intent or



**Table 3.1** EMPIRICAL PLAY SCALE

<u>LEVEL</u>	<u>ACTION ON MOTHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE</u>
<i>EXPLORATION</i>	
1. Mouthing	1. Suck block.
2. Simple manipulation	2. Hold spoon and look at it.
<i>NONSYMBOLIC</i>	
3. Unitary functional	3. Turn wheel on toy car.
4. Inappropriate combinations	4. Put toy dish on car.
5. Combinations based on perception	5. Stack toy plates.
6. Combinations based on function	6. Put toy lid on teapot.
<i>SYMBOLIC</i>	
7. Self	7. Feed self with toy spoon
8. Agentive animate	8. Wash mom with toy sponge.
9. Agentive inanimate	9. Rock doll.
10. Sequenced self	10. Stir in toy cup, and eat from toy spoon.
11. Sequenced agentive animate	11. Pour into toy cup from toy teapot, and feed mom.
12. Sequenced agentive inanimate	12. Cover doll with blanket, and pat to sleep.
13. Vicarious	13. Make doll wave hi.
14. Self substitution	14. Use block as sponge and wash own face.
15. Agentive animate substitution	15. Put toy plate on mom's head as hat.
16. Agentive inanimate substitution	16. Use spoon as brush and brush doll's hair.
17. Sequenced vicarious	17. Make stuffed bear walk to toy car and drive away.
18. Sequenced self substitution	18. Stir in toy pot with comb as spoon, and eat from comb.
19. Sequenced agentive animate substitution	19. Wash mom with block, wipe her mouth with toy sponge.
20. Sequenced agentive inanimate substitution	20. Wash doll with block as sponge, and dry with towel.
21. Vicarious substitution	21. Make toy person drive away in nesting cup as car.
22. Sequenced vicarious substitution	22. Put toy bib on doll as coat, and make her walk.
23. Self-removed	23. Make one doll kiss another doll.
24. Emotive	24. Make doll fall down and cry.

Source: *Infant Behavior and Development* (1994), What do mothers know about the developmental nature of play? pp. 341-345, Table 1.

the make-believe attitude through play signals is an important accomplishment and is a forerunner to later play development.

Social features of play during infancy and toddlerhood involve an interaction with an accommodating play partner. This is usually a parent or an older sibling, a relative, or an unrelated but familiar older child or adult. The infant and this other person become engaged with each other, attending to and responding to the other. From this mutual engagement comes alternating turns—waiting for the partner to perform an act before reciprocating. Communicational signals such as standing up, shaking a toy, or waving arms often show that one is waiting for a turn.

As the work cited earlier by Damast et al. (1996) would suggest, usually the infant or toddler plays with others who are aware of the child's limitations and abilities and who help assure that the play flows smoothly. Repetition extends the sequence of interaction and maintains mutual engagement and attention. These playful early interactions provide the foundation for social development in general, and social play development in particular. The purpose behind these early games, routines, or exchanges is simply to be involved in a social interaction with another person.

Researchers have concluded that play with objects is a major factor in the development of social play during infancy and toddlerhood (Mueller & Lucas, 1975). Toys can serve as "social butter," facilitating interactions particularly between peers who, unlike adults, are unable or unwilling to make special accommodations or concessions to keep play going. Toys often serve as entry mechanisms as two toddlers go from parallel to interactive play. Toys mediate social interaction. Another view is that social interaction increases in its sophistication as a result of accumulating social experiences and that the use of toys with other people is but a by-product of this experience-based increase in sophistication. Studies of social play during the second year of life suggest that children progress to more advanced forms of social play through both the use of toys with peers and other interactions with peers (Jacobson, 1981).

During the preschool years, we witness continued increases in interactive play skills as children mature and gain experiences in a variety of social situations. Although there has been general agreement on this point since Parten's (1932) classic observational studies showing a progression from solitary (2 to 2½ years) to parallel (2½ to 3½ years) to associative (3½ to 4½ years) to cooperative (4½ years) play, recent studies have questioned the developmental status of solitary and parallel play and have shed some doubts on the validity of Parten's stages, asking whether it is even helpful to picture changes in play in such broad terms, and recommending a finer analysis of play changes in specific social situations.

In a longitudinal study of social play during the preschool years, Smith (1978) found that while many children followed the trend suggested by Parten, others did not. Older children alternated between solitary and interactive play as they outgrew a tendency to engage in simple side-by-side or parallel play. In fact, with development comes an increasing capacity to use parallel

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*Parallel play occurs when children are close to each other and engage in similar activities but do not interact socially.*

play strategically to initiate or terminate play with particular play partners (Bakeman & Brownlee, 1980). Other researchers have reported that perhaps parallel and not solitary play is the least mature social form of play (Moore, Evertson, & Brophy, 1974; Rubin, 1982; Rubin, Maioni, & Hornung, 1976).

Howes and Matheson (1992) followed 48 children longitudinally from infancy through preschool, focusing on social-play development and social pretend-play development. Beginning when the children were 13–15 months of age, the children were observed at their centers during free play every 6 months, on two consecutive days by two observers, which yielded 4 hours of observational data per child at each time of measurement. Observations were coded using a system for observing and coding the social play of toddlers and preschool children, which had been originally developed by Carollee Howes (1980). This system, described in Chapter 8, was revised to include two measures of social pretend play: cooperative social pretend play and complex social pretend play, with the latter marked by the appearance of metacommunication about the play (Howes, Unger, & Seidner, 1989).

The Howes and Matheson results showed that parallel play and parallel aware play (levels one and two) decreased over time, and that complementary

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and reciprocal social play, cooperative pretend play, and complex pretend play increased over time (levels four and five). Level three, simple social play, did not vary as a function of age. Emergence of higher play forms were perfectly consistent; not a single child reversed the sequence of the five levels in the Howes scale. In this study, 33% of the children did not exhibit any complex social pretend play until after their fourth birthday. There were stable individual differences reported—those children who showed earlier signs of high play levels when they were younger had higher play levels when they were older. For example, children who engaged in a higher proportion of cooperative social pretend play at age 30–35 months had earlier emergence and a greater proportion of complex social pretend play at 44–60 months.

Howes's system analyzes social play, particularly parallel play, in a more fine-grained manner than Parten's original formulation of parallel play. Table 3.2 presents categories of social play developed by various authors, including Howes. Howes's system is recommended and detailed further in Chapter 8 which discusses play observation and assessment.

In a provocative conceptual analysis of the early precursors of the development of peer social play, Whaley (1990) inverted the original Howes's scales in discussing changes in mother-child social play during the first years of the child's life. According to Whaley's analysis—which is supported by research, as well as by relevant theory on attachment (Winnicott, 1971)—the starting point for mothers and infants resemble Howes's fifth stage, and the end point for the dyad is like Howes's first stage! At first, the mother-child "play dance" is highly fused, with a great deal of support and scaffolding by the mother to maintain the play bout. The mother and infant are in a relative state of undifferentiation, akin to peers who are playing intently on a cooperative level (Stage 5 on the Howes Peer Play Scale). Progressively, the mother does less and less as a way of better accommodating the increasing play skills of the developing child, giving the child more psychological space by separating and engaging the child in a more parallel play fashion, which then resembles the lower levels of the Howes Peer Play Scale. Whaley's proposed developmental sequence of infant-adult social play, which *reverses* the peer play scale of Howes (1980), captures an important essence of the transition from the child's primary socialization system of the family into the secondary socialization system of peers.

## DEVELOPMENT OF OBJECT PLAY

The typical kindergarten child shows a great deal of versatility in using objects during play. The typically developing child is able to use tools, participate in supervised cooking activities, and create elaborate constructions from blocks and other materials. The child can finish rather complicated puzzles and can display considerable problem-solving strategies using objects in play. Furthermore, these skills are frequently exhibited in social settings requiring additional capabilities. Such behavior reflects and requires considerable development—cognitive, social, affective, physical, and linguistic. How does the kindergarten child obtain this level of proficiency in using objects?

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**Table 3.2 CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL PLAY**

<u>PARTEN (1932)</u> <i>Developmental stage</i>	<u>ERIKSON (1950)</u> <i>Categories refer to broad stages of development</i>	<u>SEAGOE (1970)</u> <i>Play report based on structured interviews with child</i>
<i>Solitary play</i> —plays alone and independently; different activity; no reference to others	<i>Autocosmic</i> —world of self; explores own body and the body of mother; repetition of activity	<i>Informal-individual</i> —self-directed; not imitative of adults; not formally patterned
<i>Parallel play</i> —plays independently but near or among others; similar toys or activities; beside but not with	<i>Microcosmic</i> —world of small, manageable toys and objects; solitary play; pleasure derived from mastery of toys	<i>Adult-oriented</i> —adult-directed; formally patterned; not imitative of adult life
<i>Associative play</i> —plays with others; conversation is about common activity, but does not subordinate own interests to groups	<i>Macrocosmic</i> —world shared with others	<i>Informal-social</i> —self-directed; imitative of adult life; not formally patterned
<i>Cooperative play</i> —activity is organized; differentiation of roles; complementing actions		<i>Individual-competitive</i> —formally patterned; directed toward individual victory
		<i>Cooperative-competitive</i> —formally patterned toward team victory

Source: Based on Frost and Klein (1979).

IWANAGA (1979)  
*Categories refer to broad stages of development*

*Independent play*—play that is done independently of others

*Parallel play*—play in which children play independently but near or among others; similar toys or activities; beside but not with

*Complementary play*—play in which children play independently but near or among others; conversation is about common activity, but does not subordinate own interests to groups

*Integrative play*—play in which children play together and interactively; conversation is about common activity, but does not subordinate own interests to groups

	<u>IWANAGA (1973)</u> <i>Categories pertain to how an individual child structures the play situation in regard to other children</i>	<u>HOWES (1980)</u> <i>Categories show increases in reciprocity, complexity of interaction within dyads</i>	<u>HOWES &amp; MATHESON (1992)</u> <i>Categories show increases in reciprocity, complexity, and communication and meta-communication in dyads</i>
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<i>al—self- itive of ly</i>	<i>Independent—no involve- ment of peers in play</i>	<i>Parallel—engaged—in similar activities but not paying any attention to one another</i>	<i>Parallel play—in proximity and in similar activities but without notice or aware- ness of each other</i>
<i>ult- atterned; ult life</i>	<i>Parallel play—with peers; undifferentiated roles; roles enacted indepen- dently; close physical proximity; awareness of activity of others</i>	<i>Mutual regard—similar activities plus eye contact and awareness of each other; no verbalization or other social bids</i>	<i>Parallel aware play—in proximity and in similar activities with eye contact and mutual awareness</i>
<i>elf- of adult atterned</i>	<i>Complementary—Differ- entiated roles, enacted independently; some cooperation but each child engages in a different activity; little adjustment to others' behavior</i>	<i>Simple social—similar activities along with social bids such as talking, smiling, offering toys</i>	<i>Simple social play—Engaged in similar activities with eye contact and presence of social bids—talking, giving, holding, etc.</i>
<i>tive— ; directed ictory</i>	<i>Integrative—roles enacted interactively; intense awareness of others; adjustment of behavior to shifts in others' complementary roles</i>	<i>Complementary— collaborating in the same activity with mutual awareness but no social bids</i>	<i>Complementary and recip- rocal play—Presence of social bids plus "action-based role reversals," e.g., hide-and- seek, run-and-chase.</i>
<i>tive— toward</i>		<i>Complementary reciprocal— collaborating in the same activity with social bids</i>	<i>Cooperative social play— Enactment of organized constructive or sociodra- matic play with comple- mentary roles and communication</i> <i>Complex social play— Engagement in organized constructive or dramatic play with play communica- tion and communication about the play or metacom- munication</i>

As we saw in Chapter 1, the arousal-modulation theory of play focuses on motivating factors inherent in the external world, which prompt the child to play. This theory is particularly useful for understanding play with objects in a particular situation at a given time. Stimulus properties such as novelty, complexity, and manipulability motivate the child to interact with objects. This interaction can take several forms. For example, based on Berlyne's work on arousal and motivation, Hutt (1966), distinguishes between exploring and playing with objects. *Exploration* occurs when the child seemingly asks the question "What does this object do?"; *play* happens when the child seemingly asks the question "What can I do with this object?" In either case, there is intrinsic motivation to learn about objects and what can be done to or with them. Important behavioral changes occur in how objects are used in exploration and in play during the first 6 years of life.

How many objects are played with at one time and how they are played with are two dimensions of object play that have been investigated developmentally. Quality of play has been judged according to how discriminant, sequenced, and appropriate the activity is. Object play has been studied in children before and after the emergence and consolidation of children's symbolic capacities, thus making it important to distinguish between presymbolic object play and symbolic object play.

During the first months after birth, there are great changes in how babies play with objects. The newborn is equipped with reflexes and sensory capacities but does not know how to play with objects. Play actions develop as a result of experience. There is widespread agreement that object play during the first year progresses from repetitious and undifferentiated activity to more organized and sequenced action patterns. Piaget (1962) traced the development of presymbolic or mastery or exercise play while advancing his theories about cognitive development during the sensorimotor period. For Piaget, objects direct the infant's actions at first and then come under the control of the infant—providing the child with an opportunity to employ action schemes. Infants repeat actions on objects and generalize these actions to other objects. Piaget uses two categories of assimilation: (1) *reproductive* or *functional* (repeating actions on an object) and (2) *generalizing* (extending these actions to additional objects) to describe this behavior. While not goal directed, these early behaviors are pleasurable, and they define the essence of play for Piaget. During the second year, the child is able to construct new schemes from combinations of past experiences. Ritualization and conventional uses of objects increase in frequency.

Rosenblatt (1977) has described major shifts in how infants and toddlers use objects between their first and second years. The use of single objects decreases in frequency. Whereas the child less than 1 year old typically uses only one toy at a time in an unpredictable manner, the child older than 1 year of age is much more likely to use many objects in play. In addition, the toddler uses toys in a much more predictable way. That is, the toddler uses toys in appropriate or stereotypic ways, paying greater attention to the physical characteristics of playthings and showing knowledge of how different objects are used in daily life.

Several researchers have investigated the developmental transition of object play into symbolic play or presymbolic to symbolic action schemes. For example, Fenson, Kagan, Kearsley, and Zelazo (1976) compared the object

play of 9½-, 13½-, and 18½-month-old children. Motor schemes such as mouthing and banging objects predominated in the youngest infants. By 13½ months, infants used objects functionally, grouping or sorting similar objects and making simple pretenses that were self-directed. Like Piaget, these researchers concluded that object play in infancy becomes decentered and more integrated. They also found an increase in combinational play and change from functional or motor use of objects to conventional applications.

Similarly, in Belsky and Most's (1981) study of 7- to 21-month-old children, the authors noted consistent developmental trends in exploratory and manipulative play behaviors. Tasting, mouthing, and handling of materials were replaced as children matured with *correct functional play* (e.g., pushing a toy car along the floor). Then came *enactive naming* (i.e., giving names to things), *pretending with self*, and *pretending with others*.

Social environmental factors influence play development. For example, Tamis-LeMonda and Bornstein (1991) in a longitudinal study examined the nonsymbolic and symbolic play of mothers and toddlers in the home setting, at toddler ages 13 months and 20 months. Mother and child play were correlated in these dyadic free-play interactions ( $N = 45$ ). There was considerable variability in patterns of behavior. Slightly over half the sample of toddlers ( $N = 23$ ) showed increases in symbolic play, contingent on maternal symbolic play. Transitional behavior between nonsymbolic and symbolic (e.g., puts telephone receiver to ear without vocalization) was commonplace at 13 months (44%) and at 20 months (57%). This study suggests that children's maturing play behaviors and cognitions are mediated by their more mature partners' promotion of play.

During the preschool years, object play progresses from the simple to the complex, as children gain increasing ability to order objects and actions in time and space. Smilansky (1968), influenced by Piaget (1962), has defined two types of play: functional and constructive. Together, they are the dominant cognitive forms of play involving objects during the preschool years. *Functional play* refers to manipulative play, motor exercise with or without objects, or the use of objects in a stereotyped manner. This form of play decreases as children develop. *Constructive play* is organized, goal-oriented play and increases in frequency as the child matures. For instance, Hutt et al. (1989) reported that 3-year-old children often engaged in playing with water and dry sand in an active and functional way, at best; they often performed uncontrolled actions such as splashing. Four-year-olds often simply avoided these materials and younger playmates when this happened, preferring instead more productive activity. An interesting example of this contrast, 4-year-olds used only half the number of brush strokes that 3-year-olds did while painting over a comparable period of time. By age 4, constructive play becomes the most prevalent form of play, occupying more than 50% of free time in preschool settings (Rubin et al., 1983).

The typical preschool classroom or child-care center is equipped with interest centers and other play areas designed to encourage more constructive and imaginative play by young children as they grow older. The simpler functional play is seen less and less. Preschoolers become increasingly capable of building complex structures and of producing recognizable products through drawing, painting, arranging designs, and making small constructions. More-

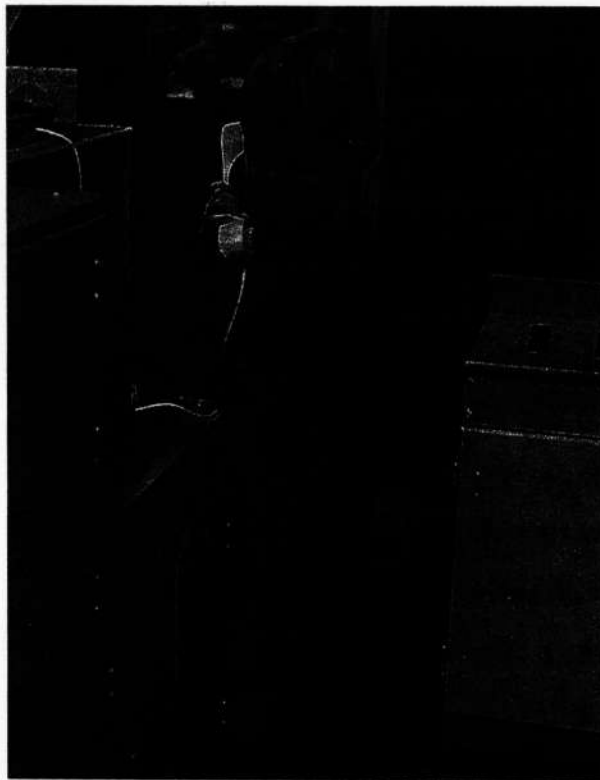


over, toys and play equipment and more recently computer-related activities (discussed in Chapter 10) are used more and more in preschools and child-care centers to challenge young children to interact creatively with the world of objects. Trageton (1997) proposes a general developmental shift from divergent types of play to convergent types of play. Constructive play of preschoolers transforms into arts and crafts creative play in primary school, just as their dramatic play transforms into drama and performing skits as they get older.

### DEVELOPMENT OF SYMBOLIC PLAY

During the second year, as children begin their conventional uses of objects, their representational abilities emerge. There is a transition from the mastery play of the infant to the symbolic play of the preoperational child. The infant becomes able to evoke images or symbols derived from imitative activities. This enables the infant to engage in beginning pretense or make-believe play. This new ability is an outgrowth of the infant's use of objects and the adult-infant game and play routines previously discussed (Damast et al., 1996; Tamis-LeMonda & Bornstein, 1991). The origins of symbolic play are in the interpersonal context (e.g., Whaley, 1990) and in the individual context of the developing child's autonomous encounters with the physical world. Piagetian accounts of the origins of symbolic play, while stressing the latter, also include the former.

*Children's earliest symbolic transformations involve realistic toys that closely resemble their real-life counterparts.*



Piaget (1962) discusses the relationship between mastery play and symbolic play: "In mastery play the schemas follow one another without any external aim. The objects to which they are applied are no longer a problem, but merely serve as an opportunity for activity. This activity is no longer an effort to learn, it is only a happy display of known actions" (1962, p. 93). "In pretense the child is using schemes which are familiar, and for the most part already ritualized games . . . but (1) instead of using them in the presence of objects to which they are usually applied, the child assimilates to them new objectives unrelated to them from the point of view of effective adaptation; (2) these new objects, instead of resulting merely in an extension of the schema (as is the case in the generalization proper to intelligence), are used with no other purpose than that of allowing the subject to mime or evoke the schemas in question. It is the union of these two conditions—applications of schema to inadequate objects and evocation for pleasure—which characterizes the beginning of pretence" (1962, p. 97).

Piaget (1962) defined three kinds of symbolic play. The first type involves the application of one symbolic scheme to new objects. For example, a child says "cry, cry" to a doll and imitates the sound. What is imitated is taken from the child's own experience. This represents the emergence of symbolic play. The second type involves again only one symbolic scheme, but an object may be substituted for another or the child may act like another person or object. Imitated behaviors are borrowed from other models. For example, the child pretends to shave like daddy. The third kind of symbolic play involves planned combinations of symbolic schemes and a sequence or pattern of behavior. For example, a child takes a doll on a stroller ride, saying, "You see this, you see that." According to Piaget's theory, during the preschool years, there is a continuing trend toward more coherent and orderly symbolic play, often resulting in a replication of reality that is, most important, performed in a social context (termed "collective symbolism"). Piaget's general account covering individual and social factors in symbolic-play ontogeny has inspired many researchers who have sought to understand the origin and development of nonsocial and social pretense during the early years. Dimensions or components of symbolic play studied include (a) pretend actions and objects and (b) role enactments and themes.

### PRETEND ACTIONS AND OBJECTS

Researchers of infant and toddler play—such as Bornstein and O'Reilly (1993), Fenson et al. (1976), Lowe (1975), Rosenblatt (1977), and Watson and Jackowitz (1984)—have traced the development of presymbolic action schemes. Play becomes less imitative and more generative. Sequences of actions in pretending are analyzed in terms of agent and object substitutions. Infants as young as 12 months have been observed engaging in the simplest type of pretend play involving self as agent.

Examples of the earliest forms of this behavior include pretending to be sleeping, drinking, eating, or talking on the phone. In pretending to sleep, for instance, the infant does not merely touch its head to a pillow. Instead, the behavior seems to replicate in gestures the fine details of such behaviors as they would occur in ordinary life. The behaviors are not related to real needs and

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are not characterized by confusion or overgeneralization. Instead, the behaviors are selective and representative of customary practices but are independent of needs. During the second year of life, the toddler becomes increasingly able to pretend and uses a variety of substitute objects (such as a toy banana or a block for a telephone). These simple pretense activities, although unrelated to real needs or wishes, are all self-directed. Thus, they do not represent genuine symbolic play, according to Piaget (1962).

It is only after the child is capable of outer-directed symbolic activities, at around 18 months of age, that we see genuine symbolic play sequences unfold, according to Piaget's meaning of the term. Here, the child can make a mother or a doll pretend to drink from a cup or talk on the phone. Transformation of so-called recipient objects (telephone, banana, block) occurs developmentally before the ability to transform agents of pretending (e.g., self as agent, mother as agent, doll as agent). Within each type of transformation, it is important to note the level of symbolic substitutions required to judge the relative difficulty of the pretend act (Watson & Jackowitz (1984). Self as agent and a realistic or representational toy such as a prototypical toy phone as the recipient object are simplest, in that no real transformation is needed.

The form and function of substitute objects, as opposed to each real object, are important to note to judge further the complexity of the pretend actions. For example, a toy banana has a shape similar to that of a toy phone handset, suggesting its use as a substitute object for the phone. Substituting a toy car for a toy phone would clearly be a greater symbolic leap because of dissimilarity in both shape and intended function. A third dimension that determines the difficulty of the pretend act is the content of the objects and actions. Jackowitz and Watson (1980) suggest that real telephones may be off limits to children in some homes, and hence, pretend play with phones may be inhibited in the same children who may find pretending with cups and dolls relatively easy. Social conventions that promote sex-typing of toys may be viewed in this vein as limiting the play development of children, as we explain in Chapter 4.

In summary, pretend action ranges in degree of difficulty, according to the type of object transformation, level of transformation, and content. Self-directed or self-as-agent behaviors are the first signs of symbolic play in infancy (pretending to eat, talk on a phone, put on a hat, drink from a cup). Outer-directed pretense occurs when other objects or persons are made the agent of the pretend actions performed on different recipient objects—for example, pretending that toy cows are eating straw. Within both agent and recipient object transformation, transforming things similar to or not conflicting with the thing (either in appearance or intended use) is an easier task for the child than transforming things dissimilar to or conflicting with the real object. The nature or content of the pretend play is the third factor to consider to determine whether the child has had positive or negative experiences with the objects involved, which would either facilitate or inhibit the pretend play actions.

Thus far, we have kept to single pretend-play actions or simple combinations. The older infant or toddler becomes able to engage in more complicated and involved pretend-play sequences (Piaget's third type of symbolic play) in which actions are linked meaningfully while objects are used conventionally and consis-

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tently (Fenson et al., 1976). During the second and third years of life, the child is able to perform two or more consecutive acts that reflect a similar theme or topic, such as pretending to serve tea to dolls or teddy bears seated around a table. A child may at first place each cup on a saucer, then put a spoon in a cup, then pour tea from the pot into the cup, and then place the cup in front of one of the dolls. The variety and diversity of such pretend-action sequences increase as the child leaves toddlerhood. The content of such play is always familiar and comfortable for the child, and the child usually does not interact with a playmate in any reciprocal sense. However, the play can and often does involve a teacher, parent, or other older person who is able and willing to adjust to the child's needs for support and scaffolding of the make-believe experience; these experiences, taken together as we have implied, can be viewed as a critical foundation rock for social competence and, indeed, for the child's later mental health.

A good review of early symbolic play development is available in a *Young Children* "Research in Review" article by Jean Gowen (1995). Her review of research supports our claim that the child's maturation, the individual child's actions on the physical world, and social action all have a role in the emergence and consolidation of symbolic play. Vygotsky's (1978) constructs of the zone of proximal development and the importance of the interpersonal sphere for development (i.e., the interpersonal becomes intrapersonal) are stressed. Nine categories or stages in the development of symbolic play are given, based on her synthesis of the research literature (see Table 3.3, "Stages in the Development of Symbolic Play").

#### ROLE ENACTMENTS AND THEMES

Until now, we have been examining pretend-action-object development and have seen that it becomes more elaborate and organized as the child matures. During the third year, for most children, an important change occurs. The child engages in pretend activities while adopting the role of another person—a person with whom the child is intimately familiar. Typically, it is the child's mother or another primary caregiving or significant person. *Role enactment*, adopting the role of another, differs from the earlier pretend activities with objects, in that now the child is able to infer and imagine the role identity behind the pretend actions. This new capacity lends greater coherence, enjoyment, and meaning to the pretend activities of the child. The adoption of the role dictates and controls the actions. Role enactment guides the pretend play. The pretending that results is more planned and persistent.

Role enactment (role play) is significant because it indicates not only awareness of others but also the child's knowledge of role attributes, role relationships, and role-appropriate actions (Garvey, 1979). Role-enactment behaviors are influenced by cognitive development and by personality factors (see Chapter 4), as well as by the social situation—the other persons (children, as well as adults) who form part of the play or the events surrounding the play. Garvey and Berndt (1977) distinguish four types of roles: (1) *functional roles* (pseudo-role enactment), which are organized by an object or activity (e.g., pretending to cook dinner, triggered by the presence and use of a toy oven or mixing bowl); (2) *relational roles* (e.g., family roles that suggest real complements,

**Table 3.3 STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYMBOLIC PLAY**

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>EXAMPLES</u>
Prepretense	Child engages in approximate pretense but gives no confirming evidence of pretense	Child briefly touches telephone to ear; briefly puts bottle to doll's mouth
Pretend self	Child engages in pretense behavior, directed toward self, in which pretense is apparent	Child raises cup to lip, tips cup, makes drinking sounds
Pretend other	Child engages in pretense behavior directed away from child toward other; pretends the behaviors of other people	Child feeds doll with toy baby bottle or cup; pushes truck on floor and makes truck noise
Substitution	Child uses an apparently meaningless object in a creative or imaginative manner, or uses an object in a pretense act in a way that differs from its usual use	Child feeds doll with block as "bottle" puts piece of play dough on plate and calls it a hamburger
Imaginary objects or beings	Child pretends that an object, substance, person, or animal is present	Child tips empty teapot over cup and says "coffee," child moves around the room making motor sounds, as though riding an imaginary motorcycle
Active agent	Child animates a toy (e.g., doll, toy animal) that represents a being so that toy becomes an active agent in the pretend activity	Child hops toy animal across rug as though it were running, puts doll's hand to its mouth as though it were feeding itself, talks in a high voice as though the doll were talking
Sequence, no story	Child repeats a single pretense act/scheme with multiple receivers	Child gives mother a drink from the cup, then gives doll a drink from the cup
Sequence story	Child uses more than one related scheme in pretense activity	Child stirs in cup, drinks from cup, and says "Mmmm, tastes good"
Planning	Child engages in pretend play preceded by evidence of planning	Child says that she will feed the baby before putting toy baby bottle to doll's mouth

Source: Gowen (1995).

such as mother-child, wife-husband); (3) *character roles*, which are either stereotypic (e.g., firefighter, witch) or fictional (characters with proper names such as Aquaman, Hercules, Megan, or the Big Bad Wolf); and (4) *peripheral roles*, which are discussed but not enacted (e.g., real or imaginary friends).

Role enactments typically suggest the theme of the play episode. The development of symbolic play during the preschool years moves away from an exclusive preoccupation with highly familiar themes, such as playing house or doctor, and toward a greater interest in play themes that are more out of the ordinary. Over time, children become more interested in enacting the roles of characters from

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fiction, as opposed to familiar occupational roles. Potential themes for role enactments become more numerous as children begin to possess greater linguistic and cognitive abilities and social cognitive abilities and social skills, as well as greater knowledge about the world they live in—both the real world of everyday living and the events transmitted through media, which children experience vicariously.

#### OTHER ASPECTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

The end point of symbolic-play development is seen in the older preschool child, who is able to imagine with no objects at all, who is versatile in improvising with props and substitute objects of all types, and who can evoke imaginary situations through words. High levels of symbolic development are seen in the child's being able to take on a variety of diverse roles in collaboration with peers (Goncu, 1993), engaging innovatively and with great enjoyment in socio-dramatic and fantasy themes, ranging from the most commonplace to the most extraordinary. Concentration, persistence, attention to detail, and seeing the play episode as a whole are other manifestations of symbolic development.

Metacommunication, improvisation, and multivocality (i.e., speaking in different 'voices') characterize complex social pretense (Howes & Matheson, 1992; Sawyer, 1997). Children at this level will repeat play sequences or start them over again to make them follow a plan. Children commonly talk about their imaginative play, decision making about props and space markers, role negotiations, and the like. Interest grows in directing and codirecting a play sequence while playing and coplaying the roles in front of real and imagined audiences. Children engaged in complex social play have been characterized by Sawyer (1997) as an improvisational jazz band, fitting in and doing one's thing simultaneously, applying different voices in their play—actor's voice, political voice, director's voice, and so on.

Finally, concerns with reality and peer pressure reduce overt make-believe play, as children move toward an interest in games with rules, sports, arts and crafts, and other activities appropriate for school-age children. Piaget (1962) and Singer (1973), among others, speculate that overt make-believe play goes underground and becomes internalized at this stage of development. There is the speculation that a residual of the preschooler's earlier active fantasy social life persists in exerting a beneficial influence on the child's creativity, imagination, divergent thinking, and operational thinking abilities. Decentration and the duality of pretend play and operational thought and social reciprocity all seem interconnected, as discussed in Chapter 2. Moreover, as we show later in this chapter, continuing outlets for make-believe play exist in the form of videogames and the like for the older child. The disappearance (or "going underground," if you will) of overt pretense may be an artifact of the location of one's play observations—in classrooms and on school playgrounds, overt pretense play may be missing or reduced drastically, but not at home or in the neighborhood.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF MOTOR PLAY

By their sixth birthday, children possess considerable motor-play skill. They may be a far cry from Olympic champions who have reached a zenith in the development of gross- and fine-motor strength and coordination, but children

have progressed a great deal since birth. They can ride bicycles, pull wagons, and construct snow forts. What are the motor-development milestones as children progress toward this level of maturity?

Newborns possess rudimentary grasping movements; they can blink and throw out their arms. Newborns also possess a number of motor reflexes, such as the rooting reflex. That reflex is evoked by touching the baby on the cheek near the mouth, causing the baby's head to turn in that direction. Motor abilities of newborns form two general categories: (1) the general ability to move body parts in an uncoordinated and random way (waving arms or turning the head), and (2) the automatic and involuntary swift and finely coordinated reflexes. Healthy human babies progress to gain even better control over their bodies, enabling them to be upright, mobile, and able to explore their surroundings. Often, while there is considerable individual variation in the rate of development, the order of acquisition seems fairly constant.

From ages 1 to 3 months, infants become able to lift their chins and heads while lying on their stomachs. At ages 4–6 months, infants gain control over their neck muscles and can pull themselves into a sitting position, with head remaining erect. The body trunk obtains more muscle control, and at age 6–7 months, infants can sit up for a minute or so.

In the second half of the first year, considerable motor development takes place. Many babies begin to stand, holding onto supports such as chairs; they can roll and repeat actions. (As we discussed earlier, playful repetition is significant in many play theories.) Infants play by themselves with body parts and objects. From age 7 months on, infants begin to have some mobility. From a prone position, they can wiggle forward. As babies approach their first birthday, some can walk or stand alone and can easily pivot from side to side while sitting. After the first birthday, most begin walking. At first, they are shaky and fall frequently. They have to concentrate on what they are doing. Very soon, though, they can walk without having this motor skill be the focal point of their awareness. They can use this new skill as a means to other ends, such as reaching places and exploring objects. By age 2 years, the toddler can run. The sequence of major motor milestones in becoming mobile from birth up to age 2 includes crawling, creeping or the bear walk, standing, walking, and running.

Progress in gross-motor behavior involved in sitting and walking is accompanied by steady improvement in hand skills. To be able to grasp and manipulate objects requires considerable fine-motor or small-muscle strength and coordination. At birth, there is virtually no small-muscle control. During the first month of life, the limbs, including fingers, act in unison, much like a fin. Even at age 1 month, infants cannot grasp objects in front of them. In the second month, they might hold an object, but only briefly.

Babies begin to pick up objects at ages 4 through 6 months, with great effort, often using two hands to trap an object. When they hold a small object, it is often between fingers. By the seventh month, objects are held between the thumb and several fingers; in the eighth month, babies can transfer objects from hand to hand. Hand skills involving grasping and manipulation make play with objects possible and also help babies acquire informal, practical, or intuitive understandings of objects, actions, three-dimensional space, and

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cause-effect relations. From ages 1 to 2 years, then, infants can walk well and even run, and they can turn a few pages of a large picture book.

During toddlerhood (ages 2–3 years), there is continual motor-play development. This is evinced both in gross-motor activity involving large objects and use of large muscles for mobility and in fine-motor activity involving hand muscles, hand-eye coordination, and the use of small objects. During this period, the child walks easily, runs, needs no help in going up or down stairs, and can hold a cup in one hand and a cookie in the other. All of this motor progression depends on physical development, experience, and practice. Motor play occurs in play with objects, people, and symbols.

Preschoolers from 3 to 4 years of age demonstrate further developmental progression in motor/physical skills and motor play. They can walk and run easily, surely, and with good balance. They can tiptoe and stand on one foot. Tricycle riding and playing with other vehicles gives them great pleasure. In climbing stairs, children at this age can put one foot on each step. From 4 to 5 years old, children achieve further motor mastery, allowing for greater varieties of play. They can skip, climb, hop, and run. They enjoy chasing games and almost any kind of athletic activity, including rough-and-tumble play. Some children are even able to ride a small bicycle equipped with supportive training wheels. Children can button clothing and put puzzles and simple constructions together.

From 5 to 6 years of age, further physical development makes possible new forms of motor play—jumping rope, doing acrobatics, and performing trapeze tricks. Because their fine-muscle development has advanced, children can string beads, cut, trace, draw, and paste. Many children can use a knife, although they cannot cut very well.

Motor play often occurs with the other forms of play. It overlaps with object play to a great extent. Nonetheless, it is more distinct in play that involves only body parts—such as in running, hopping, and skipping. In this case, a body part becomes an “object” of play.

Rough-and-tumble play is motor play that overlaps with social play. In rough-and-tumble play, parts of the bodies of playmates and the actions of playmates become a focal object of play. Rough-and-tumble play as a special subcategory of motor play also overlaps with symbolic play or pretense. That is, rough-and-tumble play is play fighting, not actual fighting. In rough-and-tumble play, children engage in a form of make-believe in which the body parts and actions of themselves and others take on a symbolic significance, which becomes the object of play. This form of play aggression may involve physical movements such as mock wrestling, running, chasing/fleeing, kicking, pouncing, piling on, pushing, open-hand hitting, and poking, as well as loud noises (Sutton-Smith, Gerstmyer, & Meckley, 1988). In the play aggression or rough-and-tumble play episode, typically several children are involved, and there are role reversals—from being the bad guy to being the good guy to being the bad guy again, allowing children to share powerful roles, as well as being the hapless victim (Pellegrini, 1991). Gender differences are sharp, as is discussed in Chapter 4. Criticisms of rough-and-tumble play are discussed in the accompanying sidebar, “Rough and-tumble Play: Some Issues.”



## Theory in Action

### ROUGH-AND-TUMBLE PLAY: SOME ISSUES

Why do many teachers frown on rough-and-tumble play and even forbid it? After all, many researchers who have studied the phenomenon suggest that this form of play is valuable in many ways. For one thing, physical contact is important to young children. They need a chance to exercise and release energy. Second, because rough-and-tumble play occurs with other children, it is a form of social communication. It has been noted that rough-and-tumble play is instrumental in children's learning to handle feelings. Children filter out negative from positive feelings and learn to control impulses so as to be able to participate appropriately within a group. Furthermore, pretense saturates the phenomenon. Rough-and-tumble play is play fighting, not real fighting. One special value of this form of play, then, may be that children so engaged, although perhaps especially tempted to cross over the threshold into real fighting, usually hold back because of peer pressure. Why, then, is this not good for children? What are the objections, if any?

First of all, criticisms of rough-and-tumble play often arise because of failure to adequately define the phenomenon. Many researchers have linked inappropriate acts of aggression with playful aggression to create composite categories, which then invariably show that children who engage in rough-and-tumble play are also unpopular with their peers and seem to be deficient in social skills. However, when rough-and-tumble play is distinguished from real fighting or from physical exercise play in general, the behavior can be judged more positively. That is, when properly defined, rough-and-tumble play does not appear to lead to statistically significant negative behavior. Such play may even have some developmental virtue.

Nevertheless, many teachers no doubt will remain unconvinced that such play has value. Some may even hold the view that it is downright unethical to permit, let alone encourage, rough-and-tumble play in young children. Why? The most common answer tends to be that one cannot take any chances that play fighting might turn into real fighting. Accidents can easily happen. Children may fall onto a hard or sharp object and hurt themselves, or they may unintentionally hurt another child. Thus, it is much wiser to forbid rough-and-tumble play.

Second, many teachers hold to an implicit threshold theory. Sooner or later, children will begin fighting seriously as the intensity increases. As an illustration, Tim, John, and Paul were observed recently in the block area, wrestling and roughhousing, playing "Power Rangers." During one episode, Tim's arm unintentionally swung and hit Paul on the nose, hitting him. To retaliate, Paul deliberately poked Tim hard, and John joined in, creating a fracas. The teacher quickly separated the children.

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**Theory in Action** (continued)

A third reason teachers object to rough and tumble play is that it symbolizes violent acts of aggression and thereby goes against many teachers' accepted values. Thus, for the same reason teachers outlaw toy guns and knives in their classrooms, they forbid play fighting. As such actions and objects are desensitizers to violence (making aggression seem more natural or commonplace), teachers certainly do not want children exposed to such influences, just as they do not approve of children's exposure to acts of violence in the media.

To summarize, we have surveyed some important findings from research and some important theoretical ideas about developmental trends in play from birth to age 6 years. We examined trends in social, object, symbolic, and motor play. Table 3.4 depicts some specific behaviors teachers and parents can look for to trace development in each of these four related categories of play.

**PLAY DEVELOPMENT FROM AGES 6 TO 8 YEARS**

Considerable play development continues in the social, object, symbol, and motor domains beyond the preschool years. Developmentally giant strides are being made from 6 to 8 years of age in children's social and cognitive competence; their ability to regulate attention, activity, and affect; and their capacity to engage in sustained high-level play episodes alone or with others. As the social ecology of the home becomes ever more meshed with the cultures of school, child care, and various neighborhood and community institutions, new play and recreation possibilities open up and are supported. (See the accompanying sidebar, "European Research on Play Behavior.")

**SOCIAL DOMAIN**

Children in this age group normally possess considerable skill in social interaction. Their levels of social cognitive abilities enable them to take the perspective of others in terms of perceptions, thoughts, intentions, and feelings. Impulse control and the ability to plan and delay gratification are better established, and children usually have more differentiated self-concepts, leading to more social competence and more mature friendship relations, compared to when they were younger. Their social play is characterized by more intimate peer relations, as well as enhanced group membership. There is a rampant rise in peer-group formations during these so-called "bubblegum years" (Thornburg, 1979).

Children typically navigate a more complex social world, interacting with a wider range of people in diverse roles. They often engage in some