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Research article

Playing with a Doll Family: Key Characteristics of Junior Preschoolers' Play Behaviour

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Abstract. The age of 3–4 years is the initial stage in the development of pretend play, or play involving an imaginary situation. In this process, the leading role belongs to dramatic play with toys, the importance of which for children's development cannot be underestimated. The qualitative analysis of children's play presented in this research forms part of a large study aimed at identifying the features of children's play and the toy preferences throughout the entire preschool age. Ten 3–4-year-old children during five play sessions were asked to play a story with a doll family. Before and after the play sessions, all children were tested to assess the level of development of executive functions, imagination, and the type of attachment was determined for each child using a survey of teachers and mothers. The video recordings of the play sessions were then analyzed. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the characteristics of 3–4-year-old children's play behavior and to explore the relationship of the play features with the indicators of individual development. The experimental setting with a series of play sessions also made it possible to assess the dynamics in play development for each child. To evaluate the play, the following indicators were used: the theme and content of play, spatial substitution, the extent of elaborateness and stability of the play idea, the level of play actions with a toy, and the elaborateness of role-play interactions. The results showed that the level of development of free play involving an imaginary situation for 3–4-year-old children could be defined as generally low, regardless of the level of individual development indicators. A comparison of the first and the fifth play sessions did not reveal any positive dynamics in the level of play development. These results indicate the important role of adult participation in the support and development of children's play. They can form the basis for the practical recommendations for teachers and parents how to scaffold the playing process of 3–4 years old children.

Key words: dramatic play, role-play, pretend play, play development level, toys, junior preschool age

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Introduction

Play is a leading activity in preschool age (Vygotsky, 2004; Elkonin, 1999; Lillard, 2017). Multiple studies revealed that play promotes emotional and social development (Colliver et al., 2021; Howard et al., 2017; Mathieson et al., 2011), executive functions' development (Fleer et al., 2019; Kelly et al., 2011; Veraksa et al., 2022), and speech development (Nicolopoulou et al., 2015; Quinn et al., 2018). Despite that throughout preschool years it is possible to observe the emergence and fading of different types of play (Smirnova, 2014), many researchers are particularly interested in play involving an imaginary situation, or pretend play. Both classical and contemporary research authors agree that this type of play dominates in preschool age (Vygotsky, 2004; Elkonin, 1999; Piaget, 1999; Thompson, Goldstein, 2019; Van Oers, 2013).

J. Piaget gave the following description of play development in preschool age: it advances from sensorimotor play to symbolic play, and then to a rule-based play where the central place belongs to symbolic representations and use of objects in some unusual, nontrivial way. According to J. Piaget, this type of play emerges in typically developing children before 2 years. By 3–4 years it is fully developed, and by 6 gradually fades and gives way to other activities, even though some children continue to play at later age as well (Piaget, 1999). The cultural-historical approach considers dramatic play as the first type of “real” independent child play. It appears in the end of early years or in the beginning of the junior preschool age (3–4 years). G.G. Kravtsov and E.E. Kravtsova (2017) pointed out that even though dramatic play still very much resembled a manipulative activity with objects it already featured all characteristics of full-fledged play such as double-subjectness (a child both directs the course of play and participates in it at the same time) and an imaginary situation (a child's actions with the objects make sense in its logic). Toys and other objects are used as means to play out the plot. 3–4-year-old children also develop image-based play where they associate themselves with someone or something and try to copy this example in their behaviour. In this case, there is no plot nor role-based relationship intrinsic for role-play that would emerge on the next stage at the age of 5–6 years. Role-play integrates image-based and dramatic lines of play and mental development. According to L.S. Vygotsky, role-play possesses three essential features: children create an imaginary situation where they take up roles and act in accordance to them, and they also follow a set of rules corresponding to particular roles. Each of these aspects is important and contributes to the development of higher mental functions (Vygotsky, 2004).

Thus, the age of 3–4 years is the initial stage of pretend play development. In this context, dramatic play with toys is of first importance, and the significance of the latter should not be underestimated.

Play behaviour at the age of 3–4 years

According to G.G. Kravtsov and E.E. Kravtsova (2017), the age of 3–4 years is the most essential for the development of so-called psychological readiness for play. At 3 years, a child develops the ability to generalize her experience, an intel-

lectualized perception, and an awareness of being the subject of her speech. These changes in the functioning of consciousness provide the maturation of the components of psychological readiness for play. The ability to perceive the nominal position of oneself and an adult in play emerges; there are more ways to control and manage oneself while playing; the child's personality becomes more whole and integral. The latter manifests itself in the qualitative changes in the child's speech and an increasing ability to distinguish the real plane and the imaginary situation, and act depending on the context. The key factor and the main condition of the readiness for play is a well-developed imagination. For example, the ability to transfer functions from one object to another (deprived of these functions) is required as well as seeing oneself as an agent of activity. This means, a child is able to manage and control her actions while playing.

Our review of research literature revealed a serious lack of empirical studies of play specifics and their relationship with child development at the age of 3–4 years. However, even these few works confirmed that 3-year-old children are quite advanced when it comes to play. For example, H. Rakoczy et al. (2009) discovered that 3-year-old children understood the difference of contexts in simple games: the same action could be seen as right and wrong depending on the situation.

Another study (Hughes, Donaldson, 1979) assessed children's ability to coordinate their points of view. The examinees were given a task similar to the classical "mountain problem": a boy was supposed to be hidden from two policemen positioned on the playfield in different places. Surprisingly, only very few of the 24 3–4-year-old participants experienced difficulties performing that task. In other words, it was much easier than the "mountain problem". The researchers assumed that the "new" form of the problem was more comprehensible on a common-sense level. Even the 3-year-olds were able to understand the motives and the goals of the characters (to hide and to seek). Children were basically asked to identify themselves with a little boy in a very clear situation. This ability to understand and identify oneself with other person's feelings and intentions is quite opposite to egocentrism natural for this age. Nevertheless, the 3-year-olds demonstrated that it was already developed in them.

T.R. Goldstein and M.D. Lerner (2017) conducted a learning experiment where 97 4-year-old children participated. They confirmed that their participation in 24 role-play sessions significantly decreased the distress level by two emotional control indicators as compared to the group that spent their time in guided play with blocks and reading. It was also revealed that the involvement into role-play was related to a lower level of neutral social behaviour which in all groups correlated with a higher level of positive social behaviour. The authors also assumed that even though it wasn't assessed explicitly, play caused a positive effect not on the emotional control as it was but on the executive functions that form its base.

The role of toys in junior preschool play

Toys can be understood as children's means or tools of symbolic and logic cognition of a complex world where children grow and develop. The majority of empirical studies in this area are focused on gender-based toy preferences (Davis, Hines, 2020; Francis, 2010; Liu et al., 2020) which doesn't really cast much light

on the potential mechanisms of toys' influence on child development, neither helps to understand which particular toy features are the most crucial from the perspective of child play development.

The theoretical analysis (Sukhikh et al., 2023) allowed distinguishing a number of criteria of a high developmental potential of a toy from the cultural-historical perspective. Firstly, it's the possibility of using a toy for the creation of original and diverse imaginary situations. The most important feature in this context is the "openness" of a toy, i.e. the possibility to act differently with it depending on the play idea (Smirnova et al., 2010). This includes new and original ways of operating with the toy that are not insinuated by the obvious qualities of the toy but are determined by the child's personality. Secondly, it's the ability of the toy to stimulate the child to take up a play role that would support the comprehension of the meaning of the character's activity and different systems of relationships intrinsic to this or that activity. In dramatic play, a toy can become a play partner for a child, while in a role-play it helps the child to act towards her play partners (Kravtsov, Kravtsova, 2017). Last but not least, a toy should be able to engage the child into a play on a personal level, and this play should be full of the situations of dramatic emotional experience (*perezhivanie*). E.O. Smirnova's (Smirnova et al., 2016) study revealed that junior pre-schoolers unfamiliar with the cultural meaning of Monster High dolls interacted with them as with regular dolls, or even as baby dolls. The girls preferred family-, school-, and girlfriends-related plots. It confirms that the content of play rather depends on the sociocultural context of the child's life and the relationship he's involved in than on the toy itself.

These criteria are principally applicable for dolls. J. Trawick-Smith et al. (2015) explored toys' influence on 3–4-year-old children's play. Some toys as compared to the others, provided a very high quality of play. In the study framework, 9 types of toys were offered to the participants: Duplo blocks, Rainbow people, measuring cups, sandbox toy set, wooden blocks, wooden railway, "Lincoln logs" house construction kit, Play-Doh and a wooden toolkit "Shape, model and mold", and "Bristle blocks" construction kit. On the first observation day, Duplo blocks, Rainbow people, measuring cups, and sandbox toy set obtained the highest play quality score.

Duplo blocks and Rainbow people supported a higher quality of play behaviour than other toys throughout the entire experimental period. The authors indicated that those play materials didn't dictate any particular theme. Rainbow people were just human figurines without any special features. They could represent people of different genders, or sorted, or used as construction elements. Duplo blocks are even less limited in terms of use. Children used them to create buildings, animals, and people, or even in a role-play (as a telephone, for example). In other words, these toys allow making up a whole variety of play, especially if construction or playing out a plot is involved. Interestingly, Rainbow people that also supported high quality play were one of the least preferred by children. These results are consistent with our data (Gavrilova et al., 2023). In one of the experimental trials, 3–4-year-old children were offered 12 toys and asked to pick one, the most interesting to play with. 129 children took part in the experiment, and 34.6% of them

picked a hospital playset, while 20.5% picked a toy counter desk. The least preferred were an animal family playset (0.8%) and a doll family (3.9%).

Thus, the literature review shows that there are no studies of the dramatic play with toys of younger pre-schoolers, in particular, with those that children themselves rarely choose for the play, but they meet the theoretical criteria of a toy with high developmental potential. Our research was aimed at this gap. The main research question was to assess the level of play development of children 3–4 years old. We also wanted to test hypotheses that (1) the level of play may be associated with individual indicators of child development; (2) there will be a positive trend in the parameters of the assessment of the level of play from the first play session to the fifth.

Methods

The qualitative analysis of children's play detailed below is a part of a larger study aimed at the identification of the specifics of children's play and toy preferences throughout the entire preschool age. The main goal of this analysis was to explore the specifics of play behaviour in 3–4-year-old children and their relationship with the individual development indicators. The way the play sessions were organized also allowed an assessment of the play development dynamics for each participant.

Sample. 11 3–4-year-old children (6 girls and 5 boys) attended the play sessions. The average age was 42 months. All children were individually tested beforehand. The parents of all the participants gave their consent to video recording. The study was approved by the Ethics Board of the Faculty of Psychology of Lomonosov Moscow State University. The final sample consisted of 10 children that attended all 5 play sessions.

Assessment methods. NEPSY-II (Korkman et al., 2007) subtests were applied for the assessment of executive functions. Visual working memory was measured by means of “Memory for Designs” subtest that required remembering the pictures and their location. Verbal working memory was assessed through “Sentence Repetition” subtest, where children were to repeat the sentences that gradually became more complex, both grammatically and lexically. “Statue” subtest assessed physical inhibitory control. Hot self-regulation was measured by means of “Walk-a-Line-Slowly” test (Maccoby et al., 1965). The children were required to walk on the line as slowly as possible, there and back. Meanwhile, they were able to see the toys that could be played with after completing the task. The time of two trials was summed, and an average score was calculated. Cognitive flexibility was assessed through “The Dimensional Change Card Sort” test. In this test, cards should be sorted in accordance with a changing criterion (Zelazo, 2006). The participants' emotional understanding was measured by the adapted Russian version of “Test of Emotion Comprehension” (TEC) (Pons, Harris, 2000; Veraksa et al., 2021). Non-verbal intelligence was assessed by means of the Russian adapted version of J. Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices. The “Completing the figures” technique by O.M. Dyachenko (Dyachenko, 1986) allowed the assessment of imagination. Special questionnaires for the educators and mothers were designed in order to define the attachment style. The most probable style

was identified based on the answers about the specifics of the children’s behaviour at home and in the kindergarten.

Each child attended several sessions for individual diagnostics conducted by experienced testers. All of them were specially trained for this purpose. All the techniques were used in the same order, and each session time didn’t exceed 15 minutes. Not all the children were able to complete all the tests due to their age-related characteristics. Some refused to complete certain tasks. In this case, the testing terminated.

The organization of play sessions. The play sessions took place in one of Moscow kindergartens in April 2023. They were organized individually and in a separate room. The same experimenter met with all the participants. 5 play sessions were conducted with each child, and their duration didn’t exceed 10 minutes. All the sessions were video recorded. At each session, the same selection of toys was offered to the children: a doll family (Figure), and a few wooden blocks and bars that could be used as substitutes or the materials for the organization of play space. The children played seated at a little table. The experimenter offered them the play materials, announced the instructions, and didn’t intervene anymore trying to minimize the contact with the child. This allowed modelling the conditions for a free dramatic play directed by the child. The instruction read: “I will give you these toys. Please, make up a story and show it. If you want, you can also use these blocks for your story”. In 10 minutes, the experimenter announced that the play time was over, and asked the child to conclude the story.



Doll family

Source: photo from the authors’ archive.

The selection of a doll family as play material was based on the previously described criteria of a development-supporting toy.

The analysis of video recordings of play sessions. All video recordings were thoroughly documented. The evaluation took place based on the video recordings and by one of the research team members. Both the *theme and the content* of play were registered. D.B. Elkonin emphasized the difference between the play theme and content. When a child reproduces a certain reality within the same play plot, she can be focused on absolutely different aspects of this reality. According to D.B. Elkonin, the area of reality reflected in play is its theme, while the particular aspects of this area form play content (Elkonin, 1999).

For the purposes of this study we chose and adapted a number of criteria from the technique designed under the supervision of E.O. Smirnova (Smirnova et al., 2018).

Spatial substitution – the creation and the semantic differentiation of the play space. A certain meaning attributed to space and its division into the zones as required by the play plot indicate a high level of play development. This parameter was assessed as follows, and corresponding points were assigned. 0 points – the space wasn't considered while playing; 1 point – functional use of blocks (construction as independent play without any plot line); 2 points – modelling of play space (construction of a house or a treasure cave) where the plot develops, but outside area was in no way defined; 3 points – meaningful division of play space into the key zones with houses and other places and auxiliary zones. Plot-based events take place in different areas (in a thick forest, on a field with flowers, on a bus stop, on the road, etc.).

The elaborateness of a play idea reflects the extent of its detailedness, i.e. how particular the child is in the explanation of her idea. 0 points were assigned if no idea was pronounced out loud nor as a play suggestion, neither as an explanation for the other person; 1 point – the idea was expressed abruptly, in a curtailed fashion (For example, “This is a snake”, “We had an accident”, “I am a princess”); 2 points – the idea was expressed through the planning, and the next step in the story was indicated (“And then she burst in tears”, “They went to have lunch”); 3 points – the idea was reflected in a well-planned sequence of actions (“They went to the forest and got lost”); 4 points – a whole story, a detailed plot was used as a play idea, where the beginning, the middle, and the end could be identified quite clearly.

The stability of the play idea was assessed as follows. 0 points were assigned when the idea was absent; 1 point – in case of consequent alternation of equally meaningful and significant ideas; 2 points – among the multitude of ideas, there was one or few of them the child's activity was mostly focused on; 3 points – the majority of produced ideas were integrated in one play, even though some separate ideas could still exist. They were not related to the general play line but defined some of the actions; 4 points – one idea united all child's play actions.

Following the previous research work (Veraksa et al., 2023), we also defined the criteria for the levels of play actions with a toy, and the elaborateness of play interactions. *The level of play actions with a toy* was evaluated as follows. 0 points were assigned for natural actions (interaction with the toy and its parts out of the plot); 1 point – separate cultural actions not integrated in the plot (giving the toy an injection or putting it to bed); 2 points – a sequence of actions in a typical (daily routine-based) plot; 3 points – a sequence of actions within

an original and elaborate plot. *The elaborateness of play interactions* was assessed under the same scheme. 0 points were assigned if no role-based statements or interactions of the characters took place; 1 point – some role-based statements or interactions took place between the characters, and they were of a common stereotypical nature; 2 points – incidental sequences of role-based interactions of the characters took place; 3 points – role-based statements and interactions between the characters could be observed throughout the entire play time, and their nature and logic were defined by the plot.

Results and discussion

Our observations revealed that in general, 3–4-year-old children indeed, demonstrated some elements of imaginary situation in their dramatic play with toys (Table 1). However, that imaginary situation was not of an integrate plot-based nature, nor the play idea took the form of a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. Even if some non-verbal children's actions (for example, mumbling something while moving the toys) allowed the suggestion that they were developing a play idea, it was important to remember that at that age, children could not formulate neither explain that idea to an observer. In the most cases, the elaborateness of the play idea was reduced to a brief and abrupt statement. This is why, the process of analysis of play sessions was challenging in terms of identification of play theme and content. Play ideas were mostly unstable, and a number of equally vague and not related to each other ideas followed each other within a 10-minute session. In general, play often resembled manipulating with objects. Children just moved, arranged, seated, or even tossed the figurines. Nevertheless, almost in every play episode there were moments when some play actions with a toy could be understood as cultural. Even in that case, those separate cultural actions were not integrated in one story, and they were stereotypically repeated for all family members (everyone was hiding or sliding down a slope, etc.). Role-based interactions of the characters were hardly observed, and even more seldomly – in an elaborate way. Normally, those were separate role-based statements and interactions of brief and stereotypical nature.

All children used the blocks for play. In fact, playing with the blocks often occupied most of their time during the play session, and the participants seemed to be more involved in it than in playing with the doll family. For example, one girl was building a tower. She took two figurines and pretended they were moving the blocks and stacking them. Interestingly, her characters didn't take the blocks in their arms, but between their legs. In other words, the examinee used them as thongs or claws to grip the object. There was no plot in her play except what she described as "they are building a tower". Neither the choice of those particular figurines made any sense for the plot, apart from their equal size and convenience in holding.

Nevertheless, almost in every session, a moment came when the children used the blocks to model their plot-corresponding play space (for example, built a house for the entire family). One boy even pretended the blocks were a river where the family swam. Thus, we can say that in 3–4-year-old children's dramatic play with toys it is possible to register the elements of pretend play, along with

the manipulating with objects. However, this play is not sufficiently elaborate, yet, and the plots don't turn into coherent stories. As the research literature review revealed, at this age, it is the play context that supports children in solving cognitive problems. But in the situations of free play where it is the play that matters and there is no need to solve a problem, and where an adult doesn't intervene, junior pre-schoolers demonstrate quite a low level of play quality.

Table 1

The assessment of play development indicators

Child's data		1st play session						5th play session					
Child's codename	Gender	Play theme and content	Spatial substitution	Elaborateness of the play idea	Stability of the play idea	The level of play actions with a toy	The elaborateness of role-based play interactions	Play theme and content	Spatial substitution	Elaborateness of the play idea	Stability of the play idea	The level of play actions with a toy	The elaborateness of role-based play interactions
1SM	F	Went to work	2	1	1	1	1	The family is sitting and listening to a fairy tale	1	1	1	1	0
2GM	M	Slide down the slope; at home	2	1	1	1	1	A flight to the circus/ a train trip/ using and elevator	2	2	1	2	2
3NL	M	Go for a walk	2	1	1	1	1	A bathroom	2	2	1	1	2
4BV	F	N/A	1	0	0	0	0	N/A	1	0	0	0	0
5BM	M	N/A	0	0	0	0	0	N/A	1	1	0	0	0
6ND	M	Sleep at home	2	1	4	1	0	N/A	2	0	4	1	1
7SG	F	The family swims in the river, everybody drowns	2	2	2	1	1	A fight, a chase	2	2	2	1	1
8IM	F	N/A	1	0	0	0	0	A boy beat the dog and kicked it out	1	3	2	3	3
9KM	F	Parents are at work, grandparents stay with their grandchildren	2	3	1	2	0	Hide-and-seek	2	1	1	1	0
10ZS	M	N/A	1	0	0	0	0	N/A	1	0	0	0	0

Note: N/A – not applicable.

The comparison of the first and the fifth play sessions didn't reveal any common tendency towards positive dynamics in the level of play development. The few minor changes were related to the elaborateness of play idea and the level of play actions, and sometimes, to the elaborateness of role-based statements. In general, the participants tended to comment the play events in more detail during the last sessions. Only in one case, on the seventh minute of the fifth play session, IM suddenly told an emotional story of an abandoned doggie. That story had something of a plot, a sequence of play interactions and play actions. It also contained her comments on the feelings of the characters. Therefore, that play obtained a high evaluation score. Interestingly, the girl who told the story had an avoiding attachment style that is characterized by a hidden fear to be aban-

done, a medium level of emotional understanding, and the highest score for physical inhibitory control and hot self-regulation among the entire group of study participants. During the first play session, she hardly said a word, and only played with the blocks, but eventually, she demonstrated the most noticeable positive dynamics in play level. On another hand, KM demonstrated reverse dynamics: her play level was higher in the first session than in the last one. During the fifth session, she clearly lost her interest in play and was easily distracted. Deriving from these observations, it is valid to assume that even if a child is potentially capable of creation of an elaborate imaginary situation, it is almost impossible to predict if play would take place in the conditions of individual free activity. Moreover, the probability of this taking place is quite low.

The hypothesis about the correlation of individual development indicators and the children’s play level was not tested using statistical methods on this sample. The juxtaposition of the evaluation of play level and the highest and the lowest development indicators revealed no regularities (Tables 1 and 2). This outcome is consistent with the results of the correlation analysis conducted for a larger sample of children of the same age. It didn’t demonstrate any relationship between the development indicators and the toy preferences (Gavrilova et al., 2023). Thus, it can be assumed that the level of pretend play development in 3–4-year-old children does not depend on the level of the individual development indicators.

Table 2

Children’s testing results

Child’s code-name	Gender	Age	Non-verbal intelligence (0–36 points)	Cognitive flexibility (0–24 points)	Visual working memory (0–150 points)	Emotional understanding (0–9 points)	Verbal working memory (0–34 points)	Physical inhibitory control (0–30 points)	Hot self-regulation (mean score, seconds)	Imagination			Attachment style
										Originality (number of inclusions)	Individual flexibility (umber or non-repeating images)	Elaborateness, mean value	
1 SM	F	36	7	13	36	1	6	10	8	–	–	–	Amb.
2 GM	M	42	2	–	–	–	–	–	–	0	8	1.6	Amb.
3 NL	M	46	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	0	10	1.4	Rel.
4 BV	F	38	11	15	51	1	6	19	8	0	10	1.3	Rel.
5 BM	M	37	1	12	34	0	3	1	4.5	0	10	1.3	Amb.
6 ND	M	37	5	18	36	4	14	19	6.5	–	–	–	Avd.
7 SG	F	43	7	18	34	5	10	6	8	0	10	1.7	Avd.
8 IM	F	47	6	18	36	5	18	23	21	0	9	1.4	Avd.
9 KM	F	45	5	18	23	3	0	23	4	0	10	1.4	Avd.
10 ZS	M	44	2	17	29	0	0	16	5	0	6	1.4	Rel.

Note: Amb. – ambivalent; Rel. – reliable; Avd. – avoiding.

Traditionally, play is defined as being voluntary, internally motivated, process-oriented rather than result-based, spontaneous, joyous and pleasant, active involvement with an occasional element of make-believe (Burghardt, 2010; Pellegrini, Smith, 1998; Weisberg, 2015). Free play that takes place without adult intervention and is fully directed by the child is considered as the Golden standard of play. The idea of this type of natural (without adults) play as the foundation for children’s wellbeing is prevailing among play researchers (see, for example, Smirnova, 2014; Burghardt, 2010). However, the results of this study and previous research (Veraksa, 2022; Veresov et al., 2021) provide the grounds for

the conclusion about an empirical confirmation of L.S. Vygotsky's approach. He believed that in play, the development occurs because of interaction with an adult and other children, in the first place (Vygotsky, 2004). Children are only capable of imagining something on the basis of their experience. Therefore, free play, especially in preschool age, cannot take the form of a well-developed activity and, therefore, doesn't possess a strong developmental potential. An adult (an educator, a kindergarten teacher, or an older child) is required to extend the child's social and cultural experience that would form the foundation for the imagination development and enrich play. It could also introduce new forms of play and support its development. The results obtained can form the basis for the practical recommendations for teachers and parents how to scaffold the playing process of children 3–4 years old.

Conclusion

The age of 3–4 years is the initial stage of pretend play development process. The results of this qualitative analysis revealed that the level of free pretend play development in 3–4-year-old children could generally be defined as low, independently of the individual development indicators. The comparison of the first and the fifth play sessions didn't show any tendency towards positive dynamics in the play development level. Thus, the empirical research data allow challenging the established view on play as a "free" activity that knows no boundaries, is natural, and supporting development by default.

The limitations of this study include the small sample and the experimental conditions. Even though the authors tried to make them as similar to natural free play as it was possible, they were still not identical. In particular, the participants were always offered the same toys. In our opinion, a doll family and wooden blocks can be considered gender neutral toys. Nevertheless, numerous observations show that for boys 3–5 years old, play about family is less characteristic than for girls. Also, even though the experimenter didn't intervene in the process of play, she was still present in the same room. A further research in this direction would definitely require observing play in natural conditions, comparing different organizational forms of play (including different formats of adult participation), using a variety of toys, and comparison of the play specifics on different stages of preschool childhood. We assume that such studies can contribute to the understanding of play as a cultural activity involving both children and adults, and often requiring a special organization and adult participation.

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Исследовательская статья

Игра с игрушечной семьей: ключевые характеристики игрового поведения младших дошкольников

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Аннотация. Возраст 3–4-х лет является начальным этапом формирования игры с воображаемой ситуацией. Ведущая роль на этом этапе принадлежит режиссерской игре с игрушками, значение которых для детского развития нельзя недооценивать. Представленный в исследовании качественный анализ детской игры является частью большой

работы, направленной на выявление особенностей детской игры и предпочтений в отношении игрушек на протяжении всего дошкольного возраста. В рамках исследования 10 детям 3–4-х лет в течение пяти игровых занятий было предложено разыграть историю с кукольной семьей. До и после игровых занятий проводилось тестирование детей для оценки уровня развития регуляторных функций, воображения, а также определялся тип привязанности для каждого ребенка с помощью опроса педагогов и матерей. Затем анализировались видеозаписи игровых сессий с целью выявления особенностей игрового поведения детей 3–4-х лет и соотнесения особенностей игры с показателями индивидуального развития. Организация серии игровых встреч позволила оценить динамику в развитии игры для каждого ребенка. Для оценки использовались следующие показатели: тема и содержание игры, пространственное замещение, развернутость и устойчивость игрового замысла, уровень игровых действий с игрушкой и развернутость ролевых взаимодействий. Результаты показали, что уровень развития свободной игры с воображаемой ситуацией для детей 3–4-х лет можно определить в целом как низкий вне зависимости от уровня индивидуальных показателей развития; сравнение первой и пятой игровых встреч не выявило общей тенденции к положительной динамике в уровне развития игры. Эти результаты указывают на важную роль участия взрослых в поддержке и развитии детской игры. Они могут лечь в основу практических рекомендаций педагогам и родителям по организации игрового процесса детей 3–4-х лет.

Ключевые слова: режиссерская игра, сюжетно-ролевая игра, уровень развития игры, игрушки, младший дошкольный возраст

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