

Examining the Effect of Different Types Children's Games on Peer Relationship

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Abstract: The development of young children's peer relationships is mostly interfered with by parents and teachers. Therefore, the independent development of peer relationships in play for young children has become a popular topic. Play, as a basic activity for young children, plays an important role in the development of young children's peer relationships. Based on the American scholar Patton's classification of children's games and the influencing factors of peer interaction, the influence of different types of games on young children's peer relationships is studied. This paper analyzes the specific effects of play around toys, same-gender play, cooperative play, and symbolic play on young children's peer relationships and concludes that the environment, rules, and materials of play all influence young children's peer interaction behaviors in play, thus acting on the quality of peer interaction. The research in this paper can help the collective construction of young children's peer relationships, allowing them to gain problem-solving skills and direct experience of peer interaction during play.

Keywords: children's games, peer relationship, play

1. Introduction

Social interaction among young children has become a concern for parents and teachers alike. As the world's birth rate continues to decline, the base of children is becoming smaller and smaller, resulting in fewer children interacting with their peers. In addition, the modern, single-family home structure greatly limits children's interaction with their peer group. The main way of peer interaction for young children is through play. This study investigates the effects of different types of play on young children's peer relationships, aiming to help young children learn to establish good peer relationships through different types of games in the current social environment.

This study refines generalized play and peer relationships. Firstly, the dependent variable social interaction is operationalized as peer interaction with particular emphasis on the peer. Secondly, the independent variable play is operationalized as parallel play, joint play, and cooperative play. The characteristics of different types of play affect the development of peer relationships by influencing children's emotions, familiarity among peers, and children's criteria for choosing friends.

2. Children's Game

2.1. Concept Statement

Play is an orderly activity that children perform spontaneously and voluntarily in a fixed time and space, following certain rules and accompanied by pleasurable emotions [1]. Early childhood play, on the other hand, is an activity in which children reflect and explore the world around them through physical movement and mental activity using certain knowledge and language and with the help of various objects [2]. Psychology generally agrees that play has distinct joy, humor, physical spontaneity, cognitive spontaneity, and social spontaneity [3]. Children's play. Sage Publications.

The American psychologist Erikson considered play as a function of the self, an attempt to synchronize bodily processes with social ones [4]. The changing context of play renews the awareness of the surroundings and helps the development of social behavior in children.

2.2. Classification

2.2.1. Based on Children's Development

From the perspective of children's social behavior, the American scholar Patton classified play into the following six categories. The first type is incidental behavior refers to the child not playing but randomly finding things around him that interest him or looking around and climbing up and down. Secondly, Spectatorship, which means children observe and watch the play of certain children or groups of children, and are aware of what is happening but do not express their intention to participate in the game. Moreover, in Solitary play, the child plays the game alone, using different toys than the other children around him or her, and is focused on his or her play, regardless of what others are doing. The fourth type is Parallel play refers to the child still playing by himself, but the games he plays are similar to the games played by the children around him, he plays next to his peers, but not together. Furthermore, in Joint play, the child plays together with other children who have similar interests, centered on his interests, in a group. The last type is Cooperative play, children play for collective interest, cooperate, and try to achieve a goal. There is a clear division of labor, cooperation, and a sense of rules, and one or two leaders of the game [5].

2.2.2. Based on Play Activity

Smilansky's four-stage developmental model of play - is functional play, construction play, performance play, and rule play. Functional games refer to simple physical movements or manipulative activities, such as smashing bricks. Construction play means building something with objects, such as using blocks to tower a tall building. Performance games are games in which you play a role, such as dressing up as a doctor or a policeman. Rule games refer to games with commonly accepted rules, such as soccer. This classification has some limitations in that it ignores some important categories of play, especially the playfulness that occurs randomly and language play.

2.3. Qualities of Children's Play

Play is a need of children. Chinese scholar Yan Liu divided children's physiological needs and heart needs into nine needs at three levels based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory [6].

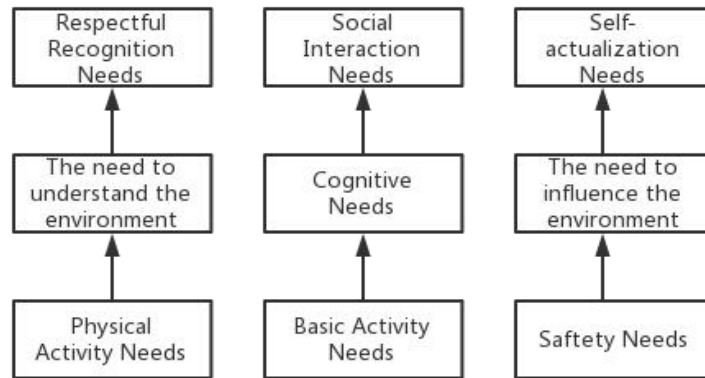


Figure 1: The basic needs of children [7].

As we can see from Figure 1, the main needs that drive children to play are the need for physical activity, the need for awareness, and the need for social interaction, and self-actualization. The peer interaction discussed below is part of the social interaction needs. Play makes the need for peer interaction satisfied, and the two interact with each other to further promote children to build good peer relationships in play.

3. Peer Interaction

3.1. Definition of Peer Interaction

Peer interactions take place between people who are the same age or have reached a similar stage of psychological development. Peer connections are more reciprocal and equitable, as well as more selective and self-determining when compared to parent-child and teacher-student relationships [8]. Peer interactions will become a significant part of children’s interactions as they get older and their cognitive capacities expand. They will also play a special and essential function in preschoolers’ development. The peer interaction of children in the game mainly includes cooperation and competition.

3.2. Types and Characteristics of Peer Interaction

Research method: peer nomination method-judging the degree of acceptance of a particular child among peers, and types of social status in peer interaction(positive nomination-Which child do you like best in your class; negative nomination-Who do you like least in your class).

According to the total score of positive nomination and negative nomination, children’s peer communication types can be divided into four types (see Table 1) [9].

Table 1: Positive and negative nominations of four different types of interactions with young children.

| | | | | |
|---------------------|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| | Popular | Rejected | Ignored | Average |
| Positive Nomination | High | Low | Low | Medium |

Table 1: (continued).

| | | | | |
|---------------------|-----|------|-----|--------|
| Negative Nomination | Low | High | Low | Medium |
|---------------------|-----|------|-----|--------|

4. The Effect of Different Types Children’s Games on Peer Interaction

4.1. The Impact of Toy-based Game on Children’s Peer Interaction

Toys are objects that are used to facilitate game activities and that assist children in completing play activities through hands-on activities [10]. Examples include rocks, twigs, and self-made objects used in play, as well as store-bought objects. Children’s initial play around toys is primarily parallel play, where children focus only on their interaction with the toy. As children grow older, they begin to pay attention to the activities of their peers around them, and the toys become a bridge between their interactions in play. Children in the elementary grades often compete for toys, and conflicts arise over the use and ownership of toys, thus affecting the development of peer relationships. In this process, children’s play roles are divided into two main types: the current toy holder and the initiator of toy replacement or joint play. The current toy holder accepts, rejects, or delays the request for a toy swap based on the child’s current play process and the child’s personality. The current toy holder’s acceptance of a toy exchange gives the requesting initiator the impression of an approachable and friendly interaction and makes the holder the initiator’s primary future play partner. When other children in the same play environment observe the current toy holder’s response, they subconsciously give the current toy holder a positive nomination, giving the holder an active advantage in the development of peer relationships. In addition, the holder’s performance in the toy game will affect the initiator’s behavior in similar situations, i.e., the initiator will imitate the holder’s receptive behavior and form his or her peer relationship network in the game, thus realizing a virtuous cycle of peer interaction in the game.

4.2. The Effects of Games with Children of the Same Gender on Peer Interaction

Same-gender play refers to a game initiated by children of the same sex due to similar preferences. By using the naturalistic observation method, Wang and Lu observed children under free activity conditions without interfering with their free activities. It was found that due to the weak awareness of gender, the influence of gender on peer interaction is not yet great for small children, but from the middle class, the gender factor is playing a role, and it will be more obvious when they reach the older class [11]. It was also observed that boys in the older classes interacted with boys more frequently than they interact with girls. In addition, the games initiated between children of the same gender were more homogeneous, with boys preferring to play chasing, fighting, and other power and speed games, while girls preferred drawing, crafts, and dollhouse games. This shows that children of the same gender initiate play more frequently than children of different genders, which makes it easier for same-gender children to form strong play and even peer relationships.

By examining the types of friendships among students of different genders between the ages of 4-19, Gray and Feldman found that gender mixing rarely occurred among students of other year sizes, except for the youngest children and older students [12]. Therefore, games that unfold with same-gender children are not conducive to the development of interpersonal skills that involve sex appropriately with the opposite sex.

4.3. The Impact of Cooperative Play on Young Children’s Peer Interaction

Kindergarten older children aged 5-6 years old mainly play cooperatively. The main factors influencing children’s peer relationships in cooperative play are the playground and children’s own

emotions and personalities. Research shows that children prefer area activities and outdoor activities. Area activity is a great place for cooperative play to take place. The analysis led to the more adequate time spent in area activities, the greater the depth of children's cooperation and the increased closeness of children, which influences peer relationships. Outdoor play involves some chasing and climbing activities, which develop children's large muscle activities while children will spontaneously play cooperative games to solve the difficulties they encounter in the game, thus enhancing peer relationships. In addition, children's emotions and personalities in cooperative play are the most important factors affecting peer relationships. Due to the differences in cognitive development and learning ability levels of each child in cooperative play, there are often differences in opinion or inability to unify the progress of the game. The emotions of children in the game will affect the relationship between children and other children in cooperative games, and if children's emotional instability affects the smoothness of the whole game, this child will also be rejected by other children, i.e. rejected children, thus affecting their peer relationships with other children.

The attitudes and behaviors of children in cooperative games with their peers are influenced by the children's personalities and also affect the attitudes of other children playing with them [13]. It has been shown that children with lively and cheerful personalities are significantly more likely to be popular than introverted children. Especially in cooperative play, children with lively personalities are more likely to play cooperatively with other children and tend to be more likely to initiate the organization of the game, make the rules of the game, and take the lead in the game. It can be concluded that in cooperative play children can form good and stable cooperative relationships with each other and deepen their closeness to each other, thus forming good peer relationships. In addition, the more children played cooperatively with each other, the more familiar they became with each other and the more intimate they became. Children with close relationships can cooperate at a higher level and a higher level, thus becoming more intimate and having better peer relationships, so good peer relationships, and cooperative play will, to a certain extent, promote each other and complement each other.

4.4. The Influence of Symbolic Play (Role Play) on Young Children's Peer Interaction

Symbolic play in which symbols or substitutes appear, i.e., children use one thing as another, is characterized mainly by imitation and imagination, and role-play is its main manifestation [14]. Role play requires children to mobilize their existing life experiences, and the richness of children's life experiences is positively related to the frequency and quality of their interactions with peers. The richer children's life experience is, the richer the content of the game will be, and the frequency of children's interactions will increase, thus promoting the development of peer relationships. Conversely, some children's speech is vague and confused during role play, and they do not know how to interact with their peers because they are limited by their lack of experience, which prevents them from playing and stagnates the development of peer relationships.

In a related study, Jones & Rosen noted that symbolic play uses its specificity to provide a supportive environment for young children and to promote inter-child problem-solving skills [15]. Symbolic play requires a high level of understanding and negotiation skills from young children. Young children in symbolic play are influenced by egocentric thinking patterns and can be unable to understand the intentions of their peers' play a figure, which will directly affect their peer interactions. Children in symbolic play can understand the intentions of their peers and actively negotiate solutions in the face of problems, thus promoting game development and learning to deal with peer relationships.

5. Suggestion

Young children with good peer interaction skills lay the foundation for future growth. Early childhood educators should provide children with a play environment that is conducive to the development of peer relationships. Social interaction theory emphasizes the creation of an ideal social interaction environment as a way to optimize the interpersonal interaction scenario in real society [16]. Early childhood educators promote the development of children's ability to cooperate and negotiate with peers in play by putting in rich and varied play materials, providing reasonable and safe playgrounds, and setting clear and reasonable play rules. In addition, early childhood educators should correctly understand the subjective status of children in play, let children play with their subjective initiative, cultivate optimistic play emotions, and make children interact more effectively with their peers, to enhance the interaction ability of children and their peers.

At present, there are relatively fewer papers focusing on the combination of the relationship between young children's peer interaction and the type of play. Moreover, there are no specific experiments to prove the relationship between the two. The research level exists only at the theoretical stage. Excluding the subjective influence of parents and teachers in young children's play, the process of independent interaction in the process of play is very precious as far as the children themselves are concerned. By studying the effects of changes in the environment in different games on young children's peer relationships, we can help early childhood educators to provide an effective environment for young children's peer interactions and thus promote the development of young children's peer relationships.

6. Conclusions

Play is the primary way in which young children learn about the world. Peer relationships are an important source of meeting children's social needs. Children gradually develop peer relationships in play through both realistic partnerships through toys or play materials or through role-playing. Children continue to improve their problem-solving skills and develop peer relationships through their understanding of play and existing experiences. The research in this paper concludes that different types of play provide diverse environments for the development of peer relationships and contribute to the development of children's peer relationships. In the future, this study will contribute to the practitioners of early childhood educators understanding the psychological changes in young children's interactions during games, respecting the subjectivity and initiative of young children's peer interactions, and taking effective measures to help the construction of young children's peer relationships.

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