

# Benefits of pretend play for child development



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In what ways might engaging in pretend play in early childhood be beneficial for a child's development? Use evidence from psychological research to support your answer.

Pretend play is often discussed, yet rarely understood. A child can engage in fantastic play since early childhood with the purpose of developing certain skills and abilities (e. g. : cognitive skills, language and literacy abilities, creativity abilities, emotional benefits and social skills) . First of all, a definition is required in order to sustain the explanation of what pretend play is and what it might do for a child's development. Fantasy play is a type of play that shows the ability of a child to adopt the nonliteral use of objects, actions and vocalisations. (Smith, 2009). It is distinctively human and it begins around the second year of life, lasting until the primary school years. (Fein, 1981 cited by Smith, 2009). This play may lead to a variety of types of play, like abstract and social pretend play, sociodramatic play and even to the scenes with imaginary companions. Many theorists have suggested that these types of play may be connected with positive functioning and with children's healthy cognitive, social, and emotional development (Walker & Gopnik, 2013). These benefits could be valuable for a child's development in many ways and they will be discussed and reviewed in this essay, alongside the psychological research, which will be provided to support these ideas.

To support the importance of pretend play the acquirement of cognitive abilities should be taken into consideration. The main concern here is what pretend play may do for a child's development on the mental plan. Cognitive abilities may be connected with pretend play because it is thought to occur simultaneously with the arising of children's symbolic thought (Connolly &

Doyle, 1984; Doyle & Connolly, 1989; Lillard et al., 2011; Piaget, 1962; Whittington & Floyd, 2009 cited by Li, Hestenes & Wang, 2016). The research presented by Thibodeau, Gilpin, Brown and Meyer (2016) may support the idea that a child shows improvements in working memory and attention shifts beyond that of children who were not exposed to an imaginative condition. After the experiment was over, the children who were exposed to the intervention showed high levels of pretence, whereas the other group showed no greater improvement in this area. Also, other researchers, Carlson and colleagues (2014) cited by Thibodeau et al. (2016) and Pierucci and colleagues (2014) cited by Thibodeau et al. (2016) found correlations between FO and better cognitive skills, these experiments exposing the role of fantasy play which stimulates the development of executive functions. Overall, the researches have suggested that fantastical play could be a facilitator of executive functions and cognitive control. The results of these studies express the possibility which states the fact that encouraging fantasy play in children's everyday lives will improve the abilities in the cognitive domain. (Thibodeau et al., 2016).

Another point is that pretend play may be beneficial to a child's healthy and positive development (Lillard et al., 2013) through the involvement of creativity. Studies may confirm a positive relationship among pretend play, creativity and coping strategies (Pearson et al. 2008; Russ et al., 1999 cited by Li et al., 2016). This could be promoted as the ability to produce original content relevant to a particular task (Wallach & Kogan, 1965 cited by Lillard et al. , 2013). Several researchers have addressed the claim that pretending makes children more creative (Ginsburg et al., 2007; Singer, 1973 cited by

Lillard et al., 2013), mainly by observing the connection between naturalistic play and creativity. Unfortunately, the connection between naturalistic play and creativity is not enough evidence for causation, but if causation exists, the connection should be found (Lillard et al., 2013). Another researcher, Johnson (1976) cited by Lillard et al. (2013), found that an amount of social but not solitary fantasy play was related to fluency. This could lead to the statement that the social element, rather than pretending, was in a correlation with creativity. However, Johnson (1978) cited by Lillard et al. (2013) later found no common ground in a similar study, with no relationship between pretend play and alternate uses. These studies detected a possibility of the involvement of creativity in the development of a child through pretend play, but there is not enough research to support this idea.

Furthermore, in the case of literacy and language, different approaches were made to illustrate the outcomes of these abilities and the influence that may occur upon the child in the early childhood. Also, previous studies suggest that pretend play may justify in some way the language development (Mundy et al. 1987 cited by Li et al., 2016) but a different research has observed that the exposure to literacy play materials increases literacy (Neuman & Roskos, 1992; Roskos & Neuman, 1998 cited by Lillard et al., 2013). Therefore, it should be noted that one could influence what children play with, and in return, the play materials could influence their playing abilities, leading to a content outside of pretend play which might be effective. (Lillard et al, 2013). Although it appears to exist a relation between pretend play and language, researchers thought that the correlation is possible due to a symbolic function, an epiphenomenal reason. (Lillard et al,

2013). In other words, both causal account is possible and a reverse direction of effects and there may be a need of more research on this topic. Since the studies about creativity could not present a valid point for the benefits of pretend play, the ones explained above should detect some of the abilities of this type of play.

Moreover, on the topic of abilities that may come from pretend play, another affirmation could be the involvement of emotional benefits. A study presented by Lindsey and Colwell (2013) might establish that sociodramatic play (an evolve type of pretend play, which consists of role playing) predicted in some way children's emotional expressiveness, emotion knowledge, and emotion regulation. The aim of the study was to explain how preschool children's association in pretend play with peers may account for individual differences in ASC skills. In addition to this research, both Piaget (1945/1962) cited by Lindsey and Colwell (2013) and Vygotsky (1933/1978) cited by Lindsey and Colwell (2013) argued that children's participation in pretend play contribute with opportunities to practice their developing perspective-taking abilities, including the ability to identify and understand another person's emotions. Sociodramatic play appears to offer children some developmental advantage when it comes to ASC skills, but in comparison to pretend play it doesn't contribute too much to the benefits. These discoveries are consistent with previous evidence connecting preschool children's frequency of pretend play to children's empathic responding to peers (Niec & Russ, 2002 cited by Lindsey & Colwell, 2013), emotion knowledge (Dunn & Hughes, 2001 cited by Lindsey & Colwell, 2013), and emotion regulation (Galyer & Evans, 2001; Lindsey & Colwell,

2003 cited by Lindsey & Colwell, 2013). These studies showed a better approach about the emotional benefits that pretend play may offer.

Lastly, one unmistakable school of thought might be the association of imagine play in the development of social abilities in early childhood. The examination of Li, et al. (2016) inspected the relationship between various sorts of imaginative play and preschool children' social abilities within the context of the child-care centre outdoor environment. The play time concentrated on two subtypes of pretend play, abstract pretend play and social pretend play , yet the overall social skills score was not taken into consideration with the total pretend play recurrence (frequency). As it were, these sorts of fantasy play introduced a more propelled level of cognitive processing with the fundamental motivation behind including more social collaborations. (Li et al., 2016). The affiliation which may interface cognitive abilities to the improvement of social abilities may build up the likelihood that children who have higher cognitive processing may show higher social abilities in various social interactions (Li et al., 2016). It is likewise a plausibility that social aptitudes are driving higher cognitive processing in children, however more research is required to clear up the matter.

In conclusion, the benefits of pretend play in early childhood were presented with the purpose of a better understanding of imaginative play. Cognitive abilities might be a facilitator of executive functions and cognitive control and, alongside the fact that suggests that pretend play may be beneficial for the healthy and positive development through creativity, the emotional factor intervenes. Emotional benefits made a great contribution to emotion knowledge, but not to emotional expressiveness and emotional regulation.

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Another benefit may be the acquirement of social abilities with the help of pretend play, development in higher cognitive processing and higher social skills in different social interactions. Thus, the benefits of pretend play may be able to offer a better understanding of a child development, but there is a need for further research to clearly state the benefits of this type of play.

## References

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