

# Socio-Dramatic Play as a Vehicle for Early Mathematics and Language Learning

<sup>1</sup>Sulekha Ram & <sup>2</sup>Dr. P.D. Subhash

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Bhavan's Leelavati Munshi College of Education (India)

<sup>2</sup>KG Marg, New Delhi Associate Professor PMD, NCERT, New Delhi (India)

---

## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 16 Dec 2019

### Keywords

Language Learning, Vehicle, Mathematics

### Corresponding Author

Email: subhashpd99[at]gmail.com

---

## ABSTRACT

*Dramatic play is the most predominant form of during early childhood in which children accept and assign roles and act them out in play situations. When two or more children involved in this kind of play it becomes socio-dramatic play. The researchers identified socio-dramatic play themes from natural play settings and concludes that play interventions based these kinds of play themes enhances development of early language and mathematics skills.*

## 1. Introduction

Children engage in many kinds of play in which socio-dramatic play is the most typical form of play during three to five years. When children engage in dramatic play in a group of two or more children it becomes socio-dramatic play. According to Smilansky (1968) the characteristics of socio-dramatic play include: 1) make-believe that involves roles, objects, and situations; 2) persists for at least 10 minutes, 3) language and social interaction. Children represent their immediate environment through their body language, natural oral language, and vivid imagination. During the period children are more skilled to play pretend roles and assigning roles to different persons and toys as real situations (Watson & Fisher, 1977). Socio-dramatic play gives ample chances to develop different skills which regulate their life (Frost, 1992; Landreth & Hohmeyer, 1998).

Importance of socio-dramatic play is stressed by Vygotsky (1978) by pointing out that it promotes development of the general pre-requisites for academic learning like speaking, reading and writing and metalinguistic awareness. Play interventions which include scaffolding based on socio-dramatic play help to improve language, and accelerate cognitive, social and emotional development in children.

Introducing mathematical concepts and vocabulary through play based activities enhance mathematics learning and children can relate these concepts to their daily life. The meaningful play activities during early childhood pave the foundation for abstract rule-based thinking. Children get idea of size shape, position, early numbers, length, breadth, height, weight, order and pattern of numbers which are the basic concepts of mathematical thinking and reasoning.

Vygotsky establishes that cognitive development depends on the conversation between the experts but it is different from culture to culture. Rogoff (2003) argues that that learning tasks of children are rooted in culture. Culture plays a pivotal role in the development of children and also gives unique strengths in children. Gaskins, Height & Lancy (2007) proved that the children belong to tribal and village culture get opportunity to observe adult works and helps them in the works they do.

Children's play, how, what, when and where-all depends on the cultural background in which they belong to (Shirley, 1985). Vygotsky opined that much of learning takes place through social relations of children; their relations with peers, teachers, parents and other important people who are very near to them. According to him children's cultural experiences too play a significant role to structure their intellectual properties.

Early play begins with the characteristics of their culture and follows its value system and ethics for long until it gets modified through increasing interactions with the world (Berk, 1997). She also found that culture decides the environment where child's primary activities and interaction takes place. Quality and quantity of play depends on the cultural beliefs of people who associate with the child. Culture offers different kinds of socio-dramatic play themes with culture specific roles prevalent in the society. Acting out the culture specific role in socio-dramatic play make children understand culture and the socio-cultural roles they are expected play. Frost and Klein (1979) argue that the content of a child's play is influenced by the socio-cultural environment and it is the function of the specific culture to determine the developmental sequences of play.

Keeping in view the importance of socio-dramatic play and influence of immediate socio-cultural environment on the play themes, the researchers conducted a research with the focus on the following objectives.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

- To find out socio-dramatic play themes which helps to develop language skills and early mathematics learning of children at preschool and home in different socio-cultural settings of Kerala and
- To study the influence of socio-cultural environment on socio-dramatic play themes of children.

## 3. Method Used

The researcher conducted a non-experimental research with naturalistic observation to study the socio-dramatic play

themes of children within the age limit of three to five years during preschool indoor, preschool outdoor, home indoor and home outdoor free play situations. At the same time, running records were also done by the researcher to study the influence of socio-cultural environment on socio-dramatic play themes of children.

**4. Tools Used for the Study**

- Running records of play episodes and Video camera to record the play episodes by the researcher.

- Socio–Dramatic Play Inventory (Developed by Smilansky,1968) to study the socio-dramatic play of the children.

**5. Sample**

The sample for the study consists of 80 children within the age limit of three to five years old, 20 children each from Rural, Urban, Coastal and Tribal areas of Kerala.

**6. Analysis and Interpretation of Data**

**Socio-dramatic Play Themes Identified from Different Cultural Settings**

Locale	Themes	Descriptions
Urban area	<b>“Trapping Thieves”</b>	“Trapping thieves” was another theme played by the children belonging to the urban area. Minimum four members are required for the play. Two of them act like a jail. One child acts as a thief and another as a policeman. The child who acts as a policeman chases the thief and if he/she succeeds in trapping the thief inside the jail she/ he will be the winner.
	<b>“ Fox and Hen”</b>	“Fox and hen” in this game some of the children form a cage of hen by standing in a circle. One child plays the role of a fox and another as a hen. Fox chases the hen to catch. The hen tries to escape from the fox by entering the fenced area. Personal and group interactions of children were spontaneous according to the play situation.
	<b>“Preparation of Food”</b>	In this play three children prepared rice using mud. They used mud in the place of raw rice and coconut shell as utensils. First they prepared a fire place with three pieces of bricks and used small dried sticks as firewood. One of them acted like mother and two as children. They were talking like mother and children. In this case two boys were playing in the mud. They had a toy car and toy tipper. One boy acted like a tipper lorry driver and the other one as laborer to fill the mud in the tipper. The driver loaded mud and unloaded it in another place.
	<b>“Loading and Unloading of Mud”</b> <b>“Construction of Road”</b>	Two children were trying to construct a new path for running their (toy) car. They used small sharp stick to dig and coconut shell to take out the mud. Mutual conversation between two regarding the process was also there.
	<b>“Making Stories”</b>	Regarding a toy tiger (relating with a Malayalam movie called ‘Pulimurukan’).
	<b>“In the Pond; On the Bank”</b>	In the urban area, children played “in the pond and on the bank” in which a group of children stand in a circle by holding hands. The circle thus formed is considered as the pond. During the play one child gives instruction to jump front and back by imagining inside the circle as pond and outside as bank. If any child do mistake he will be out from the game and who remains till the end becomes the winner.
Tribal area	<b>“Washing Clothes”</b>	Two children were doing household works. One of them brought water from well gave to other. A child acted like applying soap on the cloths and washing. After washing clothes, it was put for drying. There were dialogues between the two children like mother and daughter.
	<b>“Preparation of Mud Cake”</b>	Three girls were preparing a cake with mud and water. They used mud as rice flour and coconut shell as vessels. The cake was prepared in the shape of a coconut shell.
	<b>“Preparation of Herbal Medicine”</b>	One child was preparing medicine using green leaves and saying that it is a herbal medicine to heal wounds and applying it on the hand of the second child.
Coastal area	<b>“Kozhiyundo”</b>	A group of children were moving in a circle. One child is roaming outside the circle and asking “kozhiyundo” (is there any hen

		inside?). The child who acts like hen tries to break the hand chain and escape. If the child could escape he/she will be a winner.
	<b>"Playing Train"</b>	A group of children moved in a line like train. Each child acts like a bogie. All were moving by making sound of a train.
	<b>"Construction of Road"</b>	Two children were trying to construct a new path for running their (toy) car. They used small sharp stick to dig and coconut shell to take out the mud. Mutual conversation between the two regarding the process was also there.
	<b>"Family"</b>	Two children (one boy & one girl) acted like father (boy) and mother (girl). The father was getting ready for office and the mother was packing tiffin. Father used a tricycle as motorbike and said <i>"going to office"</i> .
	<b>"Preparation of Mud Cake"(Appam)</b>	Three girls were preparing a cake with mud and water. They used mud as rice flour and coconut shell as vessels. The cake was prepared in the shape of a coconut shell.
Rural area	<b>"Playing Train"</b>	A group of two or three children made train by connecting small wooden vehicles. Each child acted like a mechanic. After making the train they sat plastic animals on it and said <i>"going to park for playing"</i> .
	<b>"Preparation of Bonda (a local food)"</b>	Children were playing in a sand pit. Everybody was making sphere using the sand and was saying they are preparing <i>Bonda</i> (which is a local food of Kerala). They were trying to prepare <i>Bonda</i> with maximum size.
	<b>"Making Paper Boats"</b>	Two children prepared boats by using newspaper. After preparing the boat they floated it in rain water by saying that they are floating the boat in a river.
	<b>"Family"</b>	Three children were playing house. In it they prepared rice with mud and vegetable curry with leaves. Girls were preparing food and boys went outside by saying that going for some work to meet their livelihood. The girls were collecting small Jack Fruits and Jack Fruit leaves. Coconut shells were used as vessels. They made spoons with Jack Fruit leaves and coconut sticks.

The above table reveals that natural play activities of children offer a variety of socio-dramatic play activities that are rarely use in our present pre-schools. The children imitate what they see and observe in the immediate environment. They played 'fox and hen', 'in the pond; on the bank', preparing food, telling stories with expression, trapping a thief, construction of road, filling sand in a tipper lorry, riding animals in a train, preparing local food, making spoons with locally available material like Jack Fruit leaves and coconut sticks, etc. Children also played the socio-dramatic themes like 'Kozhiyundo' preparing herbal medicines, caring of baby, and preparing food.

## 7. Discussion and Conclusion

All these themes give ample opportunities for children to understand basic concepts of mathematics like shapes, space, size, big, small, matching, sorting and ordering. Concepts of weight, comparison of quantities, etc. are evolved from different play activities. These kinds of play themes offer many opportunities to children for verbal and non-verbal communications, to create novel statements and actions, make spontaneous dialogues from various situations, develop concentration, imagination power and other components of language skills. Li (2017) support the findings and recommends socio dramatic play for language development of preschool children. Ofra (2002) also suggests that socio-dramatic play gives many opportunities for literacy development. Tarsha (2009) argues that play themes allow children to combine many

elements of language which is the foundation of language acquisition of preschool children.

Mary Frances Hanline (2010) found relationship between different types of play and mathematics abilities.

The study pointed out the importance of free and spontaneous play for the all round development of children. Hence, there is a need to allow children to play and also all the play facilities need to be provided to them. Safe, child friendly and open ended play materials may be provided to the children for developing creativity and imagination among them. Care may be given to provide all the play materials to the children. Teachers' may provide congenial environment and opportunities to children to engage them in such kinds of play that leads to creativity, imagination, language development and social intelligence among the children.

Home outdoor play provides opportunities to children to mingle and play with peer groups that in turn help in the development of language, social skills, early mathematics skills, etc. Parents also can play a pivotal role by providing the facilities that enable them to play different kinds of play like material play, constructive play, physical play, fantasy play, sand play, water play, etc.

Pre-school curriculum should accommodate socio-dramatic play themes from all parts of the country and also

from foreign countries that leads to early understanding of different cultures. It will help them to develop as a good citizen especially a global citizen. These types of play themes should be given an appropriate place in our early childhood curriculum for better understanding of each culture. Hence, it is time to

think of introducing socio dramatic play themes rooted in our culture for facilitating effective learning process in our children. This would contribute immensely to make the learning process child-friendly and meaningful.

## References

- Berk, Laura E. (1997). *Child development*. USA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Frost, Joel., & Barryle, Klein. (1979). *Understanding play and play ground*. USA: Allyn and Bacon
- Goel, Sushil Kumar. (1996). Effect of pre-school education on cognitive development of children. *Primary Teacher*. 21, 21-29. New Delhi: NCERT.
- Groos, K. (1901). *The Play of Man*. New York: Appleton
- Hurlock, Elizabeth B. (1981). *Child development* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Auckland: McGraw Hill International Book Company.
- Hutt Corinne (1990). *Play, Exploration and learning: A natural history of the preschool*. London: Routledge.
- Kaul, Venita., & Romila, Bhatnagar. (1992). *Significance of early childhood education (ECCE): A trainers handbook*. New Delhi: NCERT
- Li Yan-Yan. (2017). Supporting Socio-Dramatic Play in preschools to promote Shanghai development in young children. *DES tech Transactions on Social Science, Education and Human Science*, Retrieved on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019 from ir.ua.edu
- Mary Frances Hanline, Sande Milton., & Pamela C Phelps. (2010). Preschool block play and reading and maths abilities in early elementary school: A longitudinal study of children. *Early Child Development And Care*, 180(8), 1005-1017, Retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019 from jstor.org.
- OfraKorat, Etti Bahar., & Marian Snapir. (2002). Socio dramatic play as opportunity For literacy development: The teacher's role. *The Reading Teacher*, 56(4), 386-393, Retrieved on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2019 from jstor.org
- Piaget, J. (1951). *Plays, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Montessori, Maria. (1959). *The Discovery of the child*. Madras 20: Kalakshetra Publication.
- Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. New York: Norton.
- Smilansky, Sara. (1968). *The effects of socio-dramatic play on disadvantaged preschool children*. USA: John Wiley and Sons. Inc.
- Spencer, H. (1873). *Principles of psychology*. 2 (3), D. Appleton and Company, New York.
- Tarsha Benaye Bluiet. (2009). Socio-dramatic play and the potentials of early language development of preschool children. *The University of Alabama Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Retrieved on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2019 from ir.ua.edu
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). 'What if' and 'As if': Imagination and pretend play in early childhood. *International Journal of Early Childhood*. 18 (1), 22-29. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/10.1080/00140137808839100>
- Worthington, Maulfry, Van Oers, Bert. (2016). Pretend play and the cultural foundations of Mathematics. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24, 51-66. [ERIC Reproduction Service EJ1089872].