

**Module Name:**

**Student Name:**

**Student ID:**

## **Table of Contents**

General Introduction	3
Detailed Introduction	3
Observations	4
Current Study and Existing Literature	7
Developmental Implications	8
Conclusion	9
Reflective Questions	10
References	11
“Appendix A”	12
“Appendix B”	15
“Appendix C”	16
“Appendix D”	17
“Appendix E”	18

## **General Introduction**

One of the most crucial elements that are involved in the process of a child's development is pretend play. It is not only common in the early stage of childhood but can also be seen at the later stages of middle childhood. The concept of imaginative play is a valuable tool with the help of which a child gets to explore the world around them and also helps in their understanding (Goldman, 2020). It is not limited to this but has a noteworthy role to play in the growth of a child's emotional, cognitive and other skills such as social skills. The age which ranges from six to twelve can be regarded as the phase of middle childhood. During this phase, the pretend play of a child is observed to become more complex as the imaginations run free and have more sophistication (Jewll *et al.*, 2019). In this context, the effect of pretend play can be evident and is reflected in the child's growing interests, values and the identities they acquire.

## **Detailed Introduction**

Pretend play has been a concept that has been under much scrutiny in terms of theoretical and empirical studies. The process of how the development of this imaginative play has been the focus of many researchers. Further, the benefits of this form of play and how it helps in the development of a child have been the aim of various studies. For this very purpose there have been many theoretical studies which need to be studied that will further help in the understanding of the pretend play concept.

Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development has been the basis upon which research on cognitive development is done (Erbil, 2020). The theory which has been developed by him is also referred to as the sociocultural theory which is of the understanding that the development of a human is intervened by their social interactions. Therefore Vygotsky's theory is of the understanding that children pick up the values and beliefs from their interactions with other people in society (Huang, 2021). Furthermore, the relationship that is shared by an individual and their social environment has been highlighted to play an important part in their cognitive development.

The "Zone of Proximal Development" in the theory aims to show the difference in the outcome of a given task without assistance and when an adult is there to assist the child (Smolucha & Smolucha, 2021). It has been observed that with the knowledge and assistance of an adult, a child is able to achieve more and additionally learn new skills (Shilalahi, 2019). Moreover, a child is able to acquire a deeper knowledge of the activities and improved their self-capabilities. An empirical study has supported the claims of the theory that children who

demonstrated pretend play and children who did not have a difference in their cognitive skills as well as social skills (Lillard & Taggart, 2019). Youngsters who were more engrossed in imaginative play was seen to be better at these skills than their counterparts. The theory however has been opposed by arguing that the type of play and the attributes of a child and the environment in which they are also have much influence on the outcome.

Theories such as the psychoanalytic theory of play argue that imaginative play allows children to freely express themselves through their emotions and also helps to repel negative thoughts and instead replace them with more positive thoughts and feelings. Sigmund Freud developed the theory and believed that pretend play allowed children to face their fears and apprehensions in an environment which is safe and controlled (Zhang, 2020). For the purpose of legitimising the hypothesis, an empirical study was conducted by Goldstein which revealed that, in addition to the development of cognitive and other social skills, children who engaged in pretend play were able to deal with stress better and were able to calm their anxiety quicker (Thompson & Goldstein, 2019).

Despite there being much debate that other factors are also involved in the process of development of children, theories with supporting empirical studies show that there are many benefits to pretend play and have a significant impact on development.

## **Observations**

For the purpose of the study, four individuals were interviewed which included an Australian Female (1st Participant), a German female (2nd Participant), a British Male (3rd Participant and a Female (4th Participant). The majority of the answers that were given by the participant were similar and all of them agreed that Pretend play was important in their development. According to the answer of participants 1,3 and 4, they all felt that pretend play helped in developing their creativity (Table 1). However, participant 2 was of the opinion that in addition to the improvement in creativity, there were also social benefits that made the person more sociable. From the interview, it was also seen that the average period at which imaginative play stopped was at the age of 12-13. This age marks the end of middle age and as such pretend play was seen to decline at this age. Even though the participants were from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds the experience in a way was similar.

According to the answers that were given by the first participant. Pretend play played a significant role in developing their creativity and imaginative power. Since the play is based on the imagination of the individual it can be said that it did help in improving their creativity (Table 1). The individual also mentioned that they stopped to engage in such plays at the age

of 14 which is pretty much later than what the actual age for pretend play is believed to be. The individual was also of the opinion that the parents and people who give care should promote such plays and give the child the opportunity to think. This helped the individual to gain much knowledge on new things in a playful way (Table 1). The individual was also of the opinion that with the growth of technology children in recent times have become more addicted to gadgets and do not engage in pretend play as much as they should be. The fourth participant has many similarities in terms of answers to the interview questions. The fourth participant however had benefited from pretend play in terms of mental growth. The age was another difference where she stopped pretending to play at the age of 12 (Table 1). Their views on the impact of technology on pretend play was the same.

The second participant who was the oldest among the participants and the third participant shared similar views. The individuals agreed that as a child she engaged in pretend play and added that it was important as it allowed the flow of her imagination and also helped her in improving her social skills (Table 1). They informed that they stopped playing in such a way at the age of 12 and 13 respectively and engaged in other forms of play. Similar to the opinion of the first participant they were also in favour of parents and caretakers to promote pretend play. They were of the opinion that restricting the imagination of the children would hinder their creative growth (Table 1). When asked about how the impact of technology they were of a completely different view and argued that technology further improves the imaginative power of the children.

**Table 1**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>“1st Participant”</b>	<b>“2nd Participant”</b>	<b>“3rd Participant”</b>	<b>“4th Participant”</b>
<b>Age</b>	24	32	28	25
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Male	Female
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Australian	German	British	British
<b>Questions</b>				
<b>1. Did you as a child engage in pretend play</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

<b>2. In your opinion how important is pretend play and why?</b>	I feel that pretend play is important because it helped in improving my creativity and develop cognitive skills. It aslo helped me to cope with difficult situations	Pretend play allows the free flow of imagination and I feel that it has helped to improve my social skills as well as cognitive skills. It made me resilient while coping with tough situations	The imaginations and visuals that I got from imaginative play gave me new perspectives as a child and that is why I feel that it is important. It made me less anxious	It is crucial for the mental growth and having the ability to create scenarios was fun and made me happy and helped to improve my cognitive skills. It gave me positive thoughts.
<b>3. At what age did you notice that you were not involved with pretend play anymore</b>	Around 14 years of age	12 years of age	13 years of age	12 years of age
<b>4. In your opinion is it right for parents or caretakers to promote pretend play</b>	Yes, the involvement not only made the play fun but the with their help and knowledge I was able to learn about new things. The support that they provided enhanced my	Yes, they should promote the the free flow of thought of the children. I feel that restricting the thoughts would limit the creativity of the child	Yes it should be promoted, there are many thing that can be learnt in a playful manner. Additionally the appreciation and the involvement of the parents makes positive impact on the	Yes Pretend play should be promoted as it will help the growth of the children and help in building better social skills. Their skills and knowledge helped me to get

	understanding of the world and other tasks		children	better results
<b>5. Do you feel that technology and screen time have made children engage less in pretend play?</b>	Yes, the children have become addicted to their phone screen and I feel that they do not engage in such plays any more	No, technology has given children the ability to think more and have increased their imaginative power. In my opinion the accessibility to the internet at a very young age has been the main reason behind it	No, Technology has made the children more creative and given them knowledge on many things. This helps in making them smarter and even more social	Yes, the increased screen time has impacted pretend play among children. The lack of pretend play has made children more socially isolated and awkward.

**Table No. 1: Questions and the responses of the participants**

(Source: Created by the learner)

## **Current Study and Existing Literature**

The existing literature that was discussed in the prior paragraphs of the report have many similarities to the current study which was made on four participants. The study which was made with the help of an interview supported the claims that were made by the existing theories. Vygotsky's theory stated that social interactions intervened in the development of children. In this context, the answers that were given by all the participants reflect that the involvement of parents and caretakers made them feel appreciated and also help them gain knowledge from the elders. The theory also stated that pretend play helps with social skills. Even though only the 2nd participant mentioned that their social skills were improved from pretend-to-play it still serves as supporting evidence.

The theory of ZPD, the theory mentioned that children are able to achieve more with the help of adults. In this context, Participant 1 and Participant 4 stated that the intervention

and the assistance of their parent help them to better understand and perceive the world. Participant 4 added that with the knowledge of the adults she was able to improve the outcomes of her actions. The deeper understanding and the increase in knowledge which were revealed in the current study supports the existing literature. The existing literature also makes a point which states that pretend play helped in improving cognitive skills. Similarly, in the current study Participants, 1,2 and 4 claimed that engaging in plays such as pretend play gave them the ability to reason and remember and developed their overall cognitive skills. The psychoanalytic theory is also supported by the current study as all the participants emphasised the free flow of imagination. All the participants pointed out that engaging in pretend play help them to deal with difficult situations. Participant 4 also mentioned that pretend play gave her positive thoughts which is the main emphasis of the psychoanalytic theory.

### **Developmental Implications**

From the answers of all the participants, it can be observed that there is an increasing trend in technology. The plays are based on the characters that children see on the internet which helps them create more detailed scenarios and create more themes. The participants were however of opposing views on the impact of technology. While two participants believed that technology helped them generate more creative themes for the purpose of pretend play the other two participants were of the opinion that it restricted them from engaging in pretend play. The existing theories do not cover the technological aspects which influence the play. In terms of other developmental implications, the promotion of pretend play allows children to have better cognitive and social skills. It is not however limited to this but has lifelong implications, where the social skills that are developed through pretend play helps in the growth of the individual's career ensuring success. The individuals are able to better manage their emotions and cope with situations that are difficult and cause stress. Creativity is developed which helps in problem-solving and generating innovative ideas to effectively and efficiently solve problems.



## **Conclusion**

The following report has provided an understanding of the concept of pretend play. The report has explored the theories that are relevant to pretend to play such as Vygotsky's theory which stated that pretend play helps in the maturation of cognitive as well as social skills. Empirical studies support the theory and additionally, the study based on the interview also assists in supporting the claims. Other theories such as the ZDP and psychoanalytic theory have also been discussed and have been supported by empirical studies as well. The interview that was conducted took four samples from different backgrounds. Despite the differences in ethnicity, the answers of the participants were similar at many levels. The conclusion of the interview revealed that pretend play helps in the overall development of the individual and has lifelong implications. The report has made efforts to compare and contrast the current study with the existing literature where it was observed that there were many similarities in them.

## **Reflective Questions**

- a. With the help of this investigative study, I was trying to determine the effectiveness and the benefits of pretend play and its role in the development of the child. The reason for the study was the lack of information on the impact of pretend play and its significance in the development of children.
- b. The attempt that I made in analysing the impact of imaginative play was successful. The help of theories on imaginative play and supporting its with interviews helped to solidify the benefits of pretend play in the development of cognitive skills.
- c. The most notable aspect of the report is that it provides empirical data that are not in support of the pretend play benefits and reconciles them with data that is in favour of the topic. This has been achieved through the use of compare and contrast methods and providing data through the conduction of the interview.
- d. The research could have provided better results had the research allowed more samples to be interviewed. With a better understanding and insights, the current study could have made this investigative study more credible and effective.
- e. At the time of conducting the interview, I reminisce about my own experiences as a child. The skill that I was able to learn was the skills of communication and the skills of active listening. I was also able to develop my multi-tasking abilities as I had to take notes as well as hear the responses of the participants as well. This has given me the confidence to take up more research topics where I will be able to interview a larger sample with ease.

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## “Appendix A”

### Participants data sheet from the interview

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>“1st Participant”</b>	<b>“2nd Participant”</b>	<b>“3rd Participant”</b>	<b>“4th Participant”</b>
<b>Age</b>	24	32	28	25
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Female	Male	Female
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Australian	German	British	British
<b>Questions</b>				
<b>1. Did you as a child engage in pretend play</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>2. In your opinion how important is pretend play and why?</b>	I feel that pretend play is important because it helped in improving my creativity and develop cognitive skills. It aslo helped me to cope with difficult situations	Prentend play allows the free flow of imagination and I feel that it has helped to improve my social skills as well as cognitive skills. It made me resilient while coping with tough situations	The imaginations and visuals that I got from imaginative play gave me new perspectives as a child and that is why I feel that it is important. It made me less anxious	It is crucial for the mental growth and having the ability to create scenarios was fun and made me happy and helped to improve my cognitive skills. It gave me positive thoughts.
<b>3. At what age did you notice that you were not involved</b>	Around 14 years of age	12 years of age	13 years of age	12 years of age

<b>with pretend play anymore</b>				
<b>4. In your opinion is it right for parents or caretakers to promote pretend play</b>	Yes, the involvement not only made the play fun but the with their help and knowledge I was able to learn about new things. The support that they provided enhanced my understanding of the world and other tasks	Yes, they should promote the the free flow of thought of the children. I feel that restricting the thoughts would limit the creativity of the child	Yes it should be promoted, there are many thing that can be learnt in a playful manner. Additionally the appreciation and the involvement of the parents makes positive impact on the children	Yes Pretend play should be promoted as it will help the growth of the children and help in building better social skills. Their skills and knowledge helped me to get better results
<b>5. Do you feel that technology and screen time have made children engage less in pretend play?</b>	Yes, the children have become addicted to their phone screen and I feel that they do not engage in such plays any more	No, technology has given children the ability to think more and have increased their imaginative power. In my opinion the accessibility to the internet at a very young age has been the main reason behind it	No, Technology has made the children more creative and given them knowledge on many things. This helps in making them smarter and even more social	Yes, the increased screen time has impacted pretend play among children. The lack of pretend play has made children more socially isolated and awkward.



# “Appendix B”

## INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Pretend Play in Middle Childhood

Participant Number: 1

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. We are currently undertaking an Investigative Study as part of the subject, Developmental Psychology, at the School of Psychology, Western Sydney University

If you agree to participate, I will ask a few questions about Pretend Play in your middle childhood. I may need to ask you for some more details or an explanation of some of your answers.

Can I read you a statement about your participation?

If the participant says ‘yes’ to the above question, please read the following”

I understand that I am being interviewed about pretend play in middle childhood. I understand that my responses will be used in an assignment for the subject Developmental Psychology at Western Sydney University. I understand that my identity is confidential and that no identifying information will be used in the assignment. I also understand that my responses are anonymous

Do you consent to participate in an interview?

Participant response (circle the response)

YES

NO→ Thank the participant & stop the interview

Student Researcher Name\_\_\_\_\_

I declare I read the above statement to the participant and have correctly indicated their response above

Student Researcher Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

# “Appendix C”

## INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

### Pretend Play in Middle Childhood

Participant Number: 2

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. We are currently undertaking an Investigative Study as part of the subject, Developmental Psychology, at the School of Psychology, Western Sydney University

If you agree to participate, I will ask a few questions about Pretend Play in your middle childhood. I may need to ask you for some more details or an explanation of some of your answers.

Can I read you a statement about your participation?

If the participant says 'yes' to the above question, please read the following"

I understand that I am being interviewed about pretend play in middle childhood. I understand that my responses will be used in an assignment for the subject Developmental Psychology at Western Sydney University. I understand that my identity is confidential and that no identifying information will be used in the assignment. I also understand that my responses are anonymous

Do you consent to participate in an interview?

Participant response (circle the response)

YES

NO→ Thank the participant & stop the interview

Student Researcher Name\_\_\_\_\_

I declare I read the above statement to the participant and have correctly indicated their response above

Student Researcher Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_



# “Appendix D”

## INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

### Pretend Play in Middle Childhood

Participant Number: 3

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. We are currently undertaking an Investigative Study as part of the subject, Developmental Psychology, at the School of Psychology, Western Sydney University

If you agree to participate, I will ask a few questions about Pretend Play in your middle childhood. I may need to ask you for some more details or an explanation of some of your answers.

Can I read you a statement about your participation?

If the participant says ‘yes’ to the above question, please read the following”

I understand that I am being interviewed about pretend play in middle childhood. I understand that my responses will be used in an assignment for the subject Developmental Psychology at Western Sydney University. I understand that my identity is confidential and that no identifying information will be used in the assignment. I also understand that my responses are anonymous

Do you consent to participate in an interview?

Participant response (circle the response) YES

NO→ Thank the participant & stop the interview

Student Researcher Name\_\_\_\_\_

I declare I read the above statement to the participant and have correctly indicated their response above

Student Researcher Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_

# “Appendix E”

## INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Pretend Play in Middle Childhood

Participant Number: 4

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. We are currently undertaking an Investigative Study as part of the subject, Developmental Psychology, at the School of Psychology, Western Sydney University

If you agree to participate, I will ask a few questions about Pretend Play in your middle childhood. I may need to ask you for some more details or an explanation of some of your answers.

Can I read you a statement about your participation?

If the participant says 'yes' to the above question, please read the following"

I understand that I am being interviewed about pretend play in middle childhood. I understand that my responses will be used in an assignment for the subject Developmental Psychology at Western Sydney University. I understand that my identity is confidential and that no identifying information will be used in the assignment. I also understand that my responses are anonymous

Do you consent to participate in an interview?

Participant response (circle the response)

YES

NO→ Thank the participant & stop the interview

Student Researcher Name\_\_\_\_\_

I declare I read the above statement to the participant and have correctly indicated their response above

Student Researcher Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_