

Developmental and Cognitive Differences in the Complexity of Children's Play Progression Through PCIT Treatment

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The sequence of play development coincides with Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Valentino, Cicchetti, Toth, & Rogosch, 2006). Pretend play is a hallmark of pre-operational thinking, emerging at approximately 24 months, increasing until the age of 4 years, and declining as children progress towards concrete operations (Fein, 1981). Previous research at this clinic found differences in the style of children's play according to their age and cognitive ability (Dao-Tran et al., 2009). Highly educated mothers have been found to not only spend more time interacting with children than less educated mothers across types of activities, but also to alter the composition of that time to suit children's developmental needs more than their less educated counterparts (Kalil, Ryan, & Corey, 2009). Research also has found that maternal involvement and positive parenting style are related to play development, social and cognitive development (Fiese, 1990).

The purpose of this study is to examine whether children's cognitive abilities or their mothers' possible cognitive abilities have the greater effect on changes in children's play from pre- to post-treatment in PCIT. The participants consisted of 52 biological mothers and their clinic-referred children: 23 children are low cognitive level and 29 are in the average range, based on their PPVT-III standard scores and/or K-BIT composite scores. Mother-child interactions were coded using the Children's Play coding system (CP). The CP is based on the hypothesized sequence of development of play (Belsky & Most, 1981) and an empirically-supported play scale (Damast, Tamis-LeMonda, & Bornstein, 1996). Results showed that when mothers had more education, the amount of time the child spent in higher stages of imaginative play increased from pre- to post-treatment compared to children of mothers who had less than a high school degree.

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