

The Effects of Teacher's Restriction of Children's Free Play on Children's Pretend Play

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of restricting children's free play on children's levels of pretend play. The level of play restriction was examined using the following: How many children can play in the same area of interest, freedom of using toys, the space available for play, and time limitation. The participants for this study were selected through two screening steps. First, a questionnaire concerning the extent of free-play restriction was sent out to 90 teachers in Korea. Of these teachers, two teachers with a high degree of limitation and two teachers with a low degree of limitation were chosen. Second, the 60 children from the classrooms of the 4 chosen teachers were observed in order to measure their levels of pretend play. The results of this study found children who were under the care of the teachers with a low degree of limitation engaged in pretend play more frequently, demonstrated a higher degree of make-believe actions and subjects, and played in more diverse areas of interest than the children under the care of the more limiting teachers. This study emphasizes the importance of providing children with an environment where they can play freely.

Keywords: pretend play, restricting children's play by teachers, free play, make-believe play

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Introduction

Children understand the world through play, which is the most natural activity to them. It is considered an important means of education and play-centered education has become the core of early childhood education (Bretherton, 1984; Ohm, 2009). Make-believe play is the representative form of play in early childhood, specifically the act of pretending. The definitions of ‘pretend play’ differ depending on the scholar, however they all emphasize converting objects, roles, or actions into symbols of make-believe and reproducing them. Starting at approximately 2 years old, children start to understand and use these symbols. Among all the forms of play, scholars are particularly interested in pretend-play, because children use abilities such as understanding states of mind while engaging in pretend-play to develop cognitive representation and socio-emotional abilities (Kim, 2002; Lillard, 1993; Ohm & Oh, 1998; Piaget, 1962).

Until now, most studies on make-believe play have focused on how pretend play is linked to elements of cognitive development, such as imagination, intelligence, problem solving abilities, inference, and the concept of conservation. Additionally, it is connected to elements of socio-emotional development, such as the theory of mind, social abilities, or self-regulation, and to elements of language development, such as literacy or story making (Lillard et al., 2013; Richards & Sanderson, 1999; Russ & Gossman-McKee, 1990; Tamis-LeMonda & Bornstein, 1994). The literature consistently reports close relationships between children’s engagement in high-level make-believe play and their cognitive, socio-emotional, and language development.

There are multiple studies about the close link between child development and make-believe play, as well as the effects of pretend play-based interventions (Moore, Russ, 2008; Ohm & Oh, 1998) and about the factors that influence pretend play (Field, Roopnarine, & Segal, 1984; Koh, 2012; Lee, 1984; Lee & Lee, 2002; Ohm, 1991; Shin & Park, 1996; Shin, 1995; Yoo, 2003). Although the focuses of these studies are different, researchers are all interested in improving the quality of make-believe play and discovering influencing factors such as diverse peers, toys, play space and play time.

Make-believe play is linked with peers. McLoyd (1983) found that children start by engaging in pretend play by themselves and gradually transition into taking complementary

roles with peers during organized pretend play. In order to have a structured, complex pretend-play, diverse interactions with peers are necessary. In studies that focus on the relationship between pretend play and peer relations, children who interact more with peers engage in make-believe play more often and at a higher level than children who do not interact with peers (Field et al., 1984; Shin, 1995, 1997). Therefore, it is important to encourage children to interact with their peers so that they may expand their play horizons together.

Toys are an important factor that influences children's pretend play. Toys contain a variety of mediums that are included in children's play, and they have a decisive role in starting a playing session, upkeeping it, and evolving it. Since a child's ability to symbolize is not yet sufficiently developed and the essence of make-believe play is making an object take on a different meaning (Shin & Park, 1996), toys that children play with have a huge impact on the theme of play, the duration of play, and the patterns of children's interactions during play.

Most studies have examined how children's play varies according to the characteristics of their toys and have discussed what toys should be provided for children (Fein & Robertson, 1975; McGhee, Ethridge, & Benz, 1984; Ohm, 1991; Shin & Park, 1996; Trawick-Smith, 1990). However, it is important to study not only 'what should children be provided with', but also 'how to encourage them to use those toys'. Although children are given the same toys, their play can be greatly varied depending on whether children are allowed to use these toys freely or in a controlled method. However, there is a lack of research on the effects children's free use of toys has on the quality and quantity of pretend or make-believe play.

Another factor influencing children's play is the spatial environment and the time they are given for play. Regarding the space where play happens, Kim, Park, Kim, Kim, and Park (2017) emphasized the importance of a space where the child has an initiative to utilize it for play. When children are given freedom to play in a spacious and free environment, the level of make-believe play is improved. Moreover, researchers agree on the importance of an allocation of sufficient time for play (Cristie, Johnsen, & Peckover, 1988; Tegano & Burdette, 1991). Time is especially essential for pretend play to take place, children need time to replace roles, situations, or objects with other children, and to intersubjectively develop play rules. Developing these agreed play roles requires intricacy and sufficient time. In essence, with plenty of space and time provided, children can initiate, engage, and be immersed in a

higher-level of pretend play.

Therefore, it is critical for teachers to help children establish make-believe play during free play, and to support interaction among peers and free use of toys while providing plenty of space and time. The freedom to allow the children to shape their free play based on their interests and desires should be at the foundation of all free play, since their learning is most optimal when they are free to interact with peers and toys as they see fit (Kim, 2012).

The current method of establishing free-choice activity in Korea largely depends on the set of rules established by the teacher, which is based on what the teachers believe to be the optimal teaching environment. Most teachers have explicit or implicit norms about how to run free play time. Teachers usually make these a custom set of class rules to provide an opportunity for children to play effectively. Unfortunately, these class rules restrict children's free play. Kim (2017) and Won et al. (2013) have reported on class rules about the number of interest areas that children should play for the day, about the number of children that can be in the same interest area, and of restricting children from mixing toys from different interest areas while playing. These rules exist despite the lack of mention in any national curriculum documents. These restrictions imposed by teachers conflict with the strategies of supporting high-quality pretend play. Forcing children to plan in advance to play in 3-4 interest areas interferes with children's opportunity to become immersed in their play. Restricting the number of children that can be in the same interest area at the same time impedes the children's opportunity to interact with a variety of peers. Lastly, restricting the use of toys for specified purposes only limits the children's right to use the toys in a variety of ways for pretend play.

Although various studies (Kim, 2012; Lee & Won, 2016; Yang & Na, 2005) have also shown the negative effects of these conventional rules, teachers have still considered them important and demanded children to follow them. In summary, despite the lack of concrete guidelines in the National Curriculum and theoretical basis, teachers still lay out conventions and rules for children to follow that limit their opportunities to interact with diverse peers, to imagine freely with toys of their choice, or to engage in pretend play in a free space with adequate time.

Imposing implicit or explicit rules on children's free-choice activities is an important factor that warrants more attention by researchers, yet there are no studies on the effects of these

conventional rules on the quantity and quality of children's pretend play. Until now, research on these imposed rules mainly focuses on the effects that limiting the number of children in the same area of interest has on children's play (Kim, 2012; Lee & Won, 2016; Yang & Na, 2005) or the response of the children when these rules are eliminated (Lim, Oh, & Choi, 2008; Kim, 2017; Kwak & Ahn, 2010).

The present study focuses on whether any differences arise in the levels of children's pretend play depending on different levels of teacher-imposed restrictions. The research questions are as follows:

1. How do the restrictions on free-choice activities imposed by teachers influence the frequency of pretend play?
2. How do the restrictions on free-choice activities imposed by teachers influence the quality of pretend play?

Methods

Participants

The final participants, which were selected in two steps, were four teachers and sixty 3-year-old children under their care. Initially, 90 kindergarten teachers of 3-year-old children in the Seoul and Gyeonggi province in Korea were asked to rate the extent to which they limit children's free-play activities on a provided questionnaire. Based on their responses, two teachers with a high degree of limitation and two teachers with a low degree of limitation were chosen. There were 75 children in total under the care of the 4 teachers. However, according to studies that have shown differences in the frequency of pretend play based on the sex of the children (Lee, 1984; Park, 1993), 15 children in each class were chosen randomly in order to match the ratio of boys and girls. In addition, 3-year-old children were selected based on the study by Trawick-Smith (1990) stating the quality of pretend play gradually developed at this age. The details of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic characteristics of participants*

Teacher	Class	Mean permissiveness (SD)	Number of children	Mean children's age in months (SD)
Permissive teachers that do not impose rules	A	3.24 (.61)	8 boys/ 7 girls	48.3(1.7)
	B	3.79 (.36)	7 boys/ 8 girls	52.4(3.2)
Restrictive teachers that impose rules	C	1.33 (.44)	8 boys/ 7 girls	51.0(3.2)
	D	1.48 (.50)	7 boys/ 8 girls	52.9(3.7)
Total	4		60	51.1(3.5)

As presented in Table 1, the two permissive teachers' mean permissiveness was 3.24 and 3.79, respectively and the two restrictive teachers' mean permissiveness was 1.33 and 1.48, respectively. The children participants were 30 boys (50%) and 30 girls (50%), with the mean age in months being 48.3 months (SD = 1.7) for class A, 52.4 months (SD = 3.2) for class B, 51.0 months (SD = 3.2) for class C, and 52.9 months (SD = 3.7) for class D, totaling a mean age of 51.1 months (SD = 3.5).

Measures

In order to find whether the teacher-imposed rules have any influence on the children's pretend play, a questionnaire about how the teachers run free play time was used and the quantity and quality of children's pretend play was observed.

A. Questionnaire on the teacher's class rules during free play time

A questionnaire was selected as the method to determine two groups of teachers that differ in the level of restricting children's free play. The questionnaire consisted of six items based on the studies of Park (2008) and Won et al. (2013) that examined the teachers' restrictions of children's play during free play time. To refine the questionnaire, an expert on children's play, three students enrolled in the Master's program, and five kindergarten teachers reviewed the questionnaire in a pilot study.

Restrictions on children's free play through class rules were examined in six aspects: the number of children that can play in one interest area, the use of toys only for specified purposes, preventing play by mixing toys from different interest areas, moving toys in one

interest area to another, moving from one interest area to another without finishing the play, and the time given to children for free play. The teachers were asked to rate the degree of their restrictions on a 4-point scale, 1 being the most restrictive and 4 being the least restrictive. The internal reliability consistency measured by Cronbach's alphas for this sample was .94.

Among the 90 teachers ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .65$), the two most restrictive teachers and the two least restrictive teachers were selected. The means of the two most restrictive teachers were 1.33 ($SD = .44$) and 1.48 ($SD = .50$) respectively and the means of the least most restrictive teachers 3.24 ($SD = .61$) and 3.79 ($SD = .36$) respectively.

B. Children's pretend play

1) Frequency of pretend play

While each child was observed 60 times, he or she was checked for their engagement in pretend play or not. The detailed observation plan is described in the procedure.

2) Quality of pretend play

The category of elements of pretending found in Lee (1984) was used to observe what elements of pretending the children use in their play. The categories of elements representing the quality of pretend play, along with definitions and specific examples are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Elements of pretending*

Element of pretending	Explanation	Example
Pretending objects	Object similar to real object	Pretending with an object similar to the real object Using a toy phone to pretend to call
	Object different to real object	Pretending with an object dissimilar to the real object Using a block as a phone to pretend to call
	Not using object	Pretending without any object Putting the hand on ear without any object and pretending to call
Pretending actions	Self	Using their own body to pretend Pretending to call by themselves
	An object similar to human	Using an object similar to human to pretend pretending that the doll is making a call
	Object dissimilar to human	Using an object dissimilar to human to pretend Pretending that a stick is making a call

Pretending roles	Family role	Pretending a role related to family	Father, mother, baby, etc.
	Functional role	Pretending a role that has a specific function	Eating, driving, swimming, fighting, etc.
	Professional role	Pretending a role related to professional jobs	Doctor, nurse, police officer, teacher, firefighter, etc.
	Fantastic role	Pretending a role unrelated to real life	TV program hero, monster, witch, space traveler, etc.
Pretending language	Explanation-related expressions	Explaining the context of play, the actions, or the toys through words as if a narrator	“This is food”, “I am eating right now.”
	Role-related expressions	Expressing in the right voice for the roles	Speaking like a mother “Come back home soon, my baby!”
	Object-related expressions	Using onomatopoeia related to the object	“Vroom vroom” while holding a car

Second, the topic levels of pretend play suggested in the study of Lee, Lee, and Shin (2002) which was based on the work of Westby (2000) were used to observe quality of children’s pretend play levels. The criteria for the topic levels of pretend play are detailed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Topic levels of pretend play*

Level	Topic	Example
Symbolic Level 1	Actions that are familiar to the child, that they participate in on a daily basis	Washing, eating, sleeping, calling, etc.
Symbolic Level 2	Re-enacting actions familiar to the child that are made by other people	Cooking, reading books or newspapers, cleaning, driving, taking photos, etc.
Symbolic Level 3	Infrequent personal experiences or experiences that were especially enjoyed or traumatic	Shopping, playing a nurse or a doctor caring for a sick child, setting a food store, driving a bus, birthday parties, etc.
Symbolic Level 4	Re-enacting and modifying an action based on a personal experience	Re-enacting taking a trip or putting gasoline in a car by reflecting personal experience.
Symbolic Level 5	Re-enacting roles or actions that the child cannot frequently observe or directly participate in	Police officer, firefighter, war games, robot, construction worker, etc.
Symbolic Level 6	Integrating high-level imaginary scripts/ schemas that the child has never observed or participated in with the child’s daily experiences	Constructing a spaceship and traveling the cosmos based on the child’s travel experience, cooking fantastic food based on the child’s cooking experience, etc.

Research procedure

During a pilot study, the validity of the questionnaire was tested in order to determine the time required for completion and the phrasing of the questions with five kindergarten teachers and three Master's degree students with teaching experience. The observation plan was checked, tested, and refined by observing ten 3-year-old children who were not included in the final study. The inter-observer reliabilities were established.

The final study was conducted for 3 weeks in 4 classes of 3-year-old children from Seoul and the Gyeonggi province in Korea. Two of the four classes were with permissive teachers who did not impose rules during free play and two of the classes were with restrictive teachers who did impose rules during free play. Each pairing of classes consisted of 30 children, 15 boys and 15 girls. Each class was observed during free play.

The children's pretend play was observed from 10:30AM until 11:30AM during which children actively participated in free play. At the start of each observation day, the observer randomly selected the first child to observe in order to limit the effect of the observation order. Each observation took 30 seconds, which was split evenly for observation, recording, and for selecting the next child to observe. The observations continued until each child was observed sixty times, totaling to 30 minutes of observation. Frequency of pretend play was determined by noting whether the observed child was engaging in pretend play. If the observed child was engaging in pretend play, the quality of their pretend play and the topic level of their play was evaluated. In the instance that the child being observed was not engaging in pretend play, it was recorded as 'non-pretend play'.

Statistical analysis was utilized to analyze data. Simple statistics, mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to analyze the frequency of pretend play among young children. The differences in quantity and quality of children's pretend play in two groups (permissive vs. restrictive classes) were analyzed using a series of t-tests.

Results

Quantity of pretend play

The frequency of children's pretend play from each group (permissive vs. restrictive

classes) was examined. In total, pretend play occurred 1324 times: 891 times in the permissive class and 433 times in the restrictive class. As shown in Table 4, pretend play occurred more often among the children in permissive classes ($M=29.70$, $SD=9.15$), as opposed to the children in more restrictive classes ($M=14.43$, $SD=5.76$). The t-test showed a profound significant difference in the frequency of pretend play between the children in permissive versus restrictive classes ($t=7.73$, $p<.001$). According to these calculations, children in classes with more permissive teachers engaged in pretend play more often than children in classes of restrictive teachers.

Table 4. *Frequency of pretend play according to teacher's permissiveness*

	Mean	SD	t
Children in permissive classes (n=30)	29.70	9.15	7.73***
Children in restrictive classes (n=30)	14.43	5.76	

*** $p<.001$

Quality of pretend play

A. Tendency of each element of pretending

The tendency of each element of pretending was examined in the permissive and restrictive classes. As shown in Table 5, the classes where teachers were permissive 'language-pretend' occurred the most ($M = 28.97$, $SD = 9.20$), followed by 'role-pretend' ($M = 27.23$, $SD = 9.49$) and 'action-pretend' ($M = 26.53$, $SD = 9.48$), while 'object-pretend' ($M = 20.87$, $SD = 8.65$) occurred the least. Similarly, in the classes with restrictive teachers, 'language-pretend' occurred the most ($M = 14.33$, $SD = 5.73$) while 'object-pretend' ($M=13.47$, $SD=5.52$) occurred the least. 'Object-pretend' occurred the least in both permissive and restrictive classes. The t-test showed that children more often engaged in all types of pretending in classes with permissive teachers compared to classes with restrictive teachers ($t=7.73$, $p<.001$).

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Table 5. *Tendency of elements of pretending in the two groups*

Element of pretending	Children in permissive classes (n=30) Mean (SD)	Children in restrictive classes (n=30) Mean (SD)	T
Object-pretend	20.87(8.65)	13.47(5.52)	3.95***
Action-pretend	26.53(9.48)	14.17(5.63)	6.14***
Role-pretend	27.23(9.49)	13.67(5.77)	6.69***
Language-pretend	28.97(9.20)	14.33(5.73)	7.40***

***p< .001

Follows are the detailed tendency of each element of pretending in the two groups. According to Table 6, in the classes where teachers were permissive, 'object different to real object' pretending was found to occur the most (M = 12.93, SD = 9.11), followed by 'object similar to real object' pretending (M = 6.07, SD = 5.66), while 'pretending without objects' happened the least (M = 1.87, SD = 1.59). In classes with restrictive teachers, the most common object pretending was 'object similar to real object' pretending (M = 7.33, SD = 5.81), followed by 'object different to real object' pretending (M = 5.87, SD = 4.01), and 'pretending without objects' (M = 0.27, SD = 0.64) occurred the least. 'Pretending without objects' occurred the least in both groups. The t-tests showed statistically significant discrepancies in the case of 'object different to real object' ($t=3.89, p<.001$) and pretending 'without objects' ($t=5.11, p<.001$). Therefore, pretending with 'object different to real object' and pretending 'without objects' was observed significantly more in classes with permissive teachers compared to the classes with restrictive teachers.

Table 6. *Tendency of object pretending subcategory in the two groups*

Object pretending	Children in permissive classes(n=30) Mean (SD)	Children in restrictive classes(n=30) Mean (SD)	T
Object similar to real object	6.07(5.66)	7.33(5.81)	-0.86
Object different to real object	12.93(9.11)	5.87(4.01)	3.89***
Not using object	1.87(1.59)	0.27(0.64)	5.11***
Total	20.87(8.65)	13.47(5.52)	

***p< .001

As shown in Table 7, the most frequent type of action pretending involved 'oneself', followed by pretending using 'objects dissimilar to human'. The least utilized action

pretending type was pretending using ‘objects similar to human’ in the both groups of classes. The results of the t-tests showed significant differences between the two groups in all the subcategories of action pretending. In the case of ‘self’ ($t=3.64, p<.01$) and ‘object dissimilar to human’ ($t=2.85, p<.01$), the children with permissive teachers showed more frequent occurrences of pretending, while pretending using ‘object similar to human’ ($t=-2.55, p<.05$) appeared more frequently with children under the care of restrictive teachers.

Table 7. *Tendency of action pretending subcategory in the two groups*

Action pretending	Children in permissive classes(n=30) Mean (SD)	Children in restrictive classes(n=30) Mean (SD)	T
Self	16.43(10.87)	8.23(5.86)	3.64**
Object similar to human	0.33(0.80)	1.57(2.53)	-2.55*
Object dissimilar to human	9.77(9.43)	4.37(4.35)	2.85**
Total	26.53(9.48)	14.17(5.63)	

* $p<.05$ ** $p<.01$

Table 8. *Tendency of role pretending subcategory in the two groups*

Role-pretending	Children in permissive classes(n=30) Mean (SD)	Children in restrictive classes(n=30) Mean (SD)	T
Family role	9.10(9.97)	7.83(6.13)	0.59
Functional role	2.43(1.89)	0.77(0.97)	3.60***
Professional role	4.40(3.70)	0.70(1.15)	5.23***
Fantastic role	11.30(9.60)	4.37(4.35)	4.30**
Total	27.23(9.49)	13.67(5.77)	

** $p<.01$ *** $p<.001$

As presented in Table 8, in the classes with permissive teachers, the most frequently observed role pretending was ‘fantasy roles’ ($M = 11.30, SD = 9.60$), followed by ‘family roles’, ‘professional roles’, and ‘functional roles’. However, in the classes with restrictive teachers, the most frequently pretended role was ‘family roles’ ($M = 7.83, SD = 6.13$), followed by ‘fantasy roles’, ‘functional roles’, and lastly ‘professional roles’. The t-tests showed statistically significant differences in functional ($t=3.60, p<.001$), professional ($t=5.23, p<.001$), and fantasy roles ($t=4.30, p<.01$). The children in the permissive classes

engaged in these kinds of role pretending more often than their counterparts in the restrictive classes.

As shown in Table 9, the most frequent language pretending were 'role-related language' (M = 20.23, SD = 9.17), followed by 'explanation-related language' (M = 5.93, SD = 3.15), and lastly 'object-related language' (M = 2.81, SD = 3.80) in the classes with permissive teachers. Similarly, the most frequent language pretending was 'role-related language' (M = 11.73, SD = 5.64), followed by 'explanation-related language' (M = 1.83, SD = 1.53), and 'object-related language' (M = 0.77, SD = 1.04) in the classes with restrictive teachers. The t-tests showed statistically significant differences in all subcategories of language pretending. Whether it was 'explanation-related language' ($t=6.41, p<.001$), 'role-related language' ($t=4.32, p<.001$), or 'object-related language' ($t=2.83, p<.01$), children in the classes of permissive teachers were observed to have engaged in such play more often than the children in classes of restrictive teachers.

Table 9. *Tendency of language pretending subcategory in the two groups*

Language pretending	Children in permissive classes(n=30)	Children in restrictive classes(n=30)	T
Explanation-related expressions	5.93(3.15)	1.83(1.53)	6.41***
Role-related expressions	20.23(9.17)	11.73(5.64)	4.32***
Object-related expressions	2.81(3.80)	0.77(1.04)	2.83**
Total	28.97(9.20)	14.33(5.73)	

p< .01 *p< .001

B. Topics of pretend play

The frequency of topic levels of each group (permissive vs. restrictive classes) were examined and the results are shown in Table 10. As detailed above, level 5 was the most frequent topic level in classes with permissive teachers (M = 9.53, SD = 8.60). Level 5 consists of experiences that the children cannot partake in themselves. Level 2, re-enacting activities of familiar people, occurred the second most (M = 6.40, SD = 5.36). Level 6, which are high-level imaginary actions, occurred the least of all (M = 2.27, SD = 2.65). In classes with restrictive teachers, the most frequent topic levels were level 2 (M = 5.93, SD = 5.51) and level 5 (M = 4.20, SD = 4.27). Level 6 occurred the least in classes with restrictive

teachers ($M = 0.27$, $SD = 0.79$). The t -tests showed significant differences in symbolic levels 3, 4, 5, and 6. Level 3 ($t=3.84$, $p<.01$), level 4 ($t=3.19$, $p<.01$), level 5 ($t=3.04$, $p<.01$), and level 6 ($t=3.96$, $p<.01$) appear significantly more in the play of children with permissive teachers, compared to the children with restrictive teachers.

Table 10. *Frequency of topic levels in the two groups*

Topic level	Children in permissive classes (n=30) Mean (SD)	Children in restrictive classes (n=30) Mean (SD)	t
Symbolic level 1 (Familiar everyday actions)	3.50(5.93)	1.63(1.71)	1.66
Symbolic level 2 (Re-enacting actions of familiar people)	6.40(5.36)	5.93(5.51)	0.33
Symbolic level 3 (Infrequent own experiences)	4.40(4.85)	0.90(1.19)	3.84**
Symbolic level 4 (Modified and re-enacted own experiences)	3.60(3.26)	1.50(1.55)	3.19**
Symbolic level 5 (Experiences that they cannot partake in)	9.53(8.60)	4.20(4.27)	3.04**
Symbolic level 6 (High-level imaginative actions)	2.27(2.65)	0.27(0.79)	3.96***
Total	29.70(9.15)	14.43(5.76)	

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Conclusions and discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the teacher-imposed rules and restrictions during free play on children's pretend play. The findings of this study revealed that the frequency of pretend play was significantly higher in classes where teachers were permissive and gave children more freedom to play compared to classes where teachers imposed play rules, such as the number of interest areas that children should play for the day and the number of children that can be in the same interest area. This study showed the positive effects freedom during free play has on pretend play by observing and analyzing the frequency of pretend play and elements of pretending. Moreover, this relationship was true

for all the elements of pretending: 'object-pretend', 'action-pretend', 'role-pretend', and 'language-pretend'. These results show the importance of guaranteeing children freedom to play as they wish. In addition to the results of this study, Park, Kim, Hong, and Jo (2016) also concluded the importance of eliminating unnecessary rules in order to promote engagement in high-level pretend play, since children need to be provided with plenty of diverse toys and be provided enough time and space for play. In general, children participate in pretend play more often as they age and develop (Lee & Lee, 2002). Overall, the significant results of this study exhibit how children with permissive teachers engage more frequently in pretend play compared to their age-mates with restrictive teachers, which means children with permissive teacher are more advanced in terms of pretend play.

Considering the results of previous studies (Breherton, 1984; Kim, 2002) which showed how children relied less on real object during pretend play as they developed, the children with permissive teachers engaged in a higher level of pretend play than those with restrictive teachers. The two types of classes (permissive classes vs. restrictive classes) were statistically different in regards to the subcategories of each element of pretending. In the case of object-pretending, the children in classes with permissive teachers engaged in pretend play that used 'objects different to real objects' or 'no objects' more often than their counterparts in restrictive classes.

In the case of action-pretending, it is true that the more frequent pretend play involved 'oneself' and the least utilized pretend play was 'using objects dissimilar to human' among all children. However, statistically significant different wans found that more frequently children in restrictive classes engaged in pretend play with 'using objects similar to human'. The action pretending exhibited continues to support the conclusion that children in the permissive classes engage in a higher level of pretend play compared to children in the restrictive classes, because 'using object dissimilar to human' is more advanced than the other forms of action pretending (Lee, 1984).

In the context of role-pretending, children in permissive classes engaged mostly in 'fantastic roles', while children in restrictive classes preferred 'family roles'. This result agrees with the study of Kostelnik, Soderman, and Whiren (2004), who explained that the early forms of pretend play include 'family roles' and 'functional roles', and as children grow, they gradually begin to include 'professional roles' and 'fantastic roles'. As children develop,

they start to distance themselves from familiar roles and begin to include roles in their pretend play that goes beyond their own reality. Thus, the play of the children in the permissive classes that included fantasy roles can be regarded as advanced, high-level pretend play.

The above-mentioned conclusion was also exhibited in the case of language pretending. Children in both classes relied mostly on ‘role-related language’, followed by ‘explanation-related language’, and lastly on ‘object-related language’. However, children in permissive classes used all types of language pretending significantly more than the children in restrictive classes. This is consistent with the findings of Lee (2003), who concluded that children use role-related language most frequently, followed by explanations, and lastly by onomatopoeia in their pretend play. In addition to Lee (2003), Garvey (1977/1995) found that children use language in their pretend play in order to sophisticate or accomplish the pretended situation. Language is the primary means of expression in pretend play, and it shows immersion in playing (Fenson, 1984). In this regard, children in the permissive classes showed more immersion in their pretend play through the language that they used, compared to the children in the restrictive class.

In summary, teachers-imposed restrictions such as the number of children allowed in the same area of interest, on the free use of toys, and on the space and time allocated for play can cause a significant difference in the child’s pretend play. The pretend play observed in classes with more permissive teachers was more developed than what occurred in the classes with restrictive teachers. This discrepancy appeared because children were given freedom to play and imagine as they wish. The above-mentioned teacher-imposed limitations hinders a child’s ability to interact with peers of their choice and their ability to assign representation to an object that is not related to its original meaning. This combined with inadequate space or time for play, it is difficult for children to expand or transform their play.

As far as the level of the pretend play topics is concerned, children in the permissive classes engaged in higher-level topics of pretend play compared to their counterparts in the restrictive classes. This finding is consistent with the ones of Johnson, Christie, and Wardle (2004/2006), who concluded that children gradually distance themselves from familiar topics, transitioning towards fantastic or unusual topics in their pretend play. In addition, Lee et al. (2002) reported that as children’s ages increase, so does their topic level of pretend play. In other words, starting from symbolic level 3 (infrequent personal experiences) and up to topics of symbolic

level 6 (fantastic experiences that children cannot partake in personally) children in permissive classes engaged more in pretend play of such topics compared to children in the restrictive classes. Therefore, it can be concluded that children with permissive teachers distance themselves more from reality in their play, have more imaginative thoughts, and engage in higher-level pretend play.

The implications of this study are as follows. The rules and limitations on play imposed by the teacher hinder the children's play and can become impeding factors. This fact has been evident throughout the whole process of this study. Many teachers in Korea have imposed rules on the number of children that can be in the same area of interest at the same time, on the use of toys, or on the time and space allocated for play. The teachers believe that these rules are necessary for children to play at a higher level. However, the results of this study prove that this is not the case. This study can change how teachers approach free play by providing them with the following information. Play is a key element of early childhood education and children's play flourishes only when children have opportunities to play at their will (Wood, 2009).

This study emphasizes the need for professionalism in judging the importance of such rules. The present study shows how greatly influenced children's pretend play during free play time is whether teachers impose rules or not. Namely, the teacher should acknowledge the extent of their influence, because teacher-imposed rules can either hinder or encourage play. Moreover, there is a need for professionalism and reflective thinking on the teacher's side on whether the rules they enforce have any positive effect on encouraging the children's play or not, or if they have any developmental benefits.

This study calls for attention the necessity of understanding and making an effort towards encouraging pretend play from multiple points of view. Previous studies on pretend play have mostly covered child development, personal characteristics such as age or sex, or characteristics of preferred toys. Based on these studies, what personal factors should be considered for encouraging pretend play and what should be provided for children's play can be further discussed and the focus of future studies. It is important to discuss various points of view for means of encouraging pretend play, because the present study showed the relationship between providing a context with plenty of peers, toys, space and time, and the children's pretend play. Simply put, it is important to find concrete means of encouraging

pretend play, how large a group should be, how diverse the peers should be, how to encourage using the same toys in various contexts, and how much time should be provided in a certain place.

There are limitations inherent to this study. Participants in this study were selected based on a score assigned to them depending on their responses on a questionnaire that measured their degree of permissiveness. However, the general background of these teachers was not the same, and consequently, there is a possibility that their backgrounds influenced the results of this study. Also, due to a relatively small sample size, the findings cannot be generalized. Therefore, further studies can experiment with different controls to limit the influence of different factors, or a long-term study can investigate how children's play changes when teachers remove previously imposed rules.

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