

Revised Concise Symbolic Play Scale (Westby, 2000)

Ages	Theory of Mind	Content Themes (Episodic Memory)	Organization	Decontextualization
17-19 mo	pretend play on self	events personally experienced that happen daily	single activities	realistic props
19-22 mo	pretends on doll (doll passive recipient)	caregiver activities	combines 2 toys or performs actions on 2 people	
2 yr	talks to doll	events personally experienced that happen periodically (associated with emotion)	several actions on a theme (doll in tub, wash, dry)	
2 ½ yr				
3 yr	gives voice to dolls/puppets	events child has seen or read about but not personally experienced	short sequences of temporally-related activities; events evolve	low representation toys; object substitutions
3-3 ½ yr				
4 yr			gives characters multiple roles (mother, wife, doctor)	
5-6 yr		highly imaginative themes	multiple planned sequences	

Table 1: Developmental Playscale

Phase 1: Presymbolic

PLAY			COMMUNICATION
Object Permanence	Means-End/Problem Solving	Object Use	
Presymbolic Level I: 8 to 12 months			
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Aware that objects exist when not seen; finds toy hidden under cloth, box, etc., associates object with location</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Attains toy by pulling cloth on which toy is resting</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Attains toy by pulling string</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Touches adult to continue activity</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Explores moveable parts of toy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Does not mouth all toys. Uses several different schemes (patting, banging, turning, throwing, etc.); uses some differential schemas on familiar objects</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Joint attention on toy and person</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No true language; may have performative words that are associated with action or the total situation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Shows and gives objects</p> <p>Exhibits the following communicative intents:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Request (instrumental)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Command (regulatory)</p>
Presymbolic II: 13 to 17 months			
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Aware that objects exist separate from location; finds objects hidden in first one place and then in a second or third location</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Understands “in-ness;” dumps objects out of bottle</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hands toy to adult if unable to operate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hands toy to adult to get attention</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Uses index finger to point to desired object</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes operating parts of toys (attends to knobs, levers, buttons)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Discovers operations of toys through trial and error</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Construction of toy relationships (e.g, puts one toy in another such as figure in car; nests boxes)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Uses familiar objects appropriately</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Context dependent single words, e.g., child may use the word “car” when riding in a car, but not when he sees a car; words tend to come and go in child’s vocabulary</p> <p>Exhibits the following communicative functions:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Request <input type="checkbox"/> Protest</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Command <input type="checkbox"/> Label</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Interactional <input type="checkbox"/> Response</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Personal <input type="checkbox"/> Greeting</p>

Summary of Symbolic Playscale

AGE	PROPS	THEMES	ORGANIZATION	ROLES	LANGUAGE USE IN PLAY
by 18 months	uses one realistic object at a time	familiar everyday activities in which child is active participant (e.g., eating, sleeping)	short, isolated pretend actions	autosymbolic pretend, (e.g., child feeds self pretend food)	language used to get and maintain toys and seek assistance operating toys (e.g., "baby," "mine," "help")
by 22 months	uses two realistic objects at a time	familiar everyday activities that caregivers do (e.g., cooking, reading)	combines two related toys or performs actions on two people (e.g., uses spoon to eat from plate; feeds mother, then doll)	child acts on dolls and others (e.g., feeds doll or caregiver)	uses word combinations to comment on toy or action; uses word for intents, needs, feelings ("want that," "mad," "hungry")
by 24 months	uses several realistic objects		multischeme combinations of steps (e.g., put doll in tub, apply soap, take doll out and dry)		talks to doll briefly; describes some of the doll's actions (e.g., "baby sleeping"); uses phrases and markers for ing and plurals/possessives
by 30 months		common but less frequently experienced or especially traumatic experiences (e.g., shopping, doctor)		emerging limited doll actions (e.g., doll cries)	talking to doll and commenting on doll's actions increase in frequency; uses
by 3 years		observed, but not personally experienced activities (e.g., police, firefighter); compensatory play-- Re-enacts experienced events, but modifies original outcomes	temporal sequences of multischeme events (e.g., prepare food, set table, eat food, clear table, wash dishes)	child talks to doll in response to doll's actions (e.g., "don't cry now," "I'll get you a cookie."); brief complementary role play with peers (e.g., mother and child; doctor and patient)	use complete sentences with past tense and future aspect; children may comment on what they have just completed or what they will do next (e.g., "Dolly ate the cake." "I'm gonna wash dishes.")
by 3 1/2 years	miniature props, small figures, and object substitutions			attributes emotions and desires to dolls; reciprocal role taking with dolls (child treats doll as partner--talks for doll and as caregiver)	use dialogue for dolls and metalinguistic markers (e.g., "he said"); use words to refer to emotions and thoughts
by 4 years	imaginary props (language and gesture help set the scene)	familiar fantasy themes (e.g., Batman, Wonder Woman, Cinderella, etc.); violent themes common	planned play events with cause-effect sequences (e.g., child decides to play a birthday party and gathers necessary props and assigns roles)	child or doll has multiple roles (mother, wife, doctor; firefighter, husband, father) child can handle two or more dolls in complementary rolls (dolls are doctor and patient)	use language to plan and narrate the story line; use of connecting words so, because, but-effect
by 6 years	language and gesture can carry the play without props	create novel fantasy characters and plots	multiple planned sequences (plans for self and other players)	more than one role per doll (doll is mother, wife, doctor)	elaboration of planning and narrative story line; uses sentences with temporal markers, then, when, while, before, first, next

Phase 2: Symbolic

PLAY

Decontextualization What props are used in pretend play?	Thematic Content What schemas/scripts does the child represent?	Organization How coherent and logical are the child's schemas/scripts?	Self/Other Relations What roles does the child take and give to toys and other people?
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Symbolic level I: 17-19 months

Child exhibits internal mental representation
 Tool-use (uses stick to reach toy)
 Finds toy invisibly hidden (when placed in a box and box emptied under scarf)
 Pretends using life-like props
 Does not stack solid ring

Familiar, everyday activities (eating, sleeping) in which child has been an active participant

Short isolated schemas (single pretend actions)

Self as agent (auto-symbolic or self-representational play, i.e., child pretends to go to sleep, to eat from a spoon, or to drink from an empty cup)

Symbolic Level II: 19-22 months

Activities of familiar others (cooking, reading, cleaning, shaving)

Short, isolated schema combinations (child combines two actions or toys in pretend, e.g., rocking doll and putting it to bed; pouring from pitcher into cup, or feeding doll from plate with spoon)

Child acts on doll (Doll is passive recipient of action); brushes doll's hair, covers doll with blanket
 Child performs pretend actions on more than one object or person, e.g., feeds self, a doll, mother, or another child

Symbolic Level III: 2 years

Elaborated single schemas (represents daily experiences with details, e.g., puts lid on pan, puts pan on stove; collects items associated with cooking/eating such as dishes, pans, silverware, glasses, highchair)

Reverses roles--"I'll play you and you play me."

LANGUAGE

Function	Form and Content
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Directing
 Requesting
 Commanding
 Interactional
 Self-maintaining
 Protesting
 Protecting self and self interests
 Commenting
 Labeling (objects and activity)
 Indicating personal feeling

Beginning of true verbal communication. Words have following functional and semantic relations:
 Recurrence
 Existence
 Nonexistence
 Rejection
 Denial
 Agent
 Object
 Action or state
 Object or person associated with object or person

Refers to objects and persons not present
 Requests information

Beginning of word combinations with following semantic relations:
 Agent-Action
 Action-object
 Agent-object
 Attributive
 Dative
 Action-locative
 Possessive

Comments on activity of self (get apple)
 Comments on doll (baby sleep)

Uses phrases and short sentences
 Appearance of morphological markers:
 Present progressive (ing) on verbs
 Plurals
 Possessives

Symbolic Level IV: 2 1/2 years

Represents less frequently personally experienced events, particularly those that are memorable because they are pleasurable or traumatic:
___ Store shopping
___ Doctor-nurse-sick child

___ Talks to doll
___ Reverses dyadic/complementary roles (“I’ll play x and you play y.”), e.g. doctor/patient; shopper/cashier

Responds appropriately to the following WH questions in context:
___ What
___ Who
___ Whose
___ Where
___ What...do
___ Asks WH question (generally puts WH at beginning of sentence)
___ Responses to why questions inappropriate except for well-known routines
___ Asks why, but often inappropriate and does not attend to answer

Symbolic Level V: 3 Years

___ Compensatory play: Re-enacts experienced events, but modifies original outcomes

___ Evolving episode sequences, e.g., child mixes cake, bakes it, washes dishes; or doctor checks patient, calls ambulance, takes patient to hospital (sequence not planned)

___ Transforms self into role
___ Engages in associative play, i.e., children do similar activities, may share same role, but no organized goal

___ Reporting
___ Predicting
___ Emerging narrating or story-telling

___ Uses past tense, such as, “I ate the cake,” “I walked”
___ Uses future aspect (particularly “gonna”) forms, such as “I’m gonna wash dishes.”

Symbolic Level VI: 3 to 3 1/2 Years

___ Carries out pretend activities with replica toys (Fisher Price/ Playmobil dollhouse, barn, garage, village, airport)
___ Uses one object to represent another (Stick can be a comb, chair can be a car)
___ Uses blocks and sandbox for imaginative play. Blocks used as enclosures (fences, houses) for animals and dolls

___ Represents observed events, i.e., events in which child was not an active participant (policemen, firemen, war, cowboys, schemas/scripts from TV shows -- Batman, Ninja Turtles, Power Rangers

___ Child assigns roles to other children; negotiates play
___ Multiple reversible roles (“I’ll be a and b and you be x”), e.g., child is ticket seller, pilot, and airline steward, but co-player is always passenger

Uses doll or puppet as participant in play:
___ Child talks for doll
___ Reciprocal role taking-- child talks for doll and as parent of doll

___ Projecting: gives desires, thoughts, feelings, to doll or puppet
___ Uses indirect requests, e.g., “mommy lets me have cookies for breakfast.”
___ Changes speech depending on listener
___ Reasoning (integrates reporting, predicting, projecting information)
___ Metacommunicative strategies

Descriptive vocabulary expands as child becomes more aware of perceptual attributes; uses terms for following concepts (not always correctly):
___ shapes
___ sizes
___ colors
___ textures
___ spatial relations
___ Uses metalinguistic and metacognitive language, e.g., “He said...,” “I know....”

Symbolic Level VII: 3 1/2 to 4 Years

___ Uses language to invent props and set scene
___ Builds 3-dimensional structures with blocks

___ Improvisations and variations on themes

___ Schemas/scripts are planned
___ Hypothesizes “what would happen if”

___ Uses dolls and puppets to act out schemas/scripts
___ Child or doll has multiple roles (e.g., mother and wife; fireman, husband, father)

___ Uses language to take roles of character in the play, stage manager for the props, or as author of the play story

___ Uses modals (can, could, may, might, would)
___ Uses conjunctions (and, but, so, because, if)
NOTE: Full competence for modals and conjunctions does not develop until 10-12 years of age.

___ Some appropriate responses to why and how questions requiring reasoning

Symbolic Level VIII: 5 years

___ Can use language to set the scene, actions, and roles in play

___ Highly imaginative activities that integrate parts of known schemas/scripts for events child has never participated in or observed (e.g., astronaut builds ship, flies to strange planet, explores, eats unusual food, talks with creatures on planet)

___ Plans several sequences of pretend events. Organizes what is needed -- both objects and other children. Coordinates several scripts occurring simultaneously

___ Engages in collaborative play, i.e., play roles coordinated and themes are goal-directed

___ Uses relational terms (then, when, first, last, next, while, before, after)
Note: Full competence does not develop until 10-12 years of age.

Main Reference:

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Campbell, K.J. (2003). *Art across the alphabet: Over 100 art experiences that enrich early literacy.* Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House

MacDonald, S. (2001). *Block play: The complete guide to learning and playing with blocks.* Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.

West, S., & Cox, A. (2004). *Literacy play: Over 300 dramatic play activities that teach pre-reading skills.* Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House.

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Wolfberg, P.J. (2003). *Peer play and the autism spectrum: The art of guiding children's socialization and imagination.* Shawnee Mission, KS: Autism

Asperger Publishing. (This book is specific for children with autism – ways to evaluate play and how to structure and scaffold play for children with autism).

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