

# CLASSIFICATION AND STRUCTURE OF PLAY

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## 1. Classification of play

Classifications of play vary across cultures. In Bulgarian pedagogical theory and practice there are **two main groups**: creative play and games with rules.

**Creative play.** These are plays where children express their life experience. They are labeled as a “creative play” because children don’t copy exactly what they have seen. Children figure out stories; they use materials from the environment as substitutes of real objects; they disguise to represent a role.

There are 3 types of creative play: role play, dramatization and constructive play.

**Role play.** This is free play with or without toys. Every child plays a social role. The role can be related to a social function (mother, passenger), to a profession (cook, medical doctor, seller) or position (cook-chef cook; teacher-rector). These three aspects can be represented in one role (mother-medical doctor-manager of the hospital). The features of role play are: social role, social relationships between roles and plot.

**Dramatisation.** Children play the roles of famous characters from tales and stories (Snow White, Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood). Children don’t invent the plot, they stick to the story. Dramatisation is more difficult than role play. In the role play the child *sees* real actions and copies them. In the dramatisation the child *listens* to a story and then has to think up gestures and actions. In the role play, the parts represent social roles. In dramatic play the parts represents moral norms. Through dramatic play children learn what is

good and bad; they learn about traits and personal characteristics: stupid, clever, crafty, envious, grasping, generous.

**Constructive play.** Children use building blocks (construction sets) to represent buildings: houses, bridges, vehicles. Constructive play is more difficult than role play because the building has to be stable, realistic and aesthetic. Through constructive play children learn to plan operations and to select materials needed.

**Games with rules.** Children don't invent a plot. The game is determined by rules. They are obligatory. Rules prescribe children's action. The goal of the game is to win.

There are 2 types of games with rules: autodidactic games and motor games.

**Autodidactic games.** These are games with cards, domino, lotto, board games and others. Playing actions require from the child to perform mental actions (classification, comparison, counting). In this way the game develops the child's intelligence. But the child doesn't play for this purpose (she doesn't play domino in order to improve counting). He/she plays because she wants to win.

**Motor games.** (Hide-and-see, chase games) Motor games are directed by rules. Some of them have a simple plot and roles ("Wolf and rabbits"). Motor games require active movements, such as running and jumping.

There are many other types of play (sensorimotor play, manipulative play a.o.). This classification includes the main types that are played in pre-school.

## **2. Structure of play**

Every play has several main components.

**1. Play motive.** This is the reason for playing. The main reason for playing is pleasure. The child plays because play brings joy. Another motive (for games) is striving to win.

**2. Play idea.** Children name the idea when they discuss what to play: “Let’s play at mothers”, “Let’s play at ship”. Play idea is a brief name of the plot.

**3. Play plot.** It is a sequence of episodes that are related to the play idea (The mother wakes her baby, she makes breakfast, she dresses the child, she goes for a walk with other mothers, she goes shopping, she makes dinner with the father...).

**4. Play content.** It includes all real actions and play relationships. One and the same play idea could include different content. Playing “at ship” children could let paper boats sail in water. Different content of the same play idea is when children take the roles of a shipman and mariners.

**5. Role.** The role is performing the actions and relationships of a man according to his social position. It’s a manner of behavior that is typical to the given social function and profession.

**6. Play actions.** Play actions represent real actions. They depend on the role (the actions of the mother are feeding the child, dressing him, bathing...).

**7. Play operations.** Play operations are the real movements of the player. One and the same action can be performed through different operations.

For example the action is feeding the baby.

The first version of the operation is to give the bottle to the baby (one operation).

Another version is when the “mother” stirs the meal with a spoon, blows because the meal is hot, gives the spoon to the baby, wipes the baby with a tissue (the same action but 4 operations).

The actions depend on the role; the operations depend on the real objects used in play.

**8. Rules.** The rules define the actions of players and the sanctions for those who break the rules. Every play has rules, even the role play. The rules in the role play are hidden. Children don’t discuss them before the play. Rules become obvious when somebody breaks them.

**9. Imaginary situation.** The Imaginary situation is a fantastic moment in a play. It is caused by the fact that play actions are performed with substitutes. The child can use the chair as a car. He knows it is not a car, it is something to sit on, but during the play the object takes on a new meaning. This play meaning causes the imaginary situation.

These components have their specific meaning according to the type of play and game but they are common for all of them.