

Parten's Play Experiment

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Mildred Parten (1902-1970) observed 34 children playing in a preschool setting (Parten, 1933). The children's ages ranged from 2 to 4.5 years old. Parten observed the children for one minute each day to develop a greater understanding of play behaviors. The observations focused on type of group, activity, and play. The types of play were solitary, onlooker, parallel, associative, and cooperative.

The most observed type of group was comprised of two children of the same sex and age (Parten, 1933). The group sizes ranged from two to 15 children. Groups of two to five children occurred more frequently than groups of more than five. As children became older, there was a greater tendency to associate in larger groups.

The most frequently observed activity was playing in the sandbox (Parten, 1933). Other frequently observed activities were playing house, playing with trains, riding on toy cars, and cutting paper. Younger children compared to older children played in the sandbox more frequently; however, the sandbox was still one of the most popular activities for older children. Playing house peaked in frequency for three year olds. Cutting paper, as well as similar activities such as playing with clay and painting, increased with age. No age differences were observed for playing with trains and stringing beads.

The most social activity was playing house (Parten, 1933). In other words, cooperative play was observed in playing house more than in other activities. The most frequent type of play observed for playing with trains was solitary play. The most frequent type of play observed for playing in the sandbox and cutting paper was parallel play.

Recent research has supported the sequence of the stages of play (Berk, 2014). In other words, the stages develop in the order described by Parten. However, research suggests that rather than be replaced by later stages, the earlier stages of play can still be observed in older

children. Research also suggests cultural differences in the development of play with Asian children progressing to later stages of play earlier than North American children (Berger, 2016). Finally, Parten's study has influenced research on socialization and early childhood education (Xu, 2010).

References

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