Learning from pretense: Is pretend play an effective pedagogical tool?

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Study 1 (Continued)

Primary Questions
- Can children learn the name and function of a novel object they encounter in a pretend context?
- What will they infer about the appearance of the novel object when it is represented by a substitute object during the pretend?
- Will children’s performance be qualitatively different when learning from a real vs. pretend context?

Study 1
Participants
- N = 56
- 5-year-olds (M = 58.8 months, range: 52.9 - 66.8 months)
- Two between-participants conditions: real and pretend

Demonstration phase was repeated with a second set of functions relating to another novel object.

Study 2

To ensure that the function we taught children (pushing a ball out of a tube) did not bias them to choose long, skinny objects, Study 2 taught a nonobvious property of novel objects: ownership. Results were the same: children in the pretend condition tended to choose from among the long skinny objects, and children in the real condition tended to choose another similar form/similar function object.

General Discussion
- Children can learn new information presented to them in a pretend context.
- The majority of children in the pretend condition learned the novel object’s function.
- Children seem to have a general bias to assume that substitute objects will be similar in appearance to their pretend identities.
- They use this assumption to guide their inferences about the true properties of novel objects encountered in pretend.

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References
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