

Narrative Competence in Pretense Play and Stories

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to explore a method for analyzing children's narratives in pretense play and replica stories. A theoretical framework was derived from Bruner (1990) and Fein (1989). This framework served to construct the Realistic-Imaginal Scale (RIS) which incorporated behavioral components appearing in the relevant empirical literature. The scale includes 17 items grouped into 4 categories and measures narratives on a realistic-imaginary continuum. A limited attempt to test the applicability of the RIS, using pretense play episodes of Israeli kindergarten children, and the replica stories of US preschoolers, revealed well-distributed scores correlated with Applebee's narrative organization scores. The scale yielded high inter-scoring reliability. Distributions of scores showed a striking resemblance between the two culturally and contextually different samples. The strong theoretical framework of the RIS makes it a promising tool for the analysis of young children's narrative competence, thus providing a potent tool for theoretical and research.

Key Words: narrative competence; pretense play; replica stories; dual-landscape; Realistic-Imaginal Scale; young children.

When children pretend either by playing or by telling a story, they maintain a two-tier mental state. On one tier, the child is conscious of being herself in an actual world, pretending to be a baby, a father, or an alligator. On another tier, the child is conscious of being the pretend character and enacting the part of baby, father, or alligator.

Bi-level Theories of Pretense

When children are engaged in pretense activities such as pretense play or storytelling, they actually act in a "dual landscape" (Fein 1989, 1990; Leslie 1987). In the present study we examined the applicability of a scale we have constructed to measure the degree of reality and imagination in children's play and storytelling. Some play episodes deal with the meaning of human calamity from the mild to the fatal. A child falls on his face and mother offers a soothing sugar cube (Appendix A, script (a))¹; another child, acting as a pretend pet (cat) is sick and his mother takes him to the clinic for treatment (script (c)). In these pretend sequences, the children present infrequent but vivid problems; the mothers react differently, yet plausibly. It is entirely possible that the child who fell on his face never received a sugar cube from his real-life mother. A sugar cube may be a folk remedy understood by children. In the dynamics of social pretend play exchanges, each partner contributes different and not always expected reactions. In script (a), an irritable mother snaps "What did I bring it for?", whereas in script (c) an overjoyed mother hugs the recovered cat. Other mothers may differ in subtle, emotionally meaningful ways.

Pretend calamities also range from the mundane to the exotic. A hurt face occurs infrequently, yet it really happens. In contrast, a blind, contagious cat dying of cancer is the purely imaginative construction of two children. These children compound the worst possible condition from an array of vivid, lesser conditions, none of which are ordinary occurrences in a four-year-old's ordinary world. Having constructed such a compound condition, what is its epistemological status? Did a blind, contagious cat actually die of cancer? Or is the cat, its blindness, cancer, and death understood and remembered by the children as something that was played one day in kindergarten. In affective theory, the emotional system produces and saves these scenarios (Madrid and Kantor 2009); they never touch the child's knowledge base. None of the children

¹ Appendix A – Pretense Play Scripts and Appendix B – Replica-Toy Stories, may be obtained from the first author: R. Glaubman glaubmr@gmail.com

thinks that there was a real blind, contagious, dying cat in the kindergarten. Yet all might believe that there could be such a cat. A major problem in determining preschooler's understanding of pretense is that terms like "really" or "really, truly" fail to catch the distinction between is and could be (Bunce and Harris 2008, Lillard 1993).

Narrative Thought and the Dual Landscape

A view compatible with affective theory, although not addressed to pretense play, was offered by Bruner (1990). For this theorist, there are two kinds of thought, paradigmatic and narrative (Bruner 1986). Paradigmatic thought is built on objective knowledge and logical reasoning; it appears relatively late in development. In contrast, narrative thought is built on imaginative and affective responses to daily life events; it is an early developing way of organizing experience. A child defines self-experience based on rough empirical generalizations of introspective evidence. These restructured understandings of common events are represented as narratives (Bruner 1986, 1990). As we have claimed the dual landscape property is of interest here.

According to Bruner, narratives portray events on two terrains. Observable events and actions of the protagonists occur concurrently with mental events in the consciousness of the protagonists. The dual landscape refers to the simultaneous elaboration of these two narrative modes.

In story telling the storyteller recounts the doings and happenings of characters within this world, in pretend play the child uses realistic cups in pretend drinking, gives a passive agent a sip. In different ways, these are relatively literal, conventional, external stances towards pretense.

The second dual landscape mode is that of "mental events in the consciousness" (Bruner 1990; 51). In this mode, the protagonist reacts to internal states and cognitions. The protagonist's intentional state may emerge from a cultural convention (care for baby, as in stories (a) and (b)) or from a departure from this convention (baby is abandoned) (Bruner 1990; 51)). These dual landscapes are simultaneously elaborated in pretend play scenarios and in stories.

The relation between kindergarten children's developing theory of mind and their understanding of characters' actions and consciousness in story narrative is based on Bruner's (1986) notion of the dual landscapes of action and consciousness. Analyses revealed relations among children's age, language ability, non-verbal intelligence, theory of mind development, and their ability to coordinate consciousness and action in the stories (Pelletier and Astington 2004). Theory of mind indicates a strong relationship between the children's ability to engage in pretense and their ability to understand the minds of others (Leslie 1987; Saracho 2014).

Pretense is an early expression of the ability to understand mental states in oneself and others. Findings confirm the importance of theory of mind also in narrative competence, as it influences the comprehension of deception. Thus, narratives are proved also as research tools to assess different levels of theory of mind mastery (Gamannossi and Pinto 2014).

The narrative approach to pretense play is based on play's strong similarity to the structural aspects of narratives (Bretherton 1989; Tompkins, Farrar and Montgomery, 2019).

When telling a story or playing pretense, the child shifts back and forth between realistic and imaginative terrains (Bretherton 1989; Fein 1989; Garvey 1990; Leslie 1987; Piaget 1962; Singer and Singer 1990). The realistic, external terrain anchors the story/play in a plausible world, and the internal, imaginative terrain provides the energy, the drama, the "trouble". Not all play episodes illustrate the movement between realistic and imaginative representations. In fact, some play sequences tend to dwell on conventional events. At about four years of age, children show mastery of different pretense properties within this span (Astington 1986; Bretherton 1989; Pellegrini 1985b; Yawkey 1980). However, distinctions between the developmental span of these abilities appear in different contexts. Children show metarepresentational skills, such as attributing sensory, perceptual, and emotive experiences to others at 3 1/2 years of age, in solitary play with toys (about the same age they apply them in real life), as compared to a slower span in social pretense play (Lillard 1993).

In this analysis, we adapt bi-level theorizing to pretense play and storytelling. We broaden the scope of previous thinking to cover different bi-level processes suggested by theoretical or empirical efforts. Central to our model is the notion that sophisticated narrative thinking shifts between two poles (Carrick and Ramirez 2012). At one pole, the play deals with realistic objects, mundane events, familiar roles, conventional rules, and ordinary activities. At the other pole, the child portrays the unusual, imaginal, and even weird. However, movement between these poles occurs in several domains calling upon multiple behaviors, themes, and social relationships. A child may pretend with a realistic object or an invented object; here, the span from realistic to imaginal centers on the source of the objects rendered in the play. A child might pretend about an everyday, mundane event or about an unusual, even bizarre event. A child might communicate about the play from outside it or about the play from within a particular play role. In a particular role, the child might speak in her/his own voice or in the voice of the pretend character. Each of these domains taps different functional relations between the real world and the imagined world. In the model proposed in this paper, the movement from realistic to imaginative is a central feature of narrative competence across multiple domains. Two issues are then of interest. One is whether children can function at an imaginal level in multiple domains. The second is whether children can move flexibly back and forth between levels thereby integrating realistic and imaginal representations (Ahn and Filipenko 2007).

Components of the Realistic-Imaginal Scale

The Realistic-Imaginal Scale (RIS) was designed to identify how different components of pretense and story vary across the dual landscape from the realistic and common place to the unusual and inventive, and to inner interpretations. The RIS has 17 items organized into four a priori subscales drawn from the literature on play. Each subscale taps different properties of the relation between the narrator/player, the immediate environment, and the represented environment. The scale attempts to characterize the fantasy/imaginal level at which this relation is represented in the play/story. Most items on the scale are specified for three levels (realistic, transitional, and imaginal), although many more are possible and, in some domains, the span from realistic representation to imaginal representation is more likely to be continuous.

Studies that analyze pretend play as narratives have used story scripts (Pellegrini 1985b; Wolf and Grollman 1982), or story-grammar structure (Eckler and Weininger 1989). However, these analyses focus on the child's cognitive ability to abstract narrative structure and ignore the functional and aesthetic aspects of narrative production. In contrast, studies dealing with the abilities children display when engaged in pretense, cover diverse areas of child development, the manipulative- sensory-motor, cognitive, linguistic, social, and affective capabilities (Almy Monighan Scales and Van Hoorn 1984; Ariel 1984; Barnett 1990; Fein 1989; Howes 1980; Howes Unger and Matheson 1992; Johnson 1990; Leslie 1987; Smith 1988). A second aim of the RIS is to integrate these multiple aspects of development into a tool for investigating commonalities between pretense and storytelling and how these change over time. Items of the RIS are shown in Figure 1 and each category is discussed in the following section.

Figure 1: The Realistic-Imaginal Scale (RIS) for Different Components of Pretend Play and Replica Story

	REALISTIC	TRANSITIONAL	IMAGINAL
I. The Physical World			
1. Objects	realistic	substitutional	no actual object
2. Actions	realistic	imitative-make-believe	no actual action
3. Events	as-if contextualized events	restructured pretend events	what-if/decontextualized remote, novel combinations
4. Locale-spatial	place of events is compatible with props (washing glasses in kitchen)	place of event is not typical of props (cooking at the hairdresser)	remote imaginative setting (pretend cinema at the home corner)

II. Social-Cultural Content

5. Themes	mundane activity (cook, eat, sleep, work)	special occasions (illness, birthday, wedding, accident)	unusual/fantastic (vampire, burglar robs baby)
6. Cultural Norms	conventional mores bathe child)		exceptions/counter conventional (bathe dragon, 2 wives)
7). Social Relations	relations in keeping with the status of roles	irregular (scold mother, refuse to obey adult)	deviant (overt aggression, attack)

III. Inter- and Intra-Personal Relations

8. Roles	as a child, resembling player	familiar figure (mom, dad, nurse, shopkeeper)	fantasy, remote figure (ghost, dragon, superman)
9. Speech/ Language	self-speech	phrases, idioms, tone of familiar figures (parents, workers)	speech of remote beings (monsters, animals), rare adult terms ("contagious")
10. Affect Attribution	behavioral expression of emotion (cry, sing, laugh, hit, bite) primary process	label of global state (It's OK. What's the matter?)	explicit attribution of emotion or mental state (Don't worry; I'm scared; he loved) secondary process
11. Cognitive Attribution	ascribing physical per- ception and sensation (see, hear, touch)	attribution of indirect intention (was hiding, try to find, run from)	attribution of mental process (decide, want, know, remember)
12. Social- Cognitive	verbal messages between players/ characters	reaction to others' message (in words/actions)	elaboration of others' message

IV. Structural Features

13. Action-Event Frame	maintain frame (staying in the kitchen doing the same things)	enrich, enlarge frame (new items introduced within the kitchen)	external event integrated into the episode (falling toy integrated into the plot)
14. Event Structure	simple: 1-2 elements (boy and a dog walk home)	longer chain (mom smacks dog who is wining and walking away)	complex structure. (girl comes home, mom opens door, they discuss a problem while boy is falling)
15. Time Reference	indefinite, taken for granted (baby crying, mom comforts her, they go to kitchen...)	time specifically mentioned in continuum with event (going, bring it home later)	time stated explicitly, remote (I'm from on-going event, next/last week, sometimes)
16. Play/story Communicate	in-play in-role enactment	meta-communication/ meta-play; director/narrator roles	integration of player and director roles
17. Cognitive Functioning	representational ("I'm tying evil monster so it won't get into the house". Extreme illness means being "very blind, ill and should not be touched" death is a possibility)		meta-representational/mental representation of other's representation (extreme illness is interpreted as contagious cancer that needs to be isolated and covered and ends in death, but resurrection is a possibility)

I. The Physical World

The ability to move freely between the relatively realistic and the imaginative is not automatically developed, as the child grows with age. Children vary in this respect, and some children develop only limited ability to switch from one mode to another. This is clearly demonstrated in studies of object use in pretense play. The ability to make-believe with objects develops at about two years of age and reaches its peak at five years of age (Pellegrini 1985b; Piaget 1962; Sharon and Woolley 2004). Object use develops from exploration and simple manipulation, through various stages to the highest level of substituting non-existing imaginary "objects" with gestures or words (Fein 1981). Yet at five years of age some children are tied to the realistic properties and functions of objects in their play, and therefore develop limited and literal pretense (Johnson Christie and Yawkey 1987; Smilansky and Shefatya 1990). For this reason, object pretense is thus one item on the RIS.

The same trend is found in the actions and states the child ascribes to replica play-figures, the second item on the RIS traced a systematic shift in which the child first treats a doll as a passive agent and progresses to treating the doll as if it were an active agent (Bunce and Harris 2008). Wolf Rygh and Altshuler (1984) describe a five-stage developmental sequence of human action representation that begins with treating a figure as a passive recipient, then as an active recipient, and finally as an active, thinking agent. Children of the same age functioned at different levels on this scale. Props may encourage narrative activity or influence its contents and duration (Fein 1995).

Yet children will act symbolically on the imaginal terrain only when they can free themselves from the restraints imposed by time, place, and common events (Carrick and Ramirez 2012; Piaget 1962; Warner 2009). One can tell a story about an ordinary child who has an extraordinary adventure, perhaps travelling through time or falling down a rabbit hole. The first is a fantasy about time and the second is a fantasy about place. Items 3 and 4 refer to children's use of these dimensions. In play script (b), the children relate to events on all three levels: Dana pretends to wash a realistic plastic dog, Ruth pretends to speak on a replica telephone with a pretend teacher, and they all "watch" a non-existent movie in a non-existent cinema, seeing imaginary things. The location of the two former events is a house center, where they found these props. The location of the latter is imaginal; no props suggest the idea of cinema.

II. Social-Cultural Content

The content of a play script is described by some as a rendering of the players' mundane, ordinary activities, and by others as an unusual, novel invention shaped by intentions and interpretations adapted from highly personal representational symbols (Bunce and Harris 2008; Christie 1991; DiLalla and Watson 1988; Garvey 1990; Sharon and Woolley 2004; Smilansky and Shefatya 1990). The three items in this scale describe somewhat different dimensions along which play scenarios might depart from cultural norms and customary social relations. In script (a), the child's criticism of the mother who is alleged to have thrown the sugar cube is scored as irregular, non-normative but not as imaginal. In contrast, the intention to take a cat to the cinema in script (b) is scored as a counter-realistic proposal as is the notion in script (c) that a patient prescribes therapy. A similar case can be made for the evil family and their dragon in story (c). In the last episode the male character flies over the world spreading color and looking for his lost dragon in a sequence of activities that violate ordinary notions about persons, dragons, and the world.

III. Intra-and Inter-Personal Relations

In pretense and in stories, children portray characters that may depart from those of daily life. As they do so, they may take on linguistic and behavioral mannerisms different from those typical of a preschool child. In some episodes, the characters display emotion or thought and in other episodes emotion and thought is attributed to the characters rather than displayed by them (Carrick and Ramirez 2012). The five items on this scale tap several components of the degree to which children project fantasy characters and then attribute to these characters internal mental and emotional states (Madrid and Kantor 2009). Items 8 and 9 evaluate the degree to which the child introduces remote characters (a dragon) and their linguistic mannerisms ("Oh, my baby got lost" in story (b)). Items 10 and 11 of the scale also evaluate the child's attributions of emotional or mental states to story characters ("I love all the children" in script (c), and "you know, alligator..." in story

(c), respectively). The range here is from behavioral descriptions (crying, seeing) to characterizations of internal states (sadness, thinking).

Item 12 evaluates the social quality of the exchange between the players, especially whether responses are linked to the partner's proposals or even extensions of them. Shir, in script (b), elaborates on Dana's state "here starts the show", by activating puppets and calling to kids, mothers, fathers and grannies to keep the children quiet.

IV. Structural Features

The structural features identified on this scale have been drawn from studies of play and stories. Item 13 contrasts episodes that adhere to a pre-established frame with those that introduce increasingly distant events. In script (b), the children are at the home area, introducing some new items within this frame. The frame of actions and events changes only at the end. Story (b) in contrast, although located also in the kitchen, introduces events that take place outside in the play yard, and the falling replica child-toy is integrated into the story.

Items 14 and 15 track the organization of play events and the timespan envisioned in the play. In the first episode of story (b), the event structure is relatively simple and consists of the mother trying to sooth the crying baby, while in the last episode the structure becomes quite complex with the mother discovering the baby was stolen and not knowing what to do, smacks the dog who cries and walks away. In story (a) the child receives credit for specific reference to time (episode 2 "we are going to cook you", in a past tense story). In script (c) the cat's mother introduces time in a continuum to preset event: "I'm going. Bring him home later". In the present narratives there is no example of remote time, but children might introduce next week or last month. In another story (of the same set), a child tells that "Sometimes the girl loses her way and sometimes her mom doesn't let her do things", relating to time in a non-continuum sequence.

As symbolic play becomes more decontextualized, events and places become more remote from the child's actual setting, customarily a play center in a preschool. The same applies to the use of words as socially defined signifiers for objects, events, and places. When children have difficulties in transmitting and receiving linguistic play messages, their potential for functioning with others on a dual landscape is limited. These children will have difficulties communicating thought and affection and creating a common narrative. Item 16 is especially important because it evaluates the meta-communicative competence displayed by the children. In play, the child has an opportunity to participate as an actor who communicates within the play frame, and as a director who talks with co-players about the play from outside the play frame.

Giffin (1984) specified seven phases in the meta-communicative continuum from within-frame to out-of-frame, whereas DiLalla and Watson (1988) specified four phases in the transition between realistic and imaginal states. A similar transition appears in stories when the child switches from narrator to a character who speaks in a pretend voice. The range has been reduced here to two to capture the children's ability to integrate the positions of director/narrator with that of player/character. Children's cognitive level of representation is the center of item 17. Children may reveal their knowledge about dangerous illness in a direct way as in script (c), when they claim that one should not get near the sick cat, and when the extent of danger is expressed by its being very blind and ill. The nurse responds on a meta-representation level, representing the cat's nonmetal representation, and talking about contagious illness such as cancer. Bibi who senses the others' concern, introduces the possibility of medicine that cures the dead. In story (b) we hear Ama's meta-representation of a helpless mommy that keeps saying things like "I don't know what to do".

The study

Method

A preliminary study was designed as an action researching to check the applicability of the RIS, by testing its validity and reliability on a relatively small sample of narratives derived from two separate sources: (a) Sixteen different pretense play scripts played by Israeli children aged 5:0-5:8 in three kindergartens. (b) Nine Replica Stories told by 5 American children between the ages of 4 and 5 years. All data consisted of children's transcribed narratives: The pretense play scripts were derived from videotapes that were taken in

the play areas of the classroom, and the Replica Stories scripts from audiotapes of stories told about replica figures.

The narratives differed in many respects: In the form of the product (a play script in the pretense play, as compared to a story in the Replica Stories); in the cultural setting of the children (Israeli in the pretense play and USA in the Replica Stories); in the circumstances of production (the pretense play, a group product in a free play setting with no adult directly involved, and the Replica Stories where a single-individual adult meeting elicited the stories); and the objects used for stimulating the narrative (complete open choice in the pretense play as compared to a given set of 8 replica figures in the Replica Stories). We believe this adds to the power of the reliability and validity of the RIS scale if similar results will be found in its application.

In both groups we applied two measurements, a measure of narrative coherence adapted from Applebee (1978), and the RIS. The adapted Applebee measure uses organizational concepts taken from Vygotsky's early work on concept development. At the lowest level of structure, story elements are "heaps" with few links connecting one event to another. At level 2, sequences are connected by arbitrary events loosely related to a thematic core. Level 3 structures are considered primitive narratives; events have some connection to one another and may even be complementary. Narratives at Level 4 contain chained events in which successive situations are causally related. However, the causes shift so that the end result is not a thematically developed story. Level 5 is an improvement insofar as there is a stable main character that has a series of adventures, but these do not elaborate a central problem. The highest level, level 6 is that of narrative which has a central situation with incidents that elaborate a theme pertaining to a central problem.

Procedure

Cycle 1

The trigger stimuli were presented to the children in the story telling group, and the instructions for task to the play group. The data were collected along a period of one month and then analyzed and was reflected upon. Following the reflection, the trigger stimuli to the story telling and the instruction to the play group were changed and methods of collecting the data where modified.

Cycle 2

The changed triggers and instruction were presented to the children and data were collected applying the modified methods along a period of six weeks.

Results

In analyzing the results, we looked for answers to three questions: First, we wanted to know whether different narrative forms could be analyzed using the same RIS scale. If the answer were positive, we could then ask whether the scale identified how these forms differed.

Validation: Finally, we asked whether scores on the RIS scale would be related to structural measures of narrative coherence.

Each narrative was divided into episodes for scoring purposes. An episode was defined as an event-reaction cycle (Fein 1989). Reliability as agreement between two scorers was measured separately for episodes and for scoring RIS items. Agreement on episodes reached 93% for the Pretense Play, and 87% for the Replica Stories. Reliability for scoring episodes on RIS items reached 93% for the Pretense Play (with the range of 85%-98%), and 94% for the Replica Stories (with the range of 90%-98%). The scripts and stories may be found in Appendices A and B².

A summary table of the results for both narrative types is presented in Table 1, in proportions of Realistic, Transitional, and Imaginal percentage of spread for each narrative. The percentages are presented for modalities and for the whole narrative. The narratives are placed in columns according to their Applebee score.

Table 1: RIS Scores for Replica Stories and Pretense Play Scripts (Proportions of Modalities and of Whole Narratives)

² See note 1 above.

R. Glaubman et./al Narrative Competence in Pretense Play and Stories

Variables	Replica Stories				Pretense Play Scripts			
	a	b	c	Total	a	b	c	Total
Applebee Score	2	4	5		2	3	5	
I % of R	50	43	48	47	62	43	39	48
% of T	33	35	28	32	17	33	39	30
% of I	17	22	24	21	21	24	22	22
II % of R	83	83	43	70	92	73	57	74
% of T	8	8	0	5	8	9	24	14
% of I	8	8	57	25	0	18	19	12
III % of R	48	31	40	41	42	45	28	38
% of T	41	48	50	46	42	45	56	48
% of I	14	4	19	12	16	10	16	14
VI % of R	43	41	44	43	54	59	51	55
% of T	36	37	28	34	26	22	29	26
% of I	21	22	28	24	20	19	20	20
Whole Narrative								
% of R	51	49	41	47	57	58	43	49
% of T	33	36	31	33	26	29	37	33
% of I	16	15	28	20	17	18	20	18

Note:

Levels of RIS: R = Realistic; T = Transitional; I = Imaginal

Modalities: I. = Physical world;

II. = Social-cultural content;

III. = Inter- and intra-personal relations;

IV. = Structural

As may be seen from Table 1, the scores are well distributed on all modalities at all levels, in all narratives. Although specific scoring was different for the various quality narratives, and some narratives did not score on all items at all levels, initial scoring on the RIS items showed that both scripts and stories may be scored on all RIS items, even those narratives with poor structural quality, as measured on the Applebee structural scale.

Thus, the answer to the first question, whether these different narrative forms could be analyzed using the same scale, was positive.

The sum scores in Table 1 show that in nearly half of the episodes of both types of narratives (Pretense Play and Replica Stories), children function at the realistic level (47%-49%). Realistic representations are especially high (73%-92%) for low and medium quality narratives of both types, in the modality of social-cultural content.

Comparing the data for Pretense Play scripts and for Replica Stories, it is striking that both narrative forms produce similar proportions for most modalities at each level. In both types of narrative, we may detect a similar profile of RIS level proportions in all modalities: in modalities I (the physical world) and IV

(structural features), the proportions are around 50% (43%-54%) in the realistic level; around 30% (26%-34%) in the transitional, and about 20% in the imaginal (20%-24%), reflecting the same pattern of proportions for the total scores. In the other two modalities, in both narrative types, we find departures from this trend. As already noticed above, in modality II (social--cultural content), the realistic level predominates (70%-72%), while at modality III (inter- and intra-personal relations), the transitional level occurs nearly 50% of the time (46%-48%) and the imaginal is extremely low (12%-14%) in both narrative types. Distributions for individual items shows that this pattern appears in 13 out of 17 items (76%) at the realistic level, in 9 out of 14 (64%) at the transitional level, and in 11 out of 17 (65%) at the imaginal level. This means that in their personal relations the children prefer to relate to familiar figures (especially in Pretense Play) (item 8), attribute affects as global labels rather than explicit states or behavioral expression of emotions (item 10), and express cognitive attributions of indirect intention rather than ascribe physical perception and sensation or mental processes to the narrative figures (item 11). They deliver and react to verbal messages (item 12), and in Pretense Play even elaborate on the other's message but they hardly do so in the Replica Stories, and they tend to use mostly self-speech, sometimes also phrases, idioms, and tones of familiar figures, but not of remote beings (item 9).

Six items (2, 3, 5, 6, 16, and 17), showed scores at all levels in both pretense play and Replica Stories. Five other items received little or no use in the imaginal dimension of either type (4, 7, 9, 13, and 15). In the former items children move freely between realistic and the imaginal terrains, but in the latter items, the need for realistic functioning prevails.

Discussion

The analysis described here was aimed at examining the sensitivity and plausibility of the 17-item RIS rather than at drawing generalized conclusions about similarities and differences between these narrative forms.

The data support the claim that the RIS is a promising instrument to investigate the imaginative quality of narrative activity. First, it meets the requirement of inter-scorer reliability; trained scorers can reach a high level of agreement. Second, there is a good spread of scores over the different levels and components of the scale, a characteristic which establishes its sensitivity and comprehensiveness. Finally, scale scores are related to structural measures of narrative complexity, a relation that bodes well for the possibility that the RIS will permit us to venture beyond structural models of narrative.

The profiles obtained in the study are in accord with the theoretical and empirical data of developmental psychology, in general, and the study of pretend play and storytelling. For instance, the profiles agree with Johnson et al. (1987), and Smilansky and Shefatya (1990), who showed that the quality of functioning in pretense is mostly dependent on the child's ability to imagine absent objects as expressed in his/her level of objects use. The profiles also agree with Smith et al. (1986) who claimed that children can act symbolically on the fantastic terrain only when they can free themselves from the restraints of the immediate, physical reality of toys and props. The first 3 items of the physical world may represent developmental prerequisites for narrative activity.

Similarities and differences between pretense play and replica stories scores lend additional support to the validity of the scale. On one hand, similar patterns emerged in two completely independent samples of different narrative forms. On the other hand, the few differences that were found are in accord with the different treatments used in these studies. Such was the leading part the replica objects took in initiating the narrative in the story study, a part different from the relatively less conspicuous and more open use of objects in pretense.

For the pretense data, the group was the unit of analysis rather than the individual child. Differences in the social role of speech may also be important. In replica stories children communicate with the experimenter and in pretend play children interacting among themselves. And, of course, the children came from two cultures. Which differences come from setting, task, or culture is a topic for future research to address.

Additional support for the usefulness of the scale comes from the match between scores on the RIS and scores on Applebee's narrative structure scale.

One hypothesis was that subscales of the RIS reflect developmental changes in narrative competence. Imaginative elements missing in younger children's play episodes and stories might be present in the narratives of older children. Younger children also rarely expressed emotion directly and rarely labelled

feelings, even when scenes seemed to call out for this expression. More attributions of mental and emotional states might appear in the narratives of older children.

Conclusion

In conclusion it needs to be reiterated that the present study is just a preliminary test of the applicability of the RIS. Due to the small number of narratives analyzed, results may be subject to chance, therefore the purpose here is to only show a general trend. A careful study is needed to fully validate this scale.

Future work with the RIS can go in several directions. Researchers might use the entire scale or select certain items to study various contexts and conditions. The scale may prove useful for assessing the outcomes of intervention methods or for cross cultural comparisons.

Educators might also find the RIS useful. The RIS might enable teachers to better understand the child through his/her play and stories. It might serve as a useful instrument for evaluating children's narrative competence. They may also want to use it as a basis for further intervention. The sensitive teacher may try to raise the level of imagination in those components in which children show some competency, and to gradually improve their skills in other components using established competencies as a lever.

Most important, also, is that the RIS scale is based on a conceptual framework derived from theory. Unlike previous unidimensional instruments (e.g., Fein 1989; Pellegrini 1985b; Wolf Rygh and Altshuler 1984) this scale is comprehensive, multidimensional and a source of rich profiles of children's narrative competence.

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