

**Children's Play Behavior During Board Game Play in
Korea and America Kindergarten Classrooms**

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ABSTRACT

This study explored Korean and American children's play behaviors during board games in a kindergarten classroom using an ethnographic approach. The Korean participants were 20 children and one teacher of one classroom at attached kindergarten of public elementary school. The American participants were 11 kindergarten children and one teacher from a kindergarten class at a public elementary school. Observations were recorded as children played board games in the natural classroom setting over the duration of 8 months (5 months in Korea, 3 month in America). Field notes and videotapes obtained throughout the observation period were analyzed via three steps. The extracted characteristics of children's play behaviors of two countries were compared.

The results of this study were as follows; First, board games functioned as play-oriented activities in Korea. But in America board games functioned as learning-oriented activities rather than as play-oriented ones in that classroom. Second, there were some differences in children's board game commencement behavior, observation behavior of board game rules, winning strategies, and behavior at game termination, and board game behavior by demographic characteristics but there were common features also found between two countries.

I. Introduction

Board game play is different from free play in that players must follow game rules with opponent players. So in addition to skills, children can learn social skills like how to interact with peers, how to follow game rules, and how to apprehended others' perspectives.

Related researches have demonstrated diverse social behavior as children played board games (Brady, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1983; Shapira & Madsen, 1971). In addition, the research has showed that board game play can be influenced by many variables.

Comparative research can identify the differences and similarities of children's play behavior and psychological traits between Korean and Anglo-Americans by qualitative methods (Choi, 1991; Farver, Kim, & Lee, 1995; Farver & Shin, 1997; Lee, 1999). Howbeit, comparative research of children's board game behavior between the two countries has yet to be investigated.

The purpose of this study is to explore children's play behavior of Korean and American during board games in a kindergarten classroom using an ethnographic approach. Through the observational study of the board game play by Korean and American children, it is possible to grasp the characteristics of children's play behavior. Research conducted with Korean children has been compared with that conducted with American children. The comparison can expand our understanding of children's board game play behavior in cross-cultural contexts.

II. Research Questions

- A. What is the teaching – learning environment of board game play in Korea and America kindergarten classrooms?
- B. How do the Korean and American children behave during board game play?
 - 1. What initial behavior do the Korean and American children exhibit at the onset of board game play?
 - 2. How do the Korean and American children follow the rules of the board game?
 - 3. What strategy do the Korean and American children employ to win?
 - 4. How do the Korean and American children react after winning or losing?

III. Method

A. Subjects

The Korean participants were 20 children and one teacher from a public kindergarten classroom in the suburb of city. The American participants coming from various ethnic backgrounds were 11 children and one teacher from a kindergarten classroom in the east region of America. Korean and American children's mean age was 68 months. Observations were recorded as children played board games in the natural classroom setting over the duration of 8 months (5 months in Korea, 3 month in America).

B. Data Collection

Observations were recorded as children played board games in the natural classroom setting. Four types of board game (Kamii & Deveries, 1979) were used. The board games were “Candy Land”, “Big Radish”

“Magic Rainbow”, “Leap Frog”, “Alphabet Zoop”, and “Popcorn Game”. The teacher of two countries attempted to choose a board game that was relevant to the developmental level and educational activities of the children.

Two teachers’ instructions of games were observed. The video camera recorder was employed and field notes were also taken. After video-taping, follow-up interviews with the teachers were held to better understand the teaching strategies of the board game and children’s behaviors.

IV. Data Analysis

The videotapes of America classroom were transcribed by English speakers. The field notes and the transcriptions were analyzed by the researcher through three steps. The first step extracted specific micro sub-characteristics (for example, competitiveness), the second step classified specific macro sub-characteristics (for example, overall trends), and the third step analyzed data based on research questions (Choi, 2000).

V. Findings & Interpretation

A. Teaching-Learning Environment of Board Game Play in Korea and American Kindergartens

Korea: Board game used very often as the choice activities play materials for learning numbers and directions. Teacher usually prepared board game in areas of manipulative play. Children could play the activities for daily and they could choose 2-4 activities. The children, who choosing the board game play as choice activities, played the game with their peers voluntarily.

Teacher explained the procedures and rules of the game in words to a large number of children and left the children to play on their own. When the teacher thought that the game was difficult for their children, she went to the play corner and exercised children in playing the game, and stressed ‘how to play the game,’ and ‘how to keep the rule’. But the teacher didn’t intervene their play except that the child asked for the help.

America: In the kindergarten classroom, board game play did not take place frequently and, when it did take place, it was applied more as a learning-oriented activity than as a play-oriented one. So the board game was introduced and applied with the clear purpose of teaching numbers and the alphabet.

At first to familiarize the children with the game, the teacher taught them the procedures and rules of the game thoroughly before the children played the game by themselves. After calling two or three children at a time by their names in five groups, the teacher sat at a table with the children and explained the procedures and rules of the game. Then the children were left to play the game for themselves while the teacher guided them on their mistakes. The teacher placed emphasis on ‘taking turns’, ‘placing markers within the boxes drawn on the board’, ‘following the procedures and rules of the game’ and ‘shaking hands with playmates after the game is over.’ After the explanation of the game was over, the teacher called four or five children by their names and designated their playmates as well as their turns.

B. Children’s playing behaviors during board game play

Common characteristics of two countries have been described first, and the each difference in that have been mentioned next.

1. Children's Initial Behavior at Board Games

(1) Choosing Board Game Markers First

The children participating in the game chose their markers, a tool necessary for the board game, competitively. The children displayed behaviors such as running to the game table before others or trying to grab the bag of markers first in an effort to select the marker of their choice. In particular, the color or shape of the marker the children preferred differed by gender, sometimes leading to arguments.

(2) Confusion in Deciding Order of the Game

Before starting the game the Korean children took 'Rock, Scissors, Paper' to decide order of the game. So there was no problem in deciding the order of the game. But they didn't change their seats and so they couldn't keep the decided order exactly.

The American teacher fixed the order of the game from the outset. After designating the first player of the game, the teacher announced that the game would proceed in counterclockwise direction. Therefore, the children were inhibited from determining the order of the game for themselves. In addition, the children did not have a clear understanding of the counterclockwise direction, causing confusion in the game order. Throughout the game, children often declared, "I'm first," expressing their strong desire to be first, which also caused confusion in the order of the game.

2. Observation of Rules in Board Games

Generally the children of two countries play the game accordance with the rules. But there were some problems during the play.

(1) Difficulty of Observing Rules of the Game

At first, the game was not conducted properly for some of the children showed unfamiliarity with the order and rules of the game. In such a case, if there was a player well aware of the order and rules of the game, that player corrected and guided an unknowing player. On the other hand, if all players failed to know the rules of the game well, the board game was not conducted in the designated order or according to the set rules.

(2) Checking & Guiding Observation of Rules Among Children

As the children became aware that the point of the game was winning, they started to take an interest in whether other players were following the rules of the game. They, therefore, actively intervened if another player was violating the rules by immediately correcting him/her or by explaining the rules over again.

(3) Intentional Violation of Game Rules

As the game proceeded, the children displayed a strong desire to win the game. This desire led them to deceptive behavior. Deceptive behavior included 'placing markers in wrong squares' and 'calling out a different number from the one on the die.'

3. Winning Strategies in Board Games

As the game proceeded, children of two countries wished strongly to win the game, the desire of which led them to employ various winning strategies. But the Korean children showed stronger behaviors than that of American children as mentioned above.

(1) Getting My Turn First

Children sought a way to reach the finishing point faster than others. Out of this impatience, the children, though not intentional, wished to go first without waiting for their due turn. This resulted in conflict with other players.

(2) Finding Various Ways to Reach the Finishing Point First

Children deliberated various ways to reach the finishing point before others, that is, to win the game. Some of their deliberations were to 'count the squares left until the finishing point', 'throwing the die to get big numbers' and 'searching for shortcuts.'

(3) Displaying to Friends the Desire to Win

Throughout the game, children expressed in strong terms their desire to win. With words such as "I'm in the very front", "I won this time" or "I want to win too," they displayed the desire and expectation that they would win. Such expressions sometimes aroused competitive behavior in competing players.

(4) Cheating

Children sometimes cheated because they wanted to win. They employed methods such as 'intentionally getting large numbers on the die', 'changing cards to their advantage', 'skipping a few squares on the board,' etc. For intentionally getting large numbers on the die they threw the die twice or changed the front number of die. In Card game, children sometimes moved around to get a peek at the cards of players sitting opposite or beside them.

4. Behavior at the End of the Game

(1) In Case of Victory

Bragging About Their Victory: When a child won the game, he or she showed joy by shouting “Wow” or “Hoorah! I’m number one!” The winner bragged about his or her victory to not only his or her friends but also to a teacher far away, saying, “Teacher, I won.”

Shaking Hands at the End of the Game: The American teacher taught the children to shake hands after the game was over. However, since most of the children who lost in the game walked away from the game table without shaking hands, the winner sought out the other children and offered his/her hand.

Request of Another Round of the Game: Winners found fun in the game and asked to play another round of the game. Since a teacher’s permission was required to continue playing, however, children asked the teacher if they could continue playing.

(2) In Case of Defeat

Leaving the Game Table: In most cases, losers walked away from the game table and moved on to another activity area after the game was over. In America, when the winner offered to shake hands with a loser, the defeated child reluctantly shook hands or rejected it.

Being Teased by Winner: In Korea, the loser was teased by the winner sometimes. Although winning or losing depends mostly on luck the winner scorned the loser.

Request of Another Round of the Game: In America as the game was played repeatedly, even the losers wished to continue with the game. Not only did they find interest in the game but also wanted to experience winning as they repeatedly participated in the game.

VIII. Conclusion

This study observed Korean and American children's board game play behavior and analyzed the study results focusing on the study questions. The conclusions derived from a comparison of the results of two countries are as follows.

First, the American kindergarten classroom teacher did not use board games as much as Korean kindergarten teacher. Moreover, American teacher applied the board games as learning-oriented activities, whereas Korean teachers used them more as play-oriented activities. Therefore, the American teacher endeavored to conduct games more formally, intending to obtain an educational effect. The American teacher, in an effort to teach children the procedures, rules, and required behavior of the game, conducted the game under leading guidance. This indicated that the American kindergarten teacher was more thorough in teaching and guiding the children than her Korean counterparts. Such a teaching strategy was significantly different from Korean teachers who explained the procedures and rules of the game in words to a large number of children and left the children to play on their own. These findings support that American kindergartens place greater stress on academic learning than in Japan or China (Stevenson, Lee, & Graham, 1993).

Second, initial behavioral characteristics observed at the onset of a board game are 'choosing markers first', 'confusion in determining the order of the game' and 'starting the game in the designated order.' Of these, 'choosing markers first' and 'starting the game in the designated order' were common characteristics in Korean and American children. However,

‘confusion in determining the order of the game’ was displayed only among American children. This is concluded to be the result of the teacher’s unilateral determination of game order. In other words, Korean children participating in a game determined the order voluntarily while American children were not given the opportunity to decide for themselves game order, which resulted in confusion among American children.

Third, in relation to observing the rules of the game, Korean and American children showed behavior such as ‘difficulty in observing rules’, ‘checking and guiding amongst themselves,’ and ‘intentional violation of rules.’ American children, however, showed vast difference in their level of understanding game rules due to the difference in intellect and literacy. Such a difference has been shown to have a heavy bearing on rule compliance.

Fourth, winning strategies adopted by children were ‘getting my turn first’, ‘finding a shortcut’, ‘expressing a desire to win’ and ‘cheating.’ Although these characteristics were similar to those of Korean children, American children displayed such characteristics much later, after the game had already been repeated several times. Such a difference can be explained by the fact that Korean children play board game very frequently at manipulative activity corner.

Fifth, behavior shown after a game’s completion differed between winners and losers. In particular, winners boasted loudly about their victory whereas losers showed no clear emotional reaction. Especially Korean children had a tendency to be more dispirited and display an emotionally negative reaction when they lost. And teasing to the loser by the winner was displayed in Korean children.

Based on all of the above, although board game play behaviors are generally similar in the two country children, several particular differences are noteworthy. Those differences can be accounted for by cultural differences; however, the teacher's policy of where the educational purpose of the board game lies and instruction also explain the difference between the two groups of children.

There are some limitations in this study. As participants of this study came from only one particular classroom each country, their specific characteristics and the classroom's climate may affect results. Hence, it is suggested that the generalization of this results needs serious consideration.

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