Smilansky’s Types Of Play

Functional Play (Stage 1)
- Starts in infancy
- Child uses muscles and senses to explore materials
- Starts with exploring how objects feel, taste, smell, and sound and progresses to more physical exploration like throwing, shaking, pounding, and dropping
- Functional play continues throughout childhood as there are new items to explore

Conditional Or Constructive Play (Stage 2)
- Starts around 2-3 years of age
- Emerges as children gain both experience playing and knowledge about the items with which they play
- Children learn different ways to creatively use materials to create objects and patterns
- Children’s creations are purposeful and planned

Dramatic Or Pretend Play (Stage 3)
- Starts around 3 years of age
- Emerges as imitation and grows more complex and imaginative as time passes
- Children imitate the world around them, pretending to be other people and using props.
- According to Smilansky, one child pretending alone is Dramatic Play while two or more children engaged in sustained pretend play is referred to as Sociodramatic Play.

Games With Rules (Stage 4)
- Starts around 3+ years of age
- Children take part in two general types of games with rules—table games and physical/movement games
- The focus of these games tends to be on enjoyment and cooperation more than winning
- This type of play requires that players control their behavior and conform to pre-made rules

Based on the works of Professor Sara Smilansky (1922-2006)
Smilansky was a researcher who wrote many books on children’s play and learning as well as the effects of death and divorce on children and the development of twins. She collaborated with Jean Piaget for a time.

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