

# Pastoral Game: A Novel Technique to Encourage Children's Combination of Discussion and Independent Exploration

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**Abstract:** *The construction of high-quality kindergartens is inextricably linked to children's activities, and games, as children's basic activities, are worth investigating and delving into deeply. As an integral element of the curriculum in kindergartens of the highest quality, games can stimulate the discussion of novel approaches. The promotion of children's games can be enhanced by combining children's discussion with independent exploration. This strategy provides Children with suitable situations and chances, ensuring the appropriate support and implementation of children's games.*

**Keywords:** *pastoral game; discussion; independent exploration*

## 1. Introduction

Game is an essential activity for Children. Currently, an increasing number of early childhood instructors and educators believe that games are crucial and useful for Children, and they regard games as an integral component of early childhood education. China's 2012 "Learning and Development Guide for 3-6-year-old Children" emphasized that "kindergartens should use the game as an important form of comprehensive development education for Children."<sup>[1]</sup> The 2016 edition of the "Kindergarten Work Regulations" stated that "kindergartens should use the game as an important form of comprehensive development education for Children."<sup>[2]</sup> Therefore, as a high-quality kindergarten, we should consider how to support the growth of children's games completely, given that people are continually reconstructing their understanding and awareness of games. How should it be implemented?

### 1.1 The challenges of pastoral games in the new situation

#### 1.1.1 "Pseudo-discussion" is not an actual discussion

Based on in-depth observation of various kindergarten pastoral games, this paper concludes that there is no actual discussion among children before and during the game. The actual discussion of Children should be conducted as follows: First, the children should determine that they want to "be active," and then this talk should encourage them to "be active" in their way throughout the game. Second, children have a great interest and purpose in the game's content, and they will discuss how to conduct their activities following their own "purpose." However, some research indicates that Children rarely encounter the two conditions above in games. Children are less involved in planning each game's development, and there are fewer spontaneous active group conversations. In addition, children are less likely to approach teachers for activities to address difficulties in games, preferring instead to rely on teachers to help discover and organize discussions to find solutions, and fewer children are aware that discussions might promote the development of games.

#### 1.1.2 Respecting "autonomy" in consciousness and acting in "prevention and high control" game mode

Teachers are frequently viewed as spectators during play, and it is imperative that they respond to the needs of Children. Teachers should encourage the autonomy of Children, which is challenging to do in practical activities. Frequently, throughout a game, teachers inadvertently assume the role of the game's commander to implement plans and requirements for the students. Therefore, untimely reminders interfere with the game of Children. Rarely, based on patient observation, teachers adjust their positions in response to specific situations and achieve positive outcomes. For instance, at the beginning of the

game, most teachers review and summarize, and then lead the children to discuss how to play and the specific regulations. Alternatively, to avoid time delays and sluggish progress throughout the game, the teacher intervenes as soon as the problem arises and is likely to arise to accelerate the game's development.

### ***1.2 Research on pastoral games at home and abroad***

Foreign theoretical research and practical experience demonstrate that "nature education" is conceptualized in 2 directions: Rousseau defined "nature" as "inner nature," that is, objective physical nature, which is an unchangeable law that man cannot influence and is the freedom and nature of the educated spirit. Regarding material, "nature education" refers to outdoor and field-based education emphasizing ecology and the environment.<sup>[3]</sup> The starting point is to allow Children to gain rich direct experience, generate real emotions, and recognize activities and experiences. According to scholar Ulla, "nature is the most fundamental educational force. Children experience closeness and love for nature through direct contact and interaction with nature, and the emotion and intimacy with everything in nature make them feel at home."<sup>[4]</sup>

In the 1990s of the previous century, the term "forest kindergarten" emerged in Germany. There are parts of white flowering woodland and bushes, lawns, and clean waterways at the kindergarten. The youngsters gather here every morning at 9 a.m., and then they disperse into small groups for free time. Some children construct sand castles and play games, others climb trees and compete, while others examine ants and snails. Hauben Dela, the inventor of the "forest kindergarten," remarked, "The youngsters are joyfully running around in the woods. Modelling with branches, sand, and stones improves their athleticism and stimulate their imagination. Without excessive discipline, psychological despair does not exist. They recommend releasing Children, allowing them to extend their creativity and physical prowess in these wild activities that directly engage nature, and sensitive nature, and allow children to become the subjects of profound nature. At the same time, teachers provide merely material and logistical support." This idea of personal natural teaching for Children is consistent with the postmodern curricular perspective. Doerr also suggested in "Postmodern Curriculum View": "Break the way modern curriculum teachers regulate courses or classrooms from external supervision, to liberate pupils from a humane perspective, in order to reform the function of teachers."<sup>[5]</sup> Both views illustrate the educational notion of low control and high release from the perspective of maximizing the subjective initiative of children. On this basis, children can engage in in-depth interactions with nature, enabling individuals to develop a comprehensive, shared vision of nature.

Japan has a long history of nature experience education, and there are more than 3,700 large-scale nature schools. These nature schools offer facilities and field activities that provide outstanding environmental education, allow students to experience nature, and conduct various programs throughout the year with the theme of learning about experiencing nature and the environment. "Nature schools may create more enjoyable and calm conditions for children, allow them to observe a variety of wildlife under the supervision of professionals, and foster their team spirit." Hatsuo Sato, the president of the Japan International University of Nature who has dedicated more than three decades to nature education, stated.<sup>[6]</sup> The most prominent characteristics of Japanese nature schools are "local experience" and "emotional education." "Local" refers to establishing roots in the ecological geography and humanistic living environment of the region, grasping the characteristics and elements of various local environments, designing and transforming these elements into educational activity courses, and developing activities with local characteristics. These activity courses are mostly practiced through experience. The activity method is in no way "transmitting knowledge and information," but rather enables participants to utilize all five senses, participate, and experience with others. The emphasis is not on how much knowledge the participants possess, nor is the itinerary strictly adhered to, but instead on finding ways to let the participants' "sensibility" be touched, learn to notice others, pay attention to the surroundings, learn to communicate with others and with the surroundings repeatedly, to open the usually closed perspective and vision, enhance the participants' "empathy ability", "thinking and judgment ability", and " manual ability."

There are numerous educational programs geared to explore nature in the United States. SPARK is one of these organizations; it promotes children aged 3 to 7 and their families to participate in nature education, frequently arranges outdoor hiking activities for families, and opens a dedicated farm to promote nature education for Children. In 2006, the Norwegian Ministry of Education promulgated the Outline of Kindergarten Education (hereafter referred to as the Programme), which refers to natural science education as natural, environmental and technological education. For natural, environmental and technical education, the Outline sets the following learning objectives: to experience the diversity and wonder of nature, to feel the joy of traveling in nature, to interact with nature, to understand the basic

knowledge of nature, and to understand environmental protection. It is both a critique and a breakthrough of traditional classroom teaching in teaching space and an expansion of classroom teaching content that emphasizes the role of direct experience in fostering indirect experience learning. According to postmodern thought, "the practice of wandering is the process of continuously breaking through and eliminating limits."<sup>[7]</sup> Allowing children to integrate into nature and construct their own understanding system of nature and life through experience and emotion is a continuous process of negating, destroying, and reconstructing traditional teaching models.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Soft systems approach method

The "soft systems approach" corresponds to the "hard thinking." "Hard thinking" strives to reach the optimal operation of a system by optimizing the system's components and structure, a process known as "optimization mode." The "soft systems approach" seeks to utilize the logical strength of "systems thinking" to assist in the resolution of social problems but faces a substantial state difference when compared to hard systems (engineering systems). The "functional objectives" of soft systems are difficult to articulate precisely because their "system parts" are interconnected and in constant flux. According to the characteristics of social systems, the soft system method employs the "iteration" of "problem situation description" to replace "system functional thinking"; Replace "the operation of system elements and their structures" with "root definitions", "conceptual models", and "actions to improve problem situations"; Through the repeated "comparison" of the process, the "solution to the problem" is sought to develop in the change, in order to achieve the "goal" of the change. Thus, "system thinking" is contextualized within the "changing and developing real world," and "theoretical" and "practical" thinking is organically blended. Due to the similarity between the process of societal change depicted by the soft systems approach and human "learning" behavior, this method is often known as a "learning model."

The basic process and route of the soft system method are shown in the figure 1.

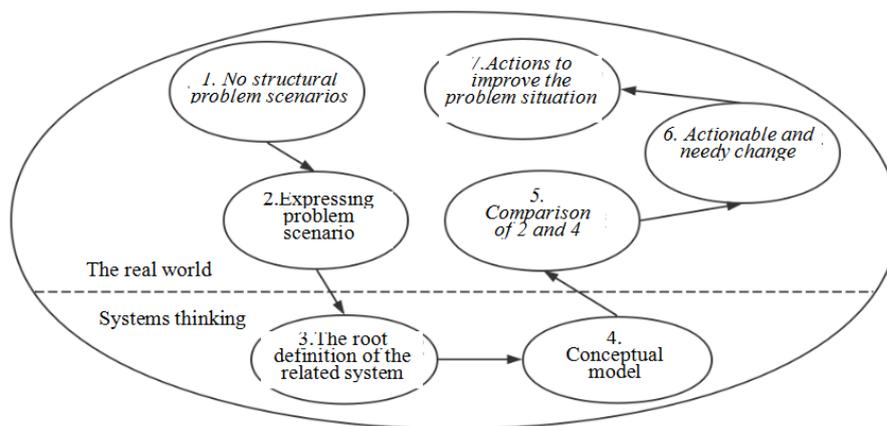


Figure 1: Soft Systems Method Roadmap

### 2.2 Case study method

A case is an example of a child's learning and game activities, an on-site record and after-the-fact description of the facts that occur in the child's activities, and the case recorder's description and interpretation of the typical problems and significant events. The "case study technique" is conducted by teachers with the assistance of colleagues or professional researchers, employing observation, recording, analysis, reflection, etcetera.

## 3. Result

A total of 902 image recordings and 60 game instances of 5-6-year-old children obtained through pastoral games were evaluated, with the following breakdown of the number of works collected for each activity form: 520 theme-related activities; 210 in the sandbox activity; 100 copies of planting activities;

132 theatrical events. The following results are available according to Table 1.

*Table 1: Record Collection Checklist*

Record collection method	Activity record type	Number of records
Club activities	Sandbox activity records	110
	Planting activity records	108
	Records of theatrical activities	112
Themed activities	Thematic activity records	110

### ***3.1 Pastoral games are interconnected with the objectives and content of the game***

This connection is both "related" and "combined." The nature curriculum resources and information, such as flora, meteorology, and rural land, inspire us to provide a platform for children to interact with the natural environment and create natural situations. As a result, we primarily allow youngsters to immerse themselves in the countryside and experience life through natural observation and experience. On this basis, we have developed pastoral outdoor theme activities and pastoral club activities. Second, pastoral games are predominately based on observation and experience, complemented by community and family cooperation, and fully incorporate the objective of fostering the emotions of pro-nature and pastoral culture, paying attention to life, and subsequently acquiring information. On the basis of developing an exquisite floral language teaching scenario, youngsters self-organize the objectives of planting tasks. In particular, according to the direction of planting duties, children pay attention to the growth of vegetables in the field and experience the various stages of life, including germination, flowering, fruiting, and seed retention. In their insect-themed activities, they emphasize the symbiotic interdependence between animal and plant life and employ this natural relationship to defend life. In addition, they increase their pastoral resources by combining agricultural communities, visiting agricultural bases, and participating in out-of-park activities developed by family parent-child investigations. They experience the pastoral values of neighborhood culture and self-sufficiency. Based on giving full attention to pastoral life, perceiving pastoral culture, and achieving emotional development, can aid in the gradual infiltration of knowledge goals, such as obtaining scientific knowledge such as weighing and marking throughout the planting process. Imitate and learn the health knowledge of insects climbing on all fours while viewing insects; Depending on the nature of the activity, acquire social knowledge such as interpersonal communication tactics for focused communication with community members.

### ***3.2 Focusing on children's "object activities" that emphasize the natural condition of operation***

There are two meanings here. One is to expose Children to nature in its entirety rather than artificially extracting certain portions as the object material of instructional activities under the name of "education." If we permit children to interact with natural items in rural games, they will develop a comprehensive grasp of nature. Let the natural observation experience no longer be an isolated ant or flower, but rather the long-term observation of an ant to discover the role division within the colony, as well as the ant's natural adversaries and other biological relationships. This interaction is symbiotic, from merely appreciating the flowers to viewing insects that pollinate the blossoms and obtain nutrition from the plants. Second, children's activities "enter" natural objects regarding perception, comprehension, and expression. These include perceptual-based activities such as observing and imitating nature, fiddling and appreciating, and experiencing and perceiving, such as feeling the temperature and shape of frost during an idyllic winter morning play, imitating insects in the field to eat vegetables, and feeling the power of life from fiddling with mushrooms after rain. In addition, this includes rational activities such as discourse discussions on objects and people in nature, as well as artistic expression (such as painting, singing, and performance) so that children can express and reproduce their feelings and understanding of the pastoral environment and culture through tangible works. The rational activity works here not only refer to traditional forms of art, music, and other forms, but also emphasize "new" works formed by children in the interaction with objects, such as children intervening in the process of plant life, creating drainage channels to help plants grow healthily, and forming colorful planting activity works. To increase the size of the game, the children created their design drawings, collaborated with workers to alter the sand pool, and offered the new sand pool as an activity work to everyone; Field club children established the game's regulations, etcetera. Youngsters produce extensive works based on their comprehension of natural objects and human phenomena.

### ***3.3 Supporting Children to carry out "free activities" in nature "at their scale"***

The case demonstrates that two major factors influence Children's "free activity" in rural areas. Initially, the "life energy" of Children determines that they must always "move," compelling them to "move" in nature in their way. Second, Children have a strong interest and intention in natural life phenomena, and they conduct their activities with their own "purpose."

According to case analysis, more than 80 percent of children prefer to imitate specific "objects" and "personnel" in the garden, discuss the life cycle of plants and animals, and intervene in the life cycle of plants. They take the initiative to discuss, and challenge the status quo, propose activity requirements to adults, urge the activities to be carried out, and use their life energy, which is comprised of solid curiosity and good motivation, to promote the development of activities. Teachers implement appropriate educational strategies based on observing and adapting to the developmental level of Children. When Children imitate the construction of bamboo woven houses, we provide the concept of soil consolidation. We provide the necessary materials when children want to create costumes for their scripted characters. When children are concerned about green insects eating their vegetables, we encourage them to refer to the traditional solar term custom - armyworm to solve problems and extend activities.

## **4. Discussion and Conclusions**

### ***4.1 A fundamental component that enhances the quality of pastoral games***

#### ***4.1.1 Independence***

By cooperating and making repeated attempts, children gradually enhance and expand the game's rules, incorporate their demands into the rules, and attain independence from the institutional level. Through comparison, it is determined that in the early stages of the game, children's peers engage in only deliberate collaboration due to the lack of children's diverse talents. However, they establish independent formations in practice, and there are no discernible regulations. By the end of the game, the child understands the rules and strategy. In addition, under the impact of the collective sense of honour, youngsters began focusing on collective goals, forming a more rational division of labor, cooperating with one another, and striving to finish chores within the allotted time.

#### ***4.1.2 Expression***

Teachers can apply the "let the toddler speak, encourage the toddler to express" principle to the game. Using performance games as an example, children use the topic as a jumping-off point to develop content, characters, and narratives through debate and artwork. Children are more interested in the content they develop than the content provided by the teacher during performances. Children can focus more effort on discussing how to develop the tale, improve the characters' movements and expressions, and represent their collective understanding of the characters' traits as vividly as possible.

#### ***4.1.3 Exploration***

Children observe, discover, feel, compare, analyze, and explore through gaming. For instance, during the pastoral frolic, children search for bamboo shoots in the bamboo bush, count the number of bamboo shoots, measure the height of bamboo shoots, taste the flavor of bamboo shoots, dry bamboo cores, and discuss the relationship between sunny weather, rain, and bamboo shoot growth. By observing the occurrence of "mushrooming after rain," youngsters gain a preliminary awareness of seasonal changes and the cyclical nature of plant growth.

### ***4.2 Innovative practices to improve the quality of pastoral games***

For Children, it is scarce to have in-depth game practice. Through the process of discussion and independent game practice, children can develop their understanding of the world, and enhancing the quality of their play will significantly benefit them. After recognizing the many implications of new approaches, it is possible to actively display the practice mode to enhance the support and happiness of children's active participation and creation, discussion, and practice within the game.

#### ***4.2.1 Providing children with appropriate gaming situations for discussion and independent exploration***

The game enables Children to use their imagination to transform the real environment into a realm of

play. In real life, we frequently observe that youngsters are imaginative and frequently incorporate their imagination into their games. As Children's environments change, likewise do their imagination. As the quality of play increases, children's imaginations become more deliberate and stable. Therefore, giving children rich settings will enable games to guide them, allowing them to discuss and practice the collision of fact and imagination continually. For example, teachers can offer children materials for game settings for performance: visiting Yang Seung-an, and touring rural structures. The children were particularly interested in the local bamboo fence and other housing patterns after their situational experience. Eventually, when performing houses, they argue and consider how to represent spire houses and what is unique about flat-roofed houses, followed by monologues describing the houses' appearance. Children utilize language or behavior to construct new plots and communicate their new understanding of conventional architecture dramatically, internalizing them into new play experiences. This is a successful outcome of children's collaborative conversation and investigation in the circumstance.

In the context of a spring equinox festival game activity, children engaged in a heated conversation regarding the process of plant growth. The performance recreates the entire process of "drilling the earth, germinating, raining, growing, fertilizing, watering, growing, flowering, fruiting, and becoming seeds." The transformation from fruit to seed has again sparked a debate: "How can apples become seeds when they fall to the ground?" How did the rape flower's seeds fall to the ground? In reality, the subtleties of plant growth have captured children's attention, and in the game circumstance of witnessing plant growth, children's inquiries are formulated. During the game, children continue to think, discuss, investigate, and experiment, and they learn to initiate problem-solving collaborations with their peers.

#### ***4.2.2 Expanding the depth and breadth of the game and providing opportunities for Children to combine discussion and independent exploration***

In order to increase the depth and breadth of the game, children will have the opportunity to discuss and explore independently. As children go through various sorts of play, they learn to discover solutions to difficulties through dialogue with others. They share their experiences through conversation while altering the plan for their solo investigation constantly. Throughout the process of refining the same game, children will discuss and investigate independently more and more, which will stimulate additional investigation in this area.

For instance, in theatrical performances, children recreate the appearance of plants from the beginning. They can anthropomorphically convey a series of growth processes, such as tiny seeds germinating, branches tugging, blossoming buds, blooming, fruiting, fading, and withering into the earth. Children express the tenacity and difficulty of experiencing life by imitation and reproduction. The substance of performance games is continuously extended through discussion, exploration, engagement with peers, and interaction with other children's groups.

During the treasure hunt, the children exclusively consider their interests and hobbies and operate independently. In the end, since it was unclear which locations had been searched, children searched the exact location multiple times, wasting a significant amount of time. The children gradually began discussing in pairs and small groups as the contradiction increased. Eventually, they established a rule: before the treasure hunt, distribute the space range and avoid wasting time and labor in the same location. In this process, not only do children gradually try out various collaboration techniques, but they also learn the value of rules via the experience of failure, develop the rules of the game they urgently require, and produce original creations.

#### ***4.2.3 The neighborhood culture in the pastoral environment is an essential gaming resource for teaching youngsters' social skills***

The interpersonal relationships in pastoral societies, particularly those between neighbors, are vastly different from those in urban societies. Residents in cities rarely move around their neighborhoods, whereas people in rural areas have more significant social contact in production and life connections. We discovered that when toddlers play planting activities in the school's "planting area," they seek assistance from experienced neighbors and offer ketchup (made from their tomatoes) to uncles who have assisted them in planting. These social interactions transcend both parental and family interactions. In the pastoral activities of Children, various interactions with rural populations can be observed. Through interaction with the community and neighbors, children begin to independently establish a social circle based on their own needs, realizing the transition from establishing partnerships based on the social relationships of their parents to establishing partnerships based on self-social relationships.

In conclusion, the development of games is necessary for activities, so that children have ample possibilities for discussion and exploration. The organic combination of the two is an attempt at a novel

approach. In the continual accumulation of children's experiences, developing high-quality games is also a requirement of education. Ensuring the "high quality" of games and the "high taste" of teachers for games is also crucial to children's growth. The logical starting point and ending point of children's discussions and autonomous discovery should promote children's growth via the game, teachers have more strategies, and kindergarten activities are of higher quality.

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