

The Values Transmitted through the Play in Early Education

Keywords: *values, play, early education*

Abstract

Children can understand the natural world through play. It occupies a leading place in children's education. Children, when they see and do things, they learn more than when they read or listen. The game's essential function is to help the child adapt to the world in which he lives.

Play is not a simple occupation in which children waste their time but how they maintain their mental health and establish and develop relationships with each other. The play also provides an appropriate framework for developing values and supporting education in achieving its goals. The values are transmitted both through the family and through the school. This article tried to find the values transmitted through plays in early education.

1. Introduction

Educators, advocates for children's rights and academic researchers agree that play is vital for young children. Play should have a central role in young children's lives—from infancy into

middle childhood and beyond. From children's development view, learning, growth and play have an essential role in all these aspects. There are five types of adult approaches to play (Pyle & Daniels, 2017):

- Free play – help and support – provide time, space and things to play with
- Inquiry play – encourage and support children's explorations in play
- Collaborative play – take opportunities to enter children's play and incorporate skill practice
- Playful learning – support play experiences that incorporate specific skills
- Learning games – try specific activities and focused activities on using skills like literacy and numeracy

Kesicioglu, Yildirim Hacıbrahimoglu & Aktas (2019)

recommended that:

- Open spaces where preschoolers play to be as big as possible.
- Play areas where children can play freely and naturally should be enlarged rather than structured and adult-controlled play areas.
- Families should be informed of the negative influence that technological devices can have on children.
- The parents need to take time to play with their children.
- The time children spend with their peers should be longer in which there are different play opportunities.

By challenging children to solve complex problems through play, they will thus benefit from these experiences and help them to be prepared for future academic learning.

Using play to meet children's needs and interests is a more effective way for teachers to meet children's developmental stages naturally than direct academic instruction does. It is essential to

provide teachers with a variety of ways to use the game for optimal learning and instruct teachers on how to master these approaches to effective learning through play (Alharbi & Alzahrani, 2020, p. 15).

2. Early education

Early childhood education is the care and instruction of young children outside of the home. It is now the first rung on the educational ladder. In many respects, however, this most recent addition to the pedagogical hierarchy is quite different from its elementary and secondary predecessors.

Friedrich Frobel, an educator from Germany, is known as a kindergarten parent due to his role in this field. He was a thinker who opened new paths in education, respectively the unique needs and qualities of children. In Human Education, Frobel shows that play is a way of showing children's inner life in an externalised form. His writings urge both parents and teachers to play with children because they create a real connection that encourages mutual respect. He believes that by working with children, teachers become more open to learning from them and can discover how and what to teach them.

Frobel believes that play is an internal activity represented by expressive external manifestations. Always starting with exploring tangible objects, such as cubes, Frobel uses the senses in the playful setting to arouse the child's curiosity and reflection. He believes that the child's spontaneous interest and play create an internal awareness - a connection between the child and the objects explored. For Frobel, this connection produces harmonising thinking, feeling, will and activity in the child.

Frobel strongly believes that in children, there is a divine essence, a spirit. The teacher's goal is to help the child become aware of this inner being. Therefore, he believes that education

means hiring and guiding the child, as a whole, as an intelligent being who thinks and feels and make him self-aware through play.

However, Frobel supports limited adult intervention in children's lives and learning. He does not suggest such freedom for the sake of freedom, but because he understood that people, including children, are more receptive to ideas and suggestions when they collaborate voluntarily rather than by coercion. Proper understanding can be reached only through the child's autonomous activity, through his actions.

Frobel believes that the primary goal of the educator should be to develop relationships. People are always in touch with each other, and every association of this type is formative. Therefore, educators must be highly aware of their intentions and actions and be extremely sensitive to children's various needs. Both parents and teachers are inevitably connected to the child in the process of mutual growth and learning.

In Romania, Early education has three types of activities: personal development activities, free-choice games, activities, and experimental fields activities. The activities freely chosen by the child occupy a central place in the children's daily program, these being represented by games and centres of interest. These are part of the second necessary type of kindergarten activities. The children participate in these centres either individually or in work teams, and all tasks are related to the theme of the week or day. Roleplay is one of the centres of interest that involves providing space, material and ideas for experiencing adult life through play, which is reminiscent of particular activities or the practice of desirable behaviours. They imagine various situations and act according to the social norms learned, suggested and practised.

Several changes took place in 2019, and one of them was when the number of hours allocated for free choice games and activities increased and the number of hours for experiential

activities was reduced. "The teachers not only appreciate the new accents involved in the current curriculum but even suggest some things that could improve the pedagogical practice in the kindergarten. Thus, they recall the following topics" (Spătărelu, 2019, p.14):

- training courses for senior teachers
- retired teachers to give way to young people
- improving stock with materials,
- fewer documents to be completed
- the possibility for teachers to transfer and detach more easily
- fewer children in the class
- reducing the number of methodical commissions.

"At birth, we first learn to make sense of booming, buzzing confusion. We learn from what we see, feel, touch, taste, smell, and do. We develop the special human abilities of language—speaking, listening, reading, writing, and discovering meaning. These new abilities enrich our lives with whole new realms of knowledge, but they never replace our immediate world of senses and activities. We learn what we do" (Schweinhart 2009, p. 16).

3. Values in education

Human society has accumulated, over the years, a vast experience embodied in a set of material and spiritual values. They realise the distinction between human communities, between peoples and between nations. To ensure continuity and cultural identity, each society preserves and transmits its values to the new generation through education. Education thus mediates the relationship of the individual with society by ensuring the assimilation, by the individual, of cultural values and models to adapt to the requirements and demands of social life.

The influential role that education has is pursuing the continuous development of specific human qualities and the exploration of new horizons of knowledge for the individual. Through this role, man's enthusiastic attitude towards his fulfilment is exploited and the sense of responsibility for future generations, expressed by the intention and permanent concern to transmit to his descendants the ideal of education, that of "being" and "becoming".

Marin Călin (2001) distinguishes the following categories of values:

a) strong values necessary to protect life and the environment as they are health (physical and mental), physical tone and strength, beauty and harmony of the body, the balance of the environment, material goods and economic prosperity.

b) the moral, political, legal and historical values necessary for a state and nations such as democracy, sovereignty, goodness, justice, courage, wisdom, independence, legality, dignity, love of nation.

c) theoretical values necessary for human knowledge and creation, such as truth, evidence, objectivity, scientific imaginary;

d) aesthetic and religious values, which concern contemplation of the world and human creations.

The Romanian school's educational ideal consists of the free, integral and harmonious development of human individuality in forming the autonomous and creative personality. Schools are a place of transmission and development of values, whether they are intentional or not. No school transmits only knowledge. Through the way they behave, teachers, through the language they use, through the methods and pedagogy they choose, communicate values to students and the whole community.

The six principles underlying the Early Education Curriculum show that fundamental values are taken into account (Ministry of National Education, 2019, p.4): The principle of:

- 1) child-centred education;
- 2) respecting the rights of the child;
- 3) integrated development;
- 4) interculturality;
- 5) equity and non-discrimination;
- 6) education as an interaction between educators and the child.

Early education based on these principles can be said to be based on the following values: "respect for the unique needs of the child, equality in the rights regarding education, encouraging the right to expression and initiative, interdisciplinarity and integrated teaching, interculturality, equity and non-discrimination" (Spătăreanu, 2019, p. 57).

Education is the realm in which values most often find their expression. The most important values for society are also found in education. The goals of education have always been the goals of society. The ideas they materialised reflected the specific conceptions of time (Albulescu, 2007, p. 17). The school is where values and messages from several directions come into contact: family, church, informal group, media, teachers. That is why the child is exposed to different sets of values: the personal values of the teacher, the values of the institution he represents, the values of the subject taught, the values of the students' class, family values, community values, transmitted values through the media, the values of religious institutions (Cucuș, 2013, pp. 119-122).

4. The play in early education

The game is an act of imagination. When children go out to play - to run, fly, jump - a different kind of knowledge is activated. It is a way of believing, which allows children, if they want to, to run faster than the wind, to jump above the clouds, becoming in an instant part of the exuberance and playfulness of nature itself (Lewis, 2009, p. 8).

Kindergarten play helps children to develop self-control, language and cognitive skills but also social skills.

Early childhood educators have noticed that play helps children develop skills that they will use throughout their lives, and that lack of play can result in delayed or incomplete development (Brown & Vaughn 2009; Copple & Bredekamp 2009). Play is a vital activity for the development of young children. "Through playing games, they explore the world, develop knowledge and accumulate experiences. During the play, they use their imagination and creativity, having to solve problems" (Maftai, 2019, p. 85). The game is in most of their activities and can be "a critical social activity with children playing together and learning how to get along with other children and learning about sharing and negotiating social contracts" (Wasik & Jacobi-Vessels, 2017).

Many of today's early childhood play-based curriculum approaches stem from constructivist theories of development which support the importance of learning through play. Play provides opportunities for children to explore and have hands-on experiences with their environment (Singer et al. 2006). Play also invites children to problem solve, use their imaginations and their creativity, and experience enjoyment of the world around them. It is also crucial that play can be a social activity in which children play together and learn how to get along with other children and negotiate social contracts (Gagon and Nagle 2004). The play has

been described as children's work, and that most of the children are engaged in play.

The game is about the essence of early education lessons. Rich gaming experiences are developmental opportunities for children who can reach self-knowledge and understand the world around them. The game leads to the solid and solid development of the conception of oneself; it helps children feel that they can influence others and create harmony and order, all positively and acceptably. Playing skills, both with objects and ideas, is essential for both children and adults because play forms skills such as problem-solving, perseverance and collaboration - skills that individuals use throughout life (Jones & Cooper 2006).

There are different types of games. The most widespread distinction is between free play and structured play. Structured play or guided play refers to play experiences in which the adult has more of an input, either in initiating the play, controlling the resources available, or intervening or participating during play.

"Seventy-eight children were tested on their theory of mind and emotion understanding. The main findings showed that free play and children's theory of mind is negatively related to externalising behaviours. Empathy was strongly related to children's social competence, but free play and social competence were not associated. Less time for free play is related to more disruptive behaviours in preschool children; however, certain emotional functioning skills influence these behaviours independently of the time children have for free play. These outcomes suggest that free play might help to prevent the development of disruptive behaviours, but future studies should further examine the causality of this relationship" (Veiga, Neto, Rieffe, 2016, p. 48).

There is the self-active game in free play that is used to describe children's spontaneous play with materials with various

possibilities of use, especially reusable materials (Nell, 2013, p.23). The concept of self-play is not new in early childhood. Friedrich Froebel (1887/2005) wrote: Play is the highest stage of a child's development - of human development - it is a self-active representation of the child's interior. Froebel used the concept of self-active play as an essential component of ongoing human development. The child who plays carefully, on his initiative, and who perseveres until he is physically tired will undoubtedly be a determined person, capable of sacrifice to promote his good and the good of others.

Practical approaches and pedagogical research show that a play experience can become a learning exercise in which children can be placed in various playful contexts with a formative character. In support of this idea, Gotesman (2001) pointed out that the game's activity: can serve, however, to goals that the player overlooks, but which are inherent in the game, without his intention and intervention. The game can have a pedagogical purpose and a well-defined instructive content"; "Instructional processes, especially those of an exercise nature, can take the form of play (Gotesman, 2001, p. 217).

The challenge is to adopt a strategy of using the game that combines freedom with structure. Just as today's childhood is different from what it was before, so is the game. The old games are no longer in the lives of today's children. One of these changes is the spaces in which they play. Clements (2004) established that today children play more indoors than the last generation, devoting more time to television and computer games. Karsten (2005) also reported that today children play more indoors, have smaller areas where they can play, have fewer playmates, play more at home, and parents impose more limits on them.

Children are learning less and less from books and more and more through the media. Computer, internet, satellite connection,

television and video games are considered essential in the classrooms.

5. The values transmitted through the play

Playing in itself is valuable for all participating. However, utilising the situations and settings of playing for learning and social processes adds a valuable dimension it adds both value and values. All beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood (Art. 1, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

The game is an educational and training tool for personal and social development, with an extraordinary power to adjust behaviours. In and through the game, it is believed that people can build a better society for themselves and future generations. A society that does not encourage racist attitudes, violence, manipulation of competition results, non-compliance with fair play or ethical rules is a developing society.

Through play, children exercise, make friends, have fun, learn to cooperate as a team member, learn to play fair and acquire skills and ideals vital to well-being, self-esteem and self-confidence. At the heart of these values are the three fundamental Olympic values: excellence, friendship and respect - respect for the rules, respect for oneself and respect for others.

Research has shown that, under the right conditions, children can learn universal values through play and that it plays an essential role in the social, mental and moral development of young children. Specific to some games is the group activity, with all the advantages deriving from its capitalisation within the instructive-educational process. The game involving cooperation, collaboration with game partners, the balance between interests,

reasons for actions and personal efforts with those of the team to which the person belongs involves joining the team, accepting and recognising values, assuming responsibilities, leadership and self-help, critical and self-critical attitude. Favourable or unfavourable situations that occur during the consumption of different phases of the game educate the person who practices sports games. Emotions and feelings, emotional states experienced, and other mental processes present in these circumstances are specific to each person and familiar to the team to which he belongs. They are determined by the team's successes or failures, which gives a deep formative character to sports games, which can be capitalised in achieving development goals.

The game allowed the manifestation of initiative and independence in actions and manifested in solving game situations. These become possible only if the person has a minimum of skills, sufficiently developed motor skills and has been trained to act within precise rules. Many of the leading theorists of early education, such as Froebel, Piaget, and Vygotsky, argued for the use of play as a vital tool in helping children understand their world. Children learn by acting and thus gain excellent knowledge about themselves. Through play, children test hypotheses and evaluate the results' correctness; these results become basic knowledge, which is used in other situations. This is the process by which children come to understand the world through play. "Playing together, discussing, planning, communicating with each other, resolving and/or preventing conflict while playing are all valuable social experiences for a child" (Ljubetic, M., Maglica, T., Vukadin, Ž., & Bulgarian Comparative Education Society, 2020, p.127).

6. Conclusions

Play is a fundamental children's activity that is usually associated with childhood. By playing, children satisfy their need to have fun, socialise, move, explore, collaborate, and build a positive self-image; they develop their creativity and successfully deal with and resolve problematic situations. As it is the dominant activity for early and preschool-aged children, which occupies most of their time, playing is also understood as "one of the most natural ways people learn.

The benefits of children's play are multiple in terms of both specific learning (development of speaking, listening, and observation skills, development of the ability to follow complex instructions, to wait for one's turn, of perseverance, responsibility) and personal, i.e. social learning (building self-esteem and respect for others, developing tolerance, honesty, empathy, responsibility, recognising and understanding one's own and other people's feelings). Depending on the child's age and development, and characteristics, he expresses a desire and a greater or lesser interest in involving adults in his play activities.

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