

ATTITUDE OF SLOVAK TEACHERS TOWARDS USING TOYS IN EDUCATION

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A game is joy. Learning at the game is joyful learning. (J. A. Komenský)

Foreword

Toys are part of children and adult population lives as means for games and tools for upbringing and education. This idea is also acknowledged by one of their characterisation, according to which, the toys are various objects, used as tools and means for children games, aimed for personality development, preparation for work and for future life (E. Pančuhová, 1995.) At the present time, the toys are used more at pre-school and-out-of-school pedagogy, than at school, in spite of the proved knowledge, that it is more effective to use those didactic means, to which pupils have an emotional attitude. As the toys meet attribute of teaching aids, they are justified also in formal school education, and that is why to accept them as full-value didactic means. Absence of toys at school or only their limited use can relate with exerted traditions in Slovak educational system in the sense „Toys do not belong to school!“. Partly, it can be caused by teacher preparation, their professional competencies as well as their personality characteristics.

Research problem

Providing that, teachers are informed about the possibilities and didactic potential of toys, we can expect, that a teacher uses the toys in his elementary education. But we cannot rely on, that the pedagogical qualification of teachers will automatically guarantee a positive relation of the teacher to toys as to specific didactic means. The following questions were formulated to obtain actual empirical data:

1. Which meanings are evoked by the term “toys in education” at teachers?
2. What are the features of toy, which are crucial to use the toys in education?
3. In which subjects teachers use toys the most frequently?

Research methodology

We started from mostly pedagogic and psychological study and also we draw from related research and development disciplines. We studied the actual school subjects (especially curricula and thematic plans); we enquired for teacher opinion about using toys in education. We have processed the information mostly by literally historical and literally comparative method. The main procedure, when collecting the data, was question; we have quantitatively evaluated with quality evaluation methods – analysis, synthesis, comparative analysis, generalisation, mathematics– statistical methods and descriptive statistics. The empirical data were collected at specialised seminars (21 events) within the frame of the project for further education of teachers „Toys as means for education” organised by Methodical-pedagogical centre in Banská Bystrica in the 2006-2007 school year (from 18. 9. 2006 to 26. 6. 2007). The participants of the seminars formed atypical selection, as we can assume, that for such oriented educational events, just those teacher came, which are interested in possibilities how to use toys in education. 475 pedagogues in all (461 women of it) from 133 schools in 25 regions (3 territorial self-administration units) took part in further education in competence of the Methodical-pedagogical centre in Banská Bystrica. Majority (53,7 %) of the participants of 7-hours seminars with workshops at an interactive travelling exhibition of cognitive toys “Scientific toy at school” came from nursery schools and 13%

were teachers assistants in the afternoon-primary-school activity (special extended activity school's club).

Research sample

The selection of the research sample was stratified to find out actual status about - how are toys used by those teachers, where exists an assumption, that they have got a positive relation to these didactic means.

For this purpose, we evaluated selected data from questionnaires of basic schoolteachers (1. stage of basic schools teachers.) The research sample consisted of 128 respondents, 6 of them were men.

Except one respondent (woman), all of them were university educated with pedagogical specialisation and 8.9 % of them graduated also secondary pedagogical school, respectively pedagogical academy. To particularise the research, it is necessary to present, that the graduates of the secondary pedagogical schools, significantly influenced 25 % part of teachers, which think, that during their professional preparation they have got enough information about toys and their use at school. All the graduates of the secondary pedagogical schools answered positively this question (no matter, whether they graduated 33 years ago, or only 3 years ago), but majority of respondents were hard up for knowledge in the this subject.

Summary and results interpretation

To the question “*What is your opinion, are toys suitable means for 1. stage basic school education?*” 98,97 % of all respondents answered positively, only two starting teachers (women) answered that they did not know. Atypism of the research sample was expressed in the amount of positive responses about using toys in education, as 94.87% of teachers use toys in education process. But, the results of periodically realised researches in 2000-2005 years with representative sample of 1. stage basic school teachers showed, that toys are not used at school as didactic means, or they are used very rarely. (e.g. E. Balážová, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005)

To the question “*Which word do you link with the term toy in education?*” was the most frequent answer **joy** (88,43 %). A bit less (77,69 %) formed relation between toys and **motivation**. The next (53,72 %) was the join toys – **fantasy**. Less than one half of the answers were about the relation toys – **relaxation**. The following most numerous categories were **toy and cognition** (40,5 %) and toy **and skilfulness** or manipulation (38,84 %). Considerably less of the associations were **toy and dispersal** or disruptive(1 %) and in comparable range (1,05 %) were relations with toy in the category „others“.

The respondents mentioned as the main reasons for using toys in education most frequently their **motivation function** (65,93%); the next reason – **the toys encourage attention** is directly connected with this category (27,47 %). The respondents understand toys in education as the means for **fantasy** development (13,19 %) and a little smaller part of respondents (12,09 %) see the toys in connection with **relaxation**.

The possibility of **motive improvement**, respectively handicraft of pupils with help of toys has got the same deal (9,89 %) as the category „others factors“.

Very sad finding was, that at the time of accentuation to develop creativity of children, only once occurred the answer „creativity“ at the questionnaire free answers about using toys in education. It is advisable to think on creativity of pupils and teachers in this context, and we recommend them SCHOLA LUDUS – Centre for complexity in science education and non-formal lifelong learning, particularly courses for teachers, e.g. „Complex and creative thinking and communication 2007/2008“ coo-financed from The European



Social Fund, where are inter alia applied also cognition strategies SCHOLA LUDUS, techniques for development of creativity, informal practices and so on. (more detailed at <http://www.scholaludus.sk.>)

The respondents stated as the reason for using toys in education also **increasing attention** (4,4 %) and in the range 2,2 % was the place of toys in **empathy development** and of social behaviour of pupils.

Toys are used in the particular school subjects at the 1. stage of basic schools most at reading respectively at **Slovak language and literature** teaching (42,74 %), **math** (37,61 %) and at **the first teaching/basic skills** (30,75 %). Further, they are used at the technical studies **and art subjects** (equally by 16,24 %), at the **foreign language lessons** and at **ethical education** (6,84 %), and at the same range (by 2,55 %) toys are used at **physical education and musical education**. There was no one instance of using toys in homeland study; the situation is the same as in 2002 year (more particularly: E. Kubániová – E. Balážová, 2002). Toys are not used also at teaching of religious education, a very few was used in the environmental studies (concerning of the nature) of natural science, where toys have got very wide application (an exemplificative car without drive, a car with fly-wheel, a car with electric drive, and so on). We can supposed, that especially using toys in natural science – but not only in this subject – could be an impulse for further individual searching or experimentation of children in young school age and also for whole-life education.

Summary

As toys are in professional (but first of all in laic) discursus primarily known as the means for game and game is considered to be one of the most effective methods for pedagogy and education, then the exploitation of games – and so also of toys – is conditional by the realisation of the recommendations of K. Teplanová (1999, s. 26):

- „to prepare such games, which are meaningful and offer valuable filling for young people,
- to prepare teachers in such a way, to adopt game as own working method,
- to create for game and playing space at school and also out of school.“

The vision of toys and games as natural part of education depends on several factors, but the key element is a teacher as a „starter“ of pupils learning. He is the person, who prepares the atmosphere of educational environment, and he has got wide diapason of possibilities, as teaching methods, hence methods and practices for achieving teaching goal, belong to the most important „tools of teacher manufactory“ (E. Ďurošová, 2005, s. 47). It depends on teachers professional competencies and personable features, whether games and toys will become common didactic means, or they will wait for pupils only after a school gate.

The realised research resulted in:

- the strongest associated meaning of toy in education are understood as joy, motivation, fantasy and relaxation.
- insufficient using of toys in education is caused by professional career preparation of teachers, where the teachers gain neither information nor practical techniques for didactic use of toys,
- non-uniform use of toys in particular educational subjects is probably related with the absence of universal model of systematic use of specific toys.

Good tools do not make a good teacher, but a good teacher uses good tools. (E. Doan)

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