

MA Elzbieta Halaburda
Ph.D. Elzbieta Jaszczyszyn
University of Bialystok
Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology
Department of Pre-School and Early School Education
20 Swierkowa Street, 15
328 Bialystok
POLAND

THE USE OF GAMES AND TOYS IN PRE-SCHOOL AS ADULTS ACTION TOWARDS ENABLING CHILDREN TO FULFILL THEIR NEED TO ACQUIRE THE WORLD

Abstract

The fundamental activity of a child at the pre-school age is playing. Till the beginning of school education it occupies the most important place in the child's life. Through games the child acquires first pieces of knowledge about the surrounding world and expands it.

Necessary for playing, there are toys. By means of colourful, various in shape, form and assignment toys the whole world becomes more and more interesting and stimulating. However, no toy has one and finally defined function. It shows its position and function within the framework of a general educational situation and can be shaped towards intellectual, motoral, social or emotional activation. A nursery school, which has as its disposal various toys, is able to offer a range of activities, which provide new experience and skills.

A proper stocking of a nursery school rooms enables undertaking various activities initiated by a child as well as those organised by a teacher. The nursery school teachers bear co-responsibility for development and education of the child, providing him with materials and tools for acting. Those materials and tools are toys. In the process of educating the child they need pedagogic awareness of the relation between the function, structure or form of the toy and the possibilities of its main user.

Introduction

Providing children with toys should be deliberate. Games organised with the use of proper toys for children at different age should enrich their experience. It is at the same time the basis activity of those who define the conditions of pleasant and effective game and criteria of a good toy. Even if the toy is the best designed and bought according to the observed needs of the child, in order to fulfil its educational role effectively, it is necessary for the child to be able to use it properly, have a place secured, freedom of action and, what's more – a proper, friendly atmosphere. Child creates the view of the world in three ways: through its own activity, through creating pictures and representations and through using words or other symbols (Lipina, 1984).

Conceptual Framework

In literature of subject playing is multisided activity of the child. Usually it's a substitute of many other activities, which are typical for teenagers and adults: learning, working and social activity (Okon, 1987). Very important in this process is a toy, in which we mean "every thing, which isn't dangerous for a child and is accessible for him (...). This object may perform various roles and can be used for many different activities" (Nartowska, 1986). There are toys which can used only for one determined form of activity and toys which can be used for many activities and which release chain of many ideas. Good toy should: 1) enjoy, cheer and interest, 2) encourage a child to activity without suggesting or compulsion, 3) help child in recognising surrounding world, enriching its vocabulary and getting new information, 4) let the child repeat and systematise all the notions got through the life (Dunin – Wasowicz, 1972).

Playing we can treat both as imitation of real world and as play of imagination. Because of this, children need toys that are like real things and toys that let work their imagination. That's why we can divide all toys into two groups: mono- and multifunctional. Small child needs conditions for changing its environment and for creating something new. This, what's ready, done, it doesn't give pleasure for child. Especially, it concerns toys. Delivering child a toy, which is true copy of real thing, it causes that child adjusts all its activities to works done by adult with this same thing. For development of child's imagination, it would be better, if the child grows up in environment, where aren't too many things for using in one way only (Carlgren, 1994).

The Methodology

Aims

Research reported in this article has two aims: 1) to know the teacher's knowledge about role of the toy in child's development (especially role of mono and multifunctional toy); 2) to know the use of toys, if it depends of age of children and kind of activity (initiated by a child as well as those organised by a teacher)

Methods

To make this research I prepared a two-part questionnaire. Part "A" concerned teacher's knowledge about role of toy (mono and multifunctional) in child's development; and part "B" concerned the use of toys by children in plays initiated by themselves and plays organised by a teacher.

In part "A" were 5 questions. Questions number 1, 2 and 3 were partly open and they concerned the role of toy in child's development. Questions 4 and 5 were open. Question number 4 let to know which multifunctional toys teachers would like to have in their pre-school groups. Question number 5 checks if multifunctional toys really are in teachers' groups.

In part "B" were 2 questions. First of them concerned the use of toys by children in plays initiated by themselves and plays organised by children. Question number 2 let to know children's preferences in toys.

The Teachers

The questionnaire was given to 50 pre-school teachers, who work at 10 pre-schools in Bialystok, chosen randomly. All of them are women. 26% of them work with 6-years old children, 28% - with 5- years old children, 24% - with 4-years old children and 22% work with 3-years old children. 72% of teachers obtained master degree, and 28% of them obtained bachelor degree.

Results and Discussion

1. The role of toy in child's development.

Teachers pointed both essential and general role of toy (see TABLE I, points 1-4) and also more detailed roles (see TABLE I, points 5-13).

TABLE I: Teacher's opinion about role of toy in child's development.

	The role of toy		%
1	Stimulates child's activity	46	92
2	Develops child's imagination	40	80
3	Extents child's experiences	33	66
4	Creates skill of control of environment	22	44
5	Creates motoral skill	4	8
6	Instructs social skills	4	8

7	Arouses positive emotions	2	4
8	Develops thinking	2	4
9	Reassures curiosity	1	2
10	Instructs concentration of attention	1	2
11	Develops child's interests	1	2

First four roles of toy have equal ranks in the literature of subject, but teachers often only chose role of stimulating child's activity and role of developing child's imagination. They pay less attention for role of extending experiences and for role of creating control skill. These results shows that teachers know toy's role in child's development well.

TABLE II: Comparison of teacher's opinion about role of mono and multifunctional toys in child's development.

	Role of toy	Monofunctional toy		Multifunctional toy	
			%		%
1	Stimulates child's activity	31	62	31	62
2	Enriches child's experiences	20	40	38	73
3	Develops child's imagination	19	38	33	66
4	Creates skill of control over environment	14	28	23	46

TABLE II shows that teachers attribute multifunctional toys more importance in child's development. They chose the role of stimulating child's activity at this same level for mono and multifunctional toys, but in the rest of roles multifunctional toys have better results (two times).

TABLE III: Teacher's relation towards multifunctional toys.

	Toys the most wanted by teachers	L	%	Type of toy
1	Tools and materials for "interests corners"	17	34	Monofunctional
2	Blocks	9	18	Multifunctional
3	Puppets	3	6	Multifunctional
4	Models	2	4	Multifunctional
5	Puzzle	1	2	Monofunctional
6	Electronic didactic games	1	2	Monofunctional
7	Toys for motoral activity	1	2	Monofunctional

Analysing data from TABLE III we can see, that the most wanted are toys – tools and materials for "interests corners" (see point 1). Two times less people need more blocks (of different types). This, what shops offer to buy (dolls, puzzle, guns...) isn't wanted by pre-school teachers for their children. Very rarely teachers chose multifunctional toys (see points 2-4), it means they don't see the necessary to use them. One of multifunctional toy is also a "treasure chest" (it is a box where children can gather all the things they find useful, found on trips, broken machines, etc). 60,41% of teachers have "treasure chest" in their pre-school rooms.

2. The use of toys by pre-school children in plays initiated by children themselves and organised by a teacher.

TABLE IV: The use of toys by pre-school children in plays initiated by themselves and organised by teachers.

	Type of toys	Plays initiated by children				Plays organised by teachers			
		3 and 4-years old children		5 and 6-years old children		3 and 4-years old children		5 and 6-years old children	
		L	%	L	%	L	%	L	%
1	Favouring motoral development	117	11,4	176	12,6	134	15,61	174	15,8
2	Favouring artistic development	187	18,21	287	20,54	287	33,45	336	30,5
3	Stimulating technical interests	97	9,44	133	9,52	47	5,48	112	10,16
4	Stimulating reproducing the reality	435	42,35	486	34,8	199	22,26	247	22,41
5	With didactic features	191	18,6	315	22,54	191	23,2	233	21,14
TOTAL		1027	100	1397	100	857	100	1102	100

When teachers organise play for younger children, they don't use toys, which stimulate technical interests as often as children do this in plays initiated by them. It is the evidence, that teachers don't do anything to help children crossing the actual stage of their development. Use of toys, which stimulate reproducing the reality, is more often in plays initiated by children. This difference between children and teachers' activity is quite big – 20 percentage points and it means that more stimulation from teachers isn't necessary. Teachers more often deliver children toys, which favouring artistic interests. In this way they play important role in teaching, which leads the development. Difference between children and teacher's activity is also big: 10 and 15 percentage points (in group of children aged 3-4 and in group aged 5-6). Toys which favouring motoral development and toys with didactic features are more often used in plays organised by teachers.

TABLE V: Teachers' opinion about the most popular toys.

	Types of toys	Children aged 3 and 4		Children aged 5 and 6	
		L	%	L	%
1	"Interests corners"	177	37,03	220	37,72
2	Tools and materials for playing in sand, snow and water	72	15,1	69	18,83
3	Pre-school theatre (puppets)	55	11,5	71	12,18
4	Cars and machines	47	9,83	41	7,03

Analysing data from TABLE V we can see, that in teachers' opinion children usually prefer toys for thematical plays and for plays in sand, snow and water, except these children prefer toys for developing their imagination and of course, toys stimulating technical interests.

Conclusion

