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ETHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF CHILDREN'S PLAY

1. Introductory thoughts - culture, tradition and becoming part of culture

From birth onwards, man is deeply immersed in the culture of the social context within which he develops as a person. In this respect culture means the way of life and the way in which a particular social group thinks. It includes values, knowledge, beliefs and behaviour, and all material goods produced by human activity (Čapo-Žmegač, 98. pg. 15). Culture means an open dynamic complex comprising systems of knowledge, beliefs, morals, arts, rights, customs and all other skills and habits acquired by the man as a member of the human society. (Taylor, in Rihtman-Auguštin, 1988, pg. 17). The culture of a social group is a union of the material and spiritual aspect and the behaviour of the people.

Culture is non-biological in character. "Cultural" denotes human. It is a process and result of the humanisation of man, achieved by transformation of human ideas into a new dimension. Culture, a dynamic and variable process, enables man to resolve his existentialist problems more effectively, helps him to develop new quality of life, fulfil his needs and develop a richer motivation system in becoming a more complete person. Human beings would remain powerless without adopting culture and therefore man's basic ability is his "ability to be a cultured being". (Ivić, 1982 pg.109)

Culture is characterized by a certain continuity recognized through tradition as a string of customs and beliefs linked to the past, and to those cultural elements which are disappearing. Tradition is man's attempt of resisting modern way of life. In a way it represents an "opposition to the dominant culture". (Rihtman-Auguštin, 1988 pg. 58). In modern culture too, elements of tradition are relatively constant but they are often not explicit due to the fact that either their form or their function has been changed. These traditional elements add special flavour and charm to the modern way of life. All human communities use the past as means of explaining the present. Studying the traditional culture is an attempt at understanding the meaning of our existence now. Reinterpreting the tradition is man's natural need demonstrated by his observance of rituals and ceremonial behaviour as a way of maintaining the tradition.

It is interesting to view the role of culture, especially the role of tradition in the life of modern man, from the perspective of the fact that it is a learning process. Culture is not part of the genetic make-up, because man is not a "naked ape" but a human being "dressed" in culture and desperately incapacitated without the help derived from culture which reflects more of the history of the species than the genes do (Kamenov, 90 pg. 35). It is therefore necessary to encourage his development from the outside. For this reason many aspects of his development, especially the primary development stages during childhood, are determined as inseparable parts of culture. In the process of transfer of culture the individual learns models of behaviour offered by his cultural environment (Čapo-Žmegač, pg.17). The learning of culture is essentially determined by the fact that man as member of his species cannot function as an isolated individual but through the process of interaction and communication with other members of the community. The general genetic law of cultural development reveals that individual experience is acquired within a social context, i.e. in certain social conditions because "every function in the cultural development of a child makes two appearances: firstly on a social, and secondly on a psychological level, among people as an inter-psychological category and then within a child as a physical category" (Vigotsky, 1983 pg.46). From birth onwards a child lives in the world of material and spiritual

elements of the culture which reflects age-old human experience. These elements representing culture are important factors in the process of socialisation, crucial for the development of higher psychic functions and cultural development of the child. Vigotsky stresses the dialectic character of cultural development and points out the fact according to which man is not purely a product of his social and cultural environment. Growing into a culture is a dynamic combination of objective and subjective aspects interwoven by two-way links, because "a child entering the culture not only takes from it, adopts parts of it and makes parts of it its own but also the culture itself transforms the child's behaviour patterns and fundamentally changes its development" (Vigotsky 1983). The capacity for cultural development of every individual depends on the level of cultural development of the social context the individual finds itself in. But, by the process of internalisation the individual affirms itself as a transformer of culture giving the culture it belongs to a new, personal stamp by its mental processes. The cultural context is therefore always marked by the individuals and is the result of creative human activities producing original works and developing new areas of action (Golubovic, 73, pg. 106). The relationship of the individual towards culture is complex and two-way in character, and it is based on having choices. The more cultural possibilities there are, the bigger the scope of man's choice and freedom to create his own culture as the objective of becoming cultured.

1.2. Pre-school child and tradition

The process of learning one's own culture begins at birth. The emancipation of personality is based on the cultivation i.e. transferral of basic cultural achievements by which child's fundamental human qualities are developed enabling it to gain experience and actively participate in the creative process of development of culture. The encounter of a young child with cultural achievements is greatly influenced with growing up in present-day conditions. Childhood today is characterized by the fact that a child comes into the world far removed from its basic needs. The cultural surroundings, an essential factor in any individual's development, dictate ever-changing conditions of socialisation. The consequence for childhood of this continued tendency to new developments is a growing lack of direct experience of different occurrences while growing up. The encounters with elements of its culture and tradition are therefore reduced to a minimum and are almost entirely replaced by indirect experience. A contemporary urban pre-school child grows up much more alienated from its roots than its parents did. Fast changes, the price of progress, are resulting in ever more intense emphasis on discontinuity in culture between different generations, making it harder for the children to accept the values of grown ups and in turn making the grown ups less suitable role models for their children (Golubović, 81, pg. 194). In this way the child is less able to get to know its past. The strength of the chain, in which the child learning its own tradition is one of the links ensuring cultural continuity of its kind, is thus put through severe tests.

2. Traditional pedagogy or looking back to a richer tomorrow

We have already emphasized one of the more important features of culture, which is the relative continuity of tradition. There is a degree of tendency in every cultural context to maintain certain elements of the traditional way of life and folklore. The transfer of tradition from generation to generation has almost everywhere resulted in an organized and consistent system of attitudes and processes of initiation of children into the culture of the community they are born into. This is particularly relevant to the earliest period of child's development which has resisted institutionalised form the longest.

Institutionalised childhood has been the fate of the late 20th century's child. Up to that time, the involvement of the child with its culture in almost every type of community, from the most primitive to the most urban ones, had taken place in primary, intimate social groups, in the form of intuitive, traditional, spontaneous mediation of the members of its own and other generations. This type of traditional pedagogy is the outcome

of a rich traditional experience in introducing children into life. Although inconsistent, it often comprises an exact system of actions and ways of bringing up children where one often recognises the values they have been based upon. It reveals a certain "theory of personality" but also its philosophical and sociological dimension through finding the answers to the questions: who is the young child, what sort of upbringing does it need, what is expected of it and finally, what is the meaning of all this. These postulates are very much a subject to the achievements of civilisation and culture of the relevant environment and that is the framework within which they are to be assessed. And yet, it is precisely here that transfer of culture shows marked continuity easily recognised in the attempt to draw parallels with modern theory of upbringing (for example the idea of woman- mother as the only primary carer, seeing childhood solely as a period of preparation for later stages in life, particularly the school, difference in treatment based on sex, reluctance towards the institutionalisation of early upbringing, ceremonies associated with child's birth etc.). These elements of tradition are transferred from generation to generation with hardly any changes.

Particularity of traditional pedagogy, which is a by-product of everyday life and work, lies in the fact that although entirely intuitive, in many of its features it is compatible with current findings regarding the norms of child development. This claim can, for example, be supported by surprisingly big importance given to children's potential. Today, it is known that for a child learning is an all-encompassing experience, and within its framework acquiring knowledge is just a by-product of spontaneous learning process. This is a process of generalisation of child's actual first-hand experiences. In traditional pedagogy this process is successfully completed. Furthermore, due to the large number of children in families in which initial introduction to culture takes place, there is a significant degree of communication within peer groups. Children were "brought up" by older children by means of a detailed strategy of rights and duties, which functioned very well in their microcosm. Contemporary pre-school theory puts great emphasis on the importance of peer-influence but due to the decline of extended family it is almost impossible to explore this phenomenon.

Traditional pedagogy was abundant in ways and means by which it attempted to realise its aims. Grown-up members of the community had created their own devices (stories, lullabies etc.) designed for children. They were known as folklore for children (Duran 2001, pg.33). Apart from this, links within peer-groups were also reflected in children's folklore and tradition. These terms signify "all kinds of activities and experiences of children's group in their entirety that have a tendency to repeat themselves from generation to generation" (M. V. Osorina in Duran 2001, pg. 33).

3. Play in the function of preserving child's cultural identity in contemporary childhood

It has already been stressed that in each cultural context a more or less consistent system of the so-called traditional pedagogy can be observed, within which, through the above mentioned devices, special attention is paid to the role of play. Play activities and knowing how to play in general is the integral part of every culture. (Ivić, 1983, pg.13) When studying play it is therefore important to bear in mind that play is part of every individual's life and every human community and it cannot be viewed in isolation from the universal living conditions. M. Duran's view of play (2001, pg. 33) is that play is an aspect of children's special sub-culture of productivity that children maintain and transfer within the framework of their tradition. Besides play there are other children's activities, beliefs, articles, which children produce and keep, as well as language creativity etc., which tends to be repeated from generation to generation.

Play has always been an important component of children's folklore because it represents the actual social practice through which a child sends messages to grown-ups regarding its perception of the world it grows up in by simultaneously creating a world of its own. Focusing attention on the content, function, organisation and messages brought by the play is the right way to discover the riches of the actual children's culture as an integral part of the cultural identity of the community. This is because there is wisdom in every tradition,

which by being transferred and with minor modifications becomes one of life's constants. In this context it is possible to get answers to many fundamental and as yet unanswered questions posed by the contemporary theory of young children's upbringing, as is, for example, the question of the attitude to a young child and childhood as the primary developmental stage.

It is particularly interesting to view play as means of socialisation of children into the culture of adults. In this, we accept the interpretation of play which emphasizes its communicational dimension, as a type of social practice and one of the mechanisms of regulating social relations among children as well as their relationship with the community they belong to (Ivic, 1983, pg.15). Play, as the component of culture of an age group, tells a lot about the position of children in the adult world and could be very useful in overcoming the ever more pronounced gap between them.

Traditional social games among children are essentially linked to the relations between adults. Regardless of the social context, the child endeavours to find ways and means of entry to the magical world of adults. In this respect play has greatly served to prepare for and to help participation in the adult world, i.e. it served to socially integrate children into the social group they belong to. Traditional children's games are a reflection of complete range of relationships built around the framework of the traditional patriarchal family as the only factor in primary upbringing. As such, they reflect relationships, position and roles accepted by the individual members of community as social and cultural patterns of behaviour. In that respect the games mirrored life in the way that in some sections they reaffirmed the relationships whilst in others they anticipated new, authentic patterns and behaviour characteristic for play only.

Traditional social games are determined by the conditions of growing up in traditional cultures. Within an individual's life span there are different biological stages that with their specific features determine social role of man while he is passing through them. Childhood, as the first stage, is characterized by variability in the upper age limit setting, subject to several factors. The most important of these is the one emphasizing the role of a child in production i.e. child as work force (Lečak, 97, pg.97). The world of work and the world of play were separated by a thin line, the reason being general poverty of large families resulting in, by today's standards, exceptionally early involvement of children with work. This is why in the ethnological research of children's play dating back to the beginning of last century (Lečak, 97, pg.211) the following was frequently heard: "We had no time to play". Time and space for play were closely connected to children's work duties. Play took place in the time space between those duties bearing greatly on the type as well as the content and means of play. In those conditions children were oriented towards themselves and organized their own authentic life practices by drawing parallels with the adult world in determining the rules of play, value systems promoted by them and similar. Those "old-fashioned" games are characterized by their marked durability, particularly prominent in their resistance to the changes in the traditional way of life, thus maintaining continuity as their basic feature. For example, the ethnographic research in 1910 of the inventory of children's games in Vrbnik on the island Krk (Žic, 1910) we find the game "špekulanje" (marbles). The same game with the same rules but under a different name can be found in the writing of J. Božičković from the region of Čakovec (1915), J. Beličković from Osijek in 1894, but also in the writing of J.Finka about play among children on the island Sali in 1964. Similar parallel can be drawn with many other games. Finka mentions the game "na piljke" (a game of pebbles) (pg.97), known in Vrbnik as "na piščake" (Žic, pg.175). In description of the games from Čakovec region we also find the game "black queen, one, two, three". The same game is mentioned by M. Duran (2001) but under the name of "red queen ... ". There are many such examples in the above-mentioned sources, the variations of which were practised in all of those regions and those times (for example variations of the game hide and seek, chase, competitive games, games of skills and abilities required by the child in those days). To illustrate this point we should mention the research carried out by F.Ilešic in 1902, which shows the presence of almost identical chants in Slovenian, German and French traditional pedagogy literature. He finds the existence of children's nonsense rhymes (engeli, bengeli...) on more than one location

particularly interesting. Singling out Slav versions and acknowledging the difference in elements of verse, he noticed they all shared a universal rhythmic quality (Ilešić, 1902, pg.223). Looking into the contemporary "nonsense literature" confirms the continuance of these creations in an almost identical rhythmic form.

Furthermore, in the sources mentioned above it is easy to find the common component of many games despite the fact that they were practised in different places and conditions. The content of the games draws strongly on the life and work of adults, but is often modified by children's experience of the same, through the discovery of the authentic rules and structure employed to resolve some of life's fundamental problems (for example assignment of roles in play, determining winning criteria in competitive games and similar). This is particularly interesting in the context of certain special relationships like those between the sexes. Traditional culture is marked by clear segregation according to gender. It is often sanctioned by common law and clearly defined within the value system of traditional pedagogy. Children's upbringing is therefore marked by learning their roles within the context of thus defined relationships. The division of men's and women's work, tasks, rights and duties is prominent everywhere except in some children's games. By constructing their own social practice concerning play, children had organized their own rules with a clear message for the adults saying this is a unique social context of "children versus adults", and, as they enjoy far more freedom in it than in real life, they can therefore without any consequences determine their own rules of behaviour. In this way, play too represents the anticipated relationships between the members in traditionally strictly defined system of relationships between group members.

Based on these thoughts it is possible to raise the question of value of traditional play in the system of the same pedagogy especially in relation to its modern dimension. Would it be possible, why and how to revitalize some of its elements and build them into the contemporary children's upbringing. The answer is positive and can be substantiated with various arguments. The most important of these is the one which gives traditional games the status of pedagogic measures bearing cultural characteristics and as such suitable for the preservation of the cultural identity of children in relation to the uniformity of modern upbringing (Ivić, 83, pg.18).

Contemporary upbringing is characterized by marked segregation of generations apparent in the presence of a clearly defined gap between adults and children. Adults and children create worlds with ever more emphasized borders. Whilst fully crediting the fact that differences between them have to exist, after all - it is about completely different stages in life, natural links also have to be present to facilitate child's entry into the adult world. Modern society, and often the theory of young children's upbringing, stresses the gap by creating children's world characterized by a closed system of values, knowledge and abilities shown to be useless later in life and making their induction into adult world difficult. The objective of continuity is not treating children as though they are adults but to teach children only that which will still be of value when they become adults (Kamenov, 1990, pg.81). The way in which the passage from childhood into adulthood is arranged is doubtless a matter of culture because the distance between the two is essentially determined by cultural attainment. Viewed from the position of importance and role of adults in cross-generation transmission of cultural patterns, it makes sense to turn to certain elements of traditional pedagogy, children's folklore and especially their games, and it can serve as an excellent way of facilitating continuation of tradition as an age-old human wisdom.

Summary

In the paper author problematizes the concept of enculturation as a process of gaining personal cultural identity. She gives the proper focus on the way of transmitting cultural attainments from the elders to the youngsters. In cultural attainments that are more complicated, transmission is only possible through

interference. One of the most powerful elements of cultural transmission develops through upbringing and education, or in other words, through cultivation as an interference process. Through it, man gains experience and becomes trained for active participation of acceptance and creation of its own culture. The process of enculturation begins with birth. Gaining knowledge is a total experience for pre-school child, an act of development which enables establishment in chaos caused by various collections of impressions. Child needs chain of events in adequate conditions in order that cultural transmission has effect. Pre-school institutional effect is determined as powerful agent of enculturation and educational process which takes place in enculturation is determined as instrument of cultural transmission. Cultural enculturation is the destiny of the 21-st century child. Contemporary childhood and various way of children's upbringing characterizes the lack of gaining direct experience about various phenomena that child confronts with in his childhood. That is the reason why is confronting with elements of culture and tradition arched to the minimum and almost maximally inverted to the indirect method of cognition.

In Croatian pre-school practice humanistic orientated conception of pre-school institution becomes recognized. For this kind of conception, educational process is understood as holistic, integral system made according to the child and for the child. It also wins recognition for play as basic child's activity which leads to cognition and as powerful factor in development. The flexibility of humanistically orientated curriculum enables entering of various approaches and ways of organizing the process of enculturation.

In this work the author gives one concept of how urban child learns his culture through the system of play-like activities which are based on growing-up conception by L. Malaguzzi.

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