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Games and different forms of fun involving physical activity as an element of promoting health among children.

Looking upon games and play as one of the forms of human activities undertaken by an individual or a group voluntarily, it is important to stress the fact that no practical matters play any part here and neither does accumulating or producing goods. The most important are emotional experiences, the feeling of freedom to do what one wants and also imagination. Fun and play are an inseparable part of a child's life; this is where the need to influence the world is formed and manifested.

At the turn of the XVIII and XIX century, Jędrzej Śniadecki (1805) stressed the importance of fun and play in children's lives in order to keep health and the proper physical development.

"It is important for children to learn while playing and having fun and it is our job to provide them with such toys and to lead them to such places where they can learn what we want". (Śniadecki 1805, 73).

Such upbringing is agreeable with nature and it does not harm health. Such a form of educational influence was later developed by Henryk Jordan, who in 1888 in Cracow initiated the, so called, "jordanowskie gardens" movement (which is still present in Poland in many towns and cities). Henryk Jordan looked upon fun and play as something as important to the development and rest of a child as the air or food. At the same time, he stressed that fun and play cannot be the aim in people's lives but only a way of proper fulfilling one's tasks, keeping the body fit and the mind fresh and the spirit in harmony with a healthy body. There is an analogy to the contemporary integrative approach to health. In the fun and play (involving physical activity) he also saw educational values, a direct influence of an educator on the development of good character qualities necessary in later life. (Zawadzka 1995, 14).

Later, Eugeniusz Piasecki was one of the great propagators of the idea of " jordanowskie gardens ". As a doctor and theoretician, he looked for the origin of fun and play in the manipulative instinct which is responsible for the need to get to know oneself and the world through attempts taken to complete certain tasks and also different aspect influencing them.

Thanks to H. Jordan and E. Piasecki (among others) fun and play were included in the physical education activities. Z. Gilewicz defined play as: " all forms of activities of people and animals in which we cannot see the motive which could be fulfilling life basic needs, the necessity of self-service, producing and accumulating of goods, necessity to fight or protection doing one's duties, etc. ". In such understanding, we look upon fun and play as the opposite of work and as a voluntarily taken way of spending one's time free from compulsory tasks. However, we look for the aim of fun and play activities in the need for recreation and fulfilling the hedonic attitudes of humans ". (Trzeźniowski 1995, 7).

Many authors from many different fields (psychology, pedagogy, medicine, and also theoreticians and experts in physical education methodology were dealing with the importance of fun and play in human life.

R. Trzeźniowski, a well-known Polish physical education theoretician, points to fun and play as one form of human activities in the whole of his development, mainly in childhood and adolescence, which „ makes life more interesting, more pleasant and more fun, stimulates to undertake further tasks at school and at work and, which is especially important, favours general upbringing, acquiring knowledge and different skills improving physical and spiritual health and also improving relationships between people". (Trzeźniowski 1995, 9).

Discussing the problem of fun and play in children's lives is also justified by the fact that practically every form of fun and play is accompanied by physical activity and also because it

brings about a spontaneous physical activity regardless of physical involvement, condition of health, one's mood, skills or physical gifts and also conditions in which a child is growing up. R. Trześniowski, taking into consideration educational values of fun and play (following Z. Gilewicz's ideas), distinguishes the following kinds of fun and play:

- manipulative games
- theme games, which are also called imitative
- constructive games
- didactic games
- games involving physical activity

Games involving physical activity are different from the above mentioned mainly because they are based on different forms of physical activity which is their integral part and also because they have the beginning and end, their own plot, subject matter and organization.

Versatile influence of such games on the child's body and mind can be associated with the following aspects: they set up a humorous and good mood, they improve your health, support general development, improve physical fitness, they form good character qualities and also create the best conditions for active relaxation (Pańczyk 1999).

If different forms of fun and play are to be of pro-health nature, they should be undertaken in proper conditions and with proper equipment. The most suitable place to get involved in fun and play is the open air. We should forget about classrooms, halls, canteens and even gyms. Hygienic values of the open air are much bigger because they make it possible for us to toughen our bodies.

Because fun and play which involve physical activity belong to the most pleasant activities and they accompany people from the early childhood until the old age, it is important to „ introduce in practice fun and play forms of physical activities and develop pupil's creativeness, to ensure early protection of children from destructive influences of contemporary technical civilization, urbanization and becoming overburdened. Therefore, a team of workers from the Academy of Physical Education – Warsaw - under the leadership of prof. Zofia Żukowska prepared „A guidance book for adolescents, parents and teachers” entitled **Me, health, physical activity** which provides material making it easier to participate in different forms of physical activities. (Żukowska 2000). Another brilliant book containing methodological pointers as well as the description of many games involving physical activity is Roman Trześniowski's book – „Fun and games involving physical activity” (1995).

From the point of view of health and physical development, fun and games involving physical activity play the role of a stimulus influencing a lot of factors. As a result of its activity, the effectiveness of different organs is increased, especially the nervous system, circulation system, breathing system, metabolism and the system responsible for physical activities (Właźnik 1994, 7). In the progress of health and physical development, all the aspects are developed: strength, speed, agility, perseverance – and also physical skills being used in every-day activities of humans.

Physical activity during fun and games is very important to human health. Using various movements in an unrestricted form is the form which not only improves the human body but also is an important health and hygienic operation. Practising fun and games involving physical activity in your free time influences favourably nervous and psychological relaxation. Practising natural movements, such as running, throwing, jumping favours the proper functioning of the whole body-system. Activated circulation and breathing systems accelerate metabolism, regenerate strength and cause the circulation of energy and willingness to learn or work.

T. Maszczak and A. Skład (1999, 132) stress a great importance of fun and play involving physical activity in getting rid of developmental deviations among over-zealous and obese children, children who are physically handicapped, blind or deaf.

Over-zealous children – fidgety, impulsive, whose moods often change and who often have disagreements with peers and adults – through fun and games we can prepare for proper contacts with a group, suiting your behaviour to the requirements of the environment, acquiring certain rules of behaviour, etc. Conducting classes with such children, we should remember, however, about one difficulty. It is also necessary to give children an opportunity

of spontaneous fun, and, at the same time, slowly but systematically adapting them to the activities which require peace and concentration.

Making obese children more physically fit refers not only to their physical organs but it is also supposed to prevent stress and complexes that they are also exposed to. Fun and games which require emotional involvement are especially recommended for such children. When conducting the classes it is important to create situations in which such children will be faced with approval and even praise from others.

Children with dysfunctional muscles, coordination and balance require not only individual exercises and games which help to overcome physical dysfunctions or prevent posture defects. Compensatory and corrective games are indispensable for such children which give satisfaction and pleasure and make people relaxed.

Being physically handicapped in the case of children means a limited mobility which affects mood in a negative way. It is often a source of complexes. Fun and games play a very important role in the process of treating handicapped children. Those games are supposed to influence all the moving organs or only some of them in a compensatory and corrective way. Psycho-therapeutic influence is also attributed to games and other forms of fun.

Blind children or children with impaired sight, deaf children with the feeling of uncertainty, poor coordination, etc. – by a proper choice of games and forms of fun we help such children to acquire the skill of moving without any limitations, the sense of balance, coordination of movements, improve the sense of hearing and general fitness. Games and other forms of fun which take place in the open air make it possible for children to get to know natural obstacles and teach them how to overcome them by themselves. This is a great utilitarian value of such games (Janikowska-Siatka 1999, 6-7). They give children a lot of fun and help them to make new friends.

Properly chosen forms of physical activity, proper intensity of doing them depending on age, sex, level of physical fitness, health of a child favourably influence their proper development in a holistic approach.

Using games and physical activities in a didactic process we can influence the personality of a child to a great extent, we can also form different mind skills: perception, imagination, memory, feelings and will. During fun and games we can familiarize the child with the world and the values of adult people and a given system of moral principles, e.g. responsibility, honesty, justice, conscientiousness, the skill of cooperation in a team with other people.

To sum up, physical activity in the form of fun and games is necessary in childhood and adolescence in order to promote health and proper versatile development:

- somatic – stimulates the growth of a body, development of muscles and functions of oxygen intake, ensures the harmony of development
- intellectual – makes it possible for a child to get to know the closest physical and social environment, various things, phenomena, and teaches ways of overcoming problems
- psychological – creates situations in which a child learns how to overcome obstacles, cope with tiredness, stress, how to control emotions
- social – accelerates this development and forms relations with others in a group of peers, favours the development of self-respect and self-perception (Wojnarowska, Wojciechowska 1993, 7,8).

Moreover, physical activity compensates negative effect of environmental factors and also prevents certain dysfunctions, infections or illnesses, lessens the risk of becoming addicted and also is an important element in the correction and therapy of many illnesses and deviations.

In conclusion, games and different forms of fun should be perceived in the perspective of human life (according to M. Demel, the founder of the Polish school of health education): (...), „what today is careless fun – as the aim in itself – tomorrow will be a way to achieve such aims as conservation of health, correction of posture, relaxation after work”. (Demel 1974, 225).

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