



Chapter 10

Play and Toys

10.1 The Role of Toys in the Child's Life

Toys are as important as play in a child's life. Toys help in the development process of a child's multilateral personality. Along with play, toys stimulate thinking, speaking, imitation, memory and enrich vocabulary, fantasy and the child's emotional abilities. The child's attention and skilfulness is developed when handling toys during a play. During collective plays, children learn to adapt to their playmates, to diminish their egocentrism and to share their toys with the other playmates. Group play shapes the children's behaviour, enriches their knowledge and develops their ability to solve conflict situations. The older the child is, the more he needs playmates and various toys, because the play is more evolved than in early childhood years.

Some psychologists consider toy as important in a child's life as the book is for adults.

We could say that toys are essential in a child's life. If children don't have toys to play with, they make up one. We see children quite often playing with sticks or stones which serve as replacement for toys. The child uses the toys as a partner in the game he is playing and he just assigns it life. The toys are in an animated being in the child's fantastic world life. The toy is not a random object, it has a value in the child's hand, sometimes it is an imaginary friend or an enemy. The toy has an important role in the development of the child's imagination and fantasy. It stimulates the child's creative abilities, lights up his fantasy, generate new desires, preferences, feelings, emotions and interests. The toys bring about deep changes in the child's life by the transformations and animations it is assigned through play: the toy develops the child's needs, desires, feelings, self-awareness.

If the toys are properly chosen, they stimulate the analytic-synthetic activity

in many and various layers of reflecting reality: sensory, perceptive, imaginative and notional.

On the sensory-perceptive level, the child analyses and synthesizes the play object very carefully. Sometimes, children even break their toys; they dismember them in their desire of seeing beyond the whole. Their gestures shouldn't, therefore be regarded as a destructive one. The gesture signals their curiosity, a need for investigation. Children feel the need to "dismember" toys, to see how they are made and what they are made of, to see what "hides" inside them because toys are a direct link between objects and beings from their universe.

The child behaves with his toys on the imaginary level as if they were real life objects; children even assign them social functions. The blending of fictional with real life objects is possible through toys.

They are used in the child's accession to knowledge and they mediate the child's acquisition of social experiences. The toys used during playing develop the child's thinking. The substitution of reality by toys involves all mental processes. We have noticed that toys acquire more subtle meanings as the children grow up, due to the evolution of their thinking. Thinking is practiced because children assign different significances to their toys while playing. These representations are the consequence of their interaction with real-world objects. The child substitutes the immediate, concrete, perceptive field and learns how to operate with the meaning of words with different degrees of generalization.

The toy and the play help in the transfer process from "outside" to "inside". The process is an important stage in the development of thinking at young pre-schoolers. Toys and play have a fundamental importance in the development of personality and adults have to consider them as the child's main playmate.

10.2 The Qualities of Toys

Toys have to meet certain quality requirements in order to be appropriate for the educational demands and develop the children's personality:

- to comply with the formative and stimulation role,
- to determine the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skills and abilities,
- to stimulate the child's imagination and fantasy,
- to develop the child's aesthetic sense,
- to comply with hygiene-sanitary requirements so as not to encroach on the child's safety and health,
- not to contradict moral values.

Toys should be carefully chosen, taking into account the child's age, preferences and intellectual abilities. We should search for high quality toys and toys made for children. These have positive effects and educational values. Usually, toys and plays contain instructions for use, the age they are appropriate for and their role in the child's education. Toys should be carefully selected according to the age of the players, so that they don't injure them in any way.

The toy should be appropriate for the age and individual features of the players. It should have proper dimensions, weight; it should be dynamic and resistant. Toys should make a contribution to the development of children's artistic spirit, the sense of beauty and also be a reflection of reality. The closer they are to reality, the better are the representations of surrounding world.

Toys along with play should contribute to the child's mental, conceptual and social development.

10.3 Classification of Toys

We can classify toys according to the children's ages:

- toys for the ages 3- 4,
- toys for the ages 4-5,
- toys for the ages 6-7 etc.

Another classification is made according to their usage:

1. *psychomotor toys*:

- construction toys,
- sport toys,
- intellectual toys,
- speech development toys,
- science toys,
- creativity stimulation toys,
- logical-mathematic toys,
- musical toys.

2. *social toys*:

- competition toys,
- role play toys,
- cooperation toys.

Toys can be classified in the following manner:

- simple toys: cuddle toys, dolls, cars,

- compound toys: construction toys, fretwork, kits,
- rule toys: society toys, domino, chess, monopoly etc.

It is very important that pre-schoolers are taught how to play with different toys, with other children and also to develop their skills in caring for the toys. Parents should choose toys according to the children's age because most toys have age specification on the box. If play is important in a child's life, so are the toys. They stimulate children in performing different actions, influence the game's content, determine emotions, interest, develop skills, activate imagination and creativity. Toys are teaching materials used in the educational stimulation of children. They have multidisciplinary characteristics; a toy can be successfully used in all kindergarten activities. Its flexibility assigns it multiple values. It also brings about socialization. When a child, who is ignored by the group, brings a new and interesting toy, the other children, guided by their innate curiosity, will rush to him and study the toy. Thus, the child will be accepted by the others and new collaboration relationships, maybe even friendships will be developed.

A high quality and colourful toy, which complies with teaching regulations always has an impact on the children's aesthetic sense.

Affective relationships usually develop between children and their toys. Each child has a favourite toy, especially at very young ages. They are inseparable even if the toy is already damaged. The favourite toy is part of the child's intimacy, is mental balance and affective substitute.

10.4 Books for Children

It is mandatory that all children have access to literature for children. These books contain various information which stimulate the children's imagination,

develop their speaking skills, their pleasure of listening to stories. Books for pre-schoolers are mostly visual books, they focus on pictures. Children can “read” these pictures and share them with other children; they retell the pictures and thus interact and socialize with the others. Children can also retell stories that are familiar to them, based on images and pictures. They develop their speaking skills, make appeal to representations to identify objects and phenomena from the surrounding environment, they can decode the letters of the alphabet and calculate based on the images. Books like: My first encyclopaedia, My first dictionary, Human body, Wild and domestic animals, Underwater world, Jungle book, Stick and learn, Insects and birds, Invisible world, Fairy tales and stories, The illustrated technical encyclopaedia are just some of the most valuable book that shouldn't miss from each child's library. Colouring book are also very useful to children for learning colours, developing skills in drawing and being familiar with colours and drawings.

Puzzle books are highly educational; children gave to rebuild the story from pictures, or to rebuild an object from its parts. These books develop the children's reproductive memory, skilfulness and thinking.

10.5 Games and Toys

Children should be allowed to play and to have their playground if we want them to develop harmoniously, healthy and according to their abilities. A child plays with anything that awakes his interest and imagination. Toy can be considered any object which activates the child's thinking, creativity, imagination, abilities, skills, memory and observation as well as anything that makes him pleasure and engages him in pleasant activities. A carton box, a stick, mud, a sheet of paper, a piece of cloth, they can all be toys in a child's hands. Toys should be used alternatively; otherwise children get bored with them. Toys which copy adults' objects, such as: toy medical kit, mini-kitchen, phones, etc.,

stimulate the child's imagination and develop their socializing skills.

Teachers can identify the children's preferences, special talent, skills and abilities if they follow closely the toys they like playing with.

Seminar Activities



Tasks and Applications

1. —

Starting from the following statement: “*The child is not a pot to be filled but a fireplace to be lighted up. A well trained mind is worth more than a well-filled mind*” -Montaigne), write a structured essay of 150 words.

Working time 10 minutes.

2. —

Show how games can make a contribution to developing self-confidence in pre-schoolers.

3. —

Which are the main functions of games?

4. —

Plan a didactic project for a game based learning activity.

5. —

Give examples of toys that can be used as didactic material for each domain of knowledge.

6. —

Show the functions of toys and what characteristics should they have to meet educational standards.