THE IMPORTANCE OF A GAME FOR SCHOOL READINESS: 
THE ATTITUDES OF PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract
The article presents the results of the study, which helped to clarify the pre-primary school teachers' attitude towards the importance of children's readiness for school. The data was collected, analysed and summarised referring to the following problem areas: the importance of a game for school readiness; planning and organisation of a game in a pre-primary education group; the role of the teacher in the process of a game; children's involvement into the process of a game, and what factors influence it; the types of games, applied in the process of education in preparing children to attend school; children's favourite and the least acceptable types of games, and the possible reasons for this choice; the characteristics of games' organisation, referring to the game's type, purpose and targeted application.

KEY WORDS: pre-primary education, games, school readiness.

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.15181/atee.v2i0.943

Introduction
A game occupies a special place in human's life and work. In a childhood - it is a key activity which helps children to express themselves, to gain knowledge about the surrounding environment and the world, to know themselves and other people better, to experience joy. The researchers of human and childhood phenomenon point out that each stage of development is important to the further human's life and the next phase of development. Learning in school is the next stage of human social life, that goes after the early and pre-school childhood. The beginning of learning in school is a complex and an important stage in the life of modern man. So, it is significant to prepare for it properly. School readiness takes place not only during pre-primary years, but also at pre-school age. In The Programme for Preparatory Preschool Education and Self-education (2002) a variety of functions that encourage self-education is attributed to a game. The Methodological Publication for the Pre-primary Teachers (2011) provides a modern, child-centered, concept of education paradigm with formulated attitudes towards a child and a teacher. This publication encourages to refer to a child as a personality, capable, possessing a power and peculiar techniques for self-education. It is encouraged to include a child into this process and together deal with the issues of his education. The game, as a natural and dominant activity of a child at pre-school and pre-primary age, is a great way and an optimal tool to prepare a child to learn in school. So, the analysis of games and their significance for child’s readiness for school is a relevant and important topic for the modern educational theory and practice.

The Aim of the Research – to examine the attitudes of pre-primary school teachers-practitioners towards the game, its importance, and how, with its help, teachers enable children to develop skills needed for the school, and what problems they face with.


All the authors and groups of authors, e.g. the publishes of The Programme for Preparatory Preschool Education and Self-education (2002), The Methodological Publication for the Pre-primary Teachers (2011) and other scientific and methodological publications, present a unified approach to a game, which states that it is the main, very important and multifunctional activity of a child. Also, the generalised types and classification of games, description of gaming activities are introduced. However, there are no detailed researches and recommendations on how the games could improve child’s readiness for school.
**The Methods of the Research:** the analysis of scientific literature and documents; partly structured interviews; qualitative data analysis, the method of content analysis; the comparative data analysis and summary.

**The Methodology of the Research.** A narrative strategy, based on the assumption that people describe social reality in the form of the story of perceived events, was used while accomplishing a research. Although this strategy is criticised for its overemphasised individual's attitude and behavior in a particular situation, personal experience is an inevitable part of social phenomena (Bitinas, Rupsiene, Zydziunaite, 2008). The qualitative content analysis method was applied. The interview method was used for the collection of the qualitative data. An individual, purposeful, semi-structured interview type was applied.

The data was collected, analysed and summarised referring to the following problem areas: 1. The importance of a game for children’s readiness for school; 2. The planning and organisation of a game process in the pre-primary education group; 3. The role of pre-primary school teacher in the process of the game. 4. Children's involvement in the process of the game, and what factors influence it; 5. The types of games applied in the process of education while preparing children to learn in school. 6. Children's favourite and least acceptable types of games and possible reasons for this choice. 7. The characteristics of games'organisation, referring to the type, purpose and targeted application of games. 8. Problems, while organising the process of the game.

The study covers the deductive aspect, is based on the interviewers'personal knowledge and experience regarding the situation in pre-school institutions and pre-primary education groups. The interviews were recorded by the means of audio, after receiving the consent from the informants. While analysing the collected data, the method of content analysis, which is perceived as a detailed, systematic study of a certain data, with the aim to distinguish the specific characteristics of the phenomenon under examination, was used. With the help of comparative analysis the attitudes of the interviewing participants are compared.

While accomplishing a qualitative research and analysing the data, the principles of anonymity and compliance with ethical requirements were followed.

Interview was conducted on February – March, in 2014, in six Klaipeda city kindergartens, 10 teachers were interviewed: all - women, 7 have qualification of teacher methodologist and 3 have qualification of senior teacher, all of them are pre-school teachers, working in pre-primary education group, the average age of interviewers - 46 years (from 34 to 53), the average of work experience – 16,2 years (from 11 to 23). All the participants of the research have a huge practical experience in education, are highly qualified specialists, knowing the particularities of work in the pre-primary group, therefore, it is assumed that they can provide valuable information for the study area.

**The Results of the Research**

By the first question of the interview it was pursued to find out the attitude of the informants towards the significance of a game for pre-school children's education and their readiness for school. While accomplishing data content analysis, regarding this issue, the following sub-categories of statements were identified:

1. Competences are developed. 7 informants listed separated competencies, which should be developed during pre-primary years, 3 informants generalised.
2. Development is promoted. 5 informants indicated that children, who play, are more emotionally, socially and physically matured, 2 informants generalised.
3. While playing a child gets acquainted with the surrounding world. Indicated by 7 informants.
4. Expresses himself and his understanding of the surrounding world. Indicated by 5 informants.
5. Learns to communicate. Indicated by 4 informants.
7. Promotes individuality. Pointed out by 1 informant.
9. Those who do not play are less talented. Pointed out by 1 informant.

To sum up, it can be stated that all the informants consider children’s games as especially significant means for child’s education and development, and point out all the pre-primary education competencies, indicated in The Framework Programme (2003): social, cognitive, communicative, health protection, and
artistic. It also indicates that by the means of game child learns about the world and himself. The games reveal how a child feels, what he experiences, how he understands the surrounding world. Those kids who play a lot, grow more emotionally, socially and physically matured and are more bright. The games provide children an opportunity to know the world and experience the joy of recognition.

One of the informants (no. 5) indicates as follows:

"The game helps children to tame the world. In any other activity a child may develop himself as extensively as in a game: by the means of game the common and basic life competences are acquired and at the same time the game provides a wonderful framework for the development of each personality".

The informant (no.4) pointed out the benefits of games for a child: they bring true joy, encourage social-emotional development of a child, games also improve children's physical and motor development; games facilitate child's cognitive learning; promote language development; encourage children's creativity, perform many other important functions that are important for the successful children's socialisation and school readiness.

"Games are extremely important for the development of a child. The following benefits of games for a child can be distinguished: games bring real and absolute joy; promote social - emotional development of a child; games improve children's physical and motor development, and facilitate cognitive learning, promote language development, encourage children's creativity, emotionally prepare for learning in school".

During the interview, the participants were asked how children's games are planned and organised in their pre-primary education group. We've highlighted the following subcategories:

1. Games are planned and organised referring to a daily schedule. Indicated by 5 informants.
2. Games are planned and organised referring to a daily schedule and children's wishes and demands. Indicated by 5 informants.
3. Games are organised in the group and outside. Indicated by 8 informants.

After summarising the research data on this topic, it can be stated that the half of the respondents plan and organise games, referring to the theme of the day and children's wishes and demands.

"Games are planned referring to the fixed programme of that day, and, certainly, the children's wishes."

However, the other part of the research, i.e. 5 informants, strictly follows a fixed daily schedule. The informant no. 6 indicates as follows:

"Games are planned on a daily schedule, which sets out the themes and activities of games".

After asking for explanation, it was stated (indicated by 2 of 5), that this is directed by the pre-school headmasters, and if they see that the requirements, provided in a plan, are not pursued - „it will be bad“. Some pre-primary school teachers said that they would be more responsive to the children's needs and more flexible in planning playing activities if it would be allowed by the principal of the institution.

The vast majority of the informants indicate that the games are organised both in a group, hall and outside. The informant No. 2 indicates:

„The planning and organisation of children's playing process take place referring to a fixed daily schedule. For example, from 10 to 11 a.m. children play outside, after lunch children play in a group, at 4-5 p.m. the game outdoors is again organised. Also, it depends on the weather conditions“.

According to the author of the final work, the planning of playing activities enables to provide children with various game themes, which are very useful for the development of a child. It should be noted that the planning of playing activities is not strictly followed to, the nature of games may vary, depending on the desires of children, referring to children's needs.
The research aimed to find out whether all the children successfully integrate themselves into the game process. Referring to this question, the statements of the informants were divided into the following sub-categories:

1. All children successfully integrate themselves into the organised game process. Indicated by 2 informants.
3. Not all the children integrate themselves. Indicated by 3 informants.

It was inquired about the reasons: why children integrate or does not integrate themselves into the organised game process. The following major reasons were indicated:

- Children are not interested; they want to choose another game.
- Pre-primary school teacher's competence and how she engages children in a game are important.
- Depends on whether a child has attended kindergarten before pre-primary group.

After summarising the expressed attitudes of research participants, it can be stated that not all the children integrate themselves into the game process successfully, however, many children involve themselves in the game process. According to the informants, child's involvement in the process largely depends on pre-primary school teacher's competence and readiness, ability to communicate with a child. The informant no. 2 indicates:

"A good organisation of game process is essential. This largely depends on the teacher's competence. The success of the game, and child's involvement depends on teacher's readiness, ability to communicate with a child."

The informants indicate the importance of the goals, a teacher set, and the nature of the games, she offers for children to play. The informant no. 8 indicates:

"Not all the children get involved in collective games, however, they willingly choose to play in small groups with the children, with whom they are friends. Didactic games are sometimes avoided, as children say they do not want to, those games are uninteresting, they prefer motion games.

It can be stated that child's integration into the game processes is conditioned by a variety of factors. Very often it is harder for the children, who rarely attend kindergarten or those who previously have not attended it, to get involved in the game. These children have difficulties in adjusting to the routine of kindergarten, surrounding environment, peers. Very often those children prefer playing alone. Referring to the attitudes of the research participants, children's involvement in the process of the game depends on pre-primary school teacher's competence and ability to organise the game process, when a child is engaged in a new game. When a child gains teacher's confidence, when a child is engaged in a new game, it will always be easier for him to get involved in the process of collective game, he gains social and communicative skills, his emotional expression is trained, language, self and world knowledge evolve actively.

The informants were asked about the role of pre-primary school teacher in the process of children's game. We've highlighted the following subcategories:

1. He plays a leading role in the process of game. Indicated by 4 informants.
2. Co-ordinates the process of game. Indicated by 2 informants.
3. Selects the theme of game. Indicated by 2 informants.
4. Together with the children plans and provides a course of a game. Indicated by 1 informant.
5. Does not interfere into the process of the game, if not necessary. Indicated by 1 informant.

The majority of the interviewed pre-primary school teachers (8 informants) tend to choose the themes of game themselves, to lead, coordinate and organise the process of the game. The informant no. 4 explains as follows:

"The main functions of pre-primary school teacher - to organise and carry out educational process: to plan group's educational activities; to create educational environment in the group, to select measures; to educate and participate in the process of children's education. Thus, pre-primary school teacher organises the process of children's games, selects the themes of game, creates the game's
environment, looks after children during the process of the game, helps the children to get involved in the process of the game."

Only a small percentage of respondents (2 informants) point out, that they discuss the course of the game with children and do not interfere into the process of the game, if there is no serious reason.

After summarising the attitudes of research participants, it can be stated that pre-primary school teachers are more likely to see children’s games as an educational tool in children's education process, than a form of relaxation, self-activity, bringing joy and recreational enjoyment for children. Therefore, they attribute themselves the leading, a coordinating role, take full responsibility for the process of game.

During the research it was concerned about the types of games, which informants apply while educating pre-primary school children. The following types were indicated:

1. Didactic Games (the following are identified: with items and toys, board games, word games). Indicated by all informants.
2. Motion games. Indicated by all informants.
3. Creative games (the following are identified: role-playing games, story games, word games, games-entertainment). Indicated by 9 informants.
5. Simulation. Indicated by 2 informants.

All the participants of the research indicated didactic and motion games, almost all (9 of 10) - creative games. The fewer part indicated traditional, simulation and intellectual ones. At the request to indicate and describe the specific games, the informants identified a wide variety of games, which can be attributed to all types of games. In summary, it can be stated that all pre-primary education teachers use the above mentioned game types, just not always can identify to which type a game is attributed.

During the research the informants were asked what types of games children love the most. The answers were divided into the following sub-categories:

1. Motion games. Indicated by all informants.
2. Creative. Indicated by 8 informants.

It can be stated that children tend to choose motion and creative games rather than didactic ones. Neither of the informants indicated traditional games as children's favorite ones. Didactic games are not very popular with children too, as they were indicated only by 3 of 10. Kids enjoy creative and story games (indicated by 6 of 10).

While talking further about the kids’ favourite games and usually indicating one type of a game and developing the thought, the informants attribute to this type such functions which are not indicated in the scientific literature. For example, the respondent 4 indicates as follows:

"Motion. Children have a tendency to create, imitate and interpret the known actions. They prefer such games where they can move, imitate the natural movements, where running, jumping, throwing dominate. Children of this age are very fond of playing with a ball."

The informant 7 explains as follows:

"Motion stimulates the work of heart and operation of respiratory systems, develops the muscles of the body, especially those who are trained slowly performing the other activities: abdominal, waist, upper limbs. It also hardens the organism, therefore, by playing motion games children not only experience pleasant moments, but also improve their health, increase stamina, develop physically. Overcoming of difficulties, in accordance with the rules of the game, forces players to focus their efforts, to perform accurately. Many children want to keep moving, to express themselves through movement, game."

The informant 9 explains as follows:

"Motion. Motion games are very valuable for the overall development of a child. In particular, they satisfy the child's biological need to move: quicken the physiological functions in organism, develop
muscles, physical characteristics: mobility, speed, etc., harden the body. Motion games affect children’s mental training, and other areas of knowledge."

The above examples show that the informants attribute the features, which are typical to the creative, simulation, and other types of games, to the motion games.

We believe that pre-primary education groups lack opportunities to satisfy the need of children’s mobility, and children compensate this weakness by choosing to play motion games. It is clear from the answers of the informants. The creative games are children's favourite because they are as an opportunity to express and show themselves, to compare their own and other children's abilities. Children of this age are still self-centered, but tend to communicate, to express themselves, and peers’ opinion are important to them. The creative games satisfy these demands and provide joy and satisfaction with the results of their creative activities.

In summary, we can state that in the practical pre-primary school teacher’s activities the types of games are not strictly classified and applied only referring to the certain functions, typical to them. The game is played referring to the situation and is used as an activity, which has a holistic, entire educational function, and responds to the needs raised by the participants of educational process. Also, the answers of informants reveal that pre-primary school teachers perceive and identify all the functions and benefits, received by the children during a particular game.

In the following phase of the research the informants were asked what types of games are less acceptable for children. The attitude of informants to this issue was quite uniform, so it was grouped into the following subcategories:

1. Didactic games. Indicated by 3 informants.
2. All types acceptable. Indicated by 7 informants (3 of them mention didactic games as less favorite).

The informants indicated various reasons, such as informant no. 8 expressed:

"Didactic games require more thinking, greater concentration and accumulation from children. [...] For some kids, these games may be less attractive than, for example, motion ones, where physical expression of a child is more noticeable."

Thus, it can be assumed that the didactic games require more effort, concentration and attention from children. While choosing games, children are more focused on less demanding activities that bring joy and easily attainable pleasure.

In the final stage of the research the informants were asked about the problems they face with while organising the process of children's games. No problems arise – indicated by 7 respondents; 3 indicate that the toys and tools should be renewed. It can be assumed that the conditions for the games to be played are quite sufficient in the pre-primary education groups.

Conclusions

The data of the research revealed that a game is important for child’s development, while preparing for a new phase of life – learning in school. The game encourages child’s social - emotional development, his creativity, language and physical development. While playing, a child gets knowledge about the world and himself. The games reveal how a child feels, what he experiences, how he understands the surrounding world. Those kids, who play a lot, are more emotionally, socially and physically developed and are more matured and bright. The games provide children an opportunity to know the world and experience the joy of recognition.

The planning and organisation of the process of children’s games in the pre-primary education groups is carried out referring to the theme of the day, only a few educators take into account children's needs.

According to the interviewers, children prefer motion and creative role-playing games, and among the least favourite are didactic and intellectual games.

Pre-primary school teachers use all kinds of games, however, in their practical activities the types of games are not strictly classified and applied only referring to the certain functions, typical to them. The game is played referring to the situation and is used as an activity, which has a holistic, entire educational function, and responds to the needs raised by the participants of educational process. Pre-primary school
teachers perceive and identify all the functions and benefits, received by the children during a particular game.

Pre-primary school teachers are more likely to see children’s games as an educational tool in children’s education process, than a form of relaxation, self-activity, bringing joy and recreational enjoyment for children. Therefore, they attribute themselves the leading, coordinating role, take full responsibility for the process of a game and child’s readiness to learn at school.

References
Žaidimas žmogaus gyvenime ir veikloje užima ypatingą vietą. Vaikystėje – tai pagrindinė veikla, kurios metu vaikas išreiškia save, išgina žinių apie jį supančią aplinką ir pasaulį, pažįsta kitus ir save, patira džiaugsmą. Žmogaus raidos ir vaikystės fenomeno tyrimoje gali būti rastas laikas, kurio metu vaikas išraiškina savęs, įgauna žinių apie jį supančią aplinką ir pasaulį, pažįsta kitus ir save, patiria džiaugsmą. Žaidimas, būdamas natūralia ir vyraujančia vaiko veikla, yra priešmokymosi ir priešmokyminiame amžiuje amžius, yra puikus būdas ir optimali priemonė vaikui pasirengti mokytis mokykloje. Tačiau tai reiškia, kad mokymasis pradėtas jau priešmokyminiame amžiuje ir turi svarbų reikšmę mokymosi pradžioje. Žaidimas, remiantis mokymosi mokykloje, yra natūralia ir vyraujančia vaiko veikla priešmokyminiame amžiuje. Mokymasis yra svarbus ir svarbus mokymosi pradžioje, nes tai yra svarbus momentas, kuris reiškia, kad mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus, nes tai reiškia, kad mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus mokymosi pradžioje. Žaidimas yra natūralia ir vyraujančia vaiko veikla priešmokyminiame amžiuje. Mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus mokymosi pradžioje, nes tai yra svarbus momentas, kuris reiškia, kad mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus, nes tai reiškia, kad mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus mokymosi pradžioje. Žaidimas yra natūralia ir vyraujančia vaiko veikla priešmokyminiame amžiuje. Mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus mokymosi pradžioje, nes tai yra svarbus momentas, kuris reiškia, kad mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus, nes tai reiškia, kad mokymasis yra svarbus ir yra svarbus mokymosi pradžioje. Žaidimas yra natūralia ir vyraujančia vaiko veikla priešmokyminiame amžiuje. 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