

Features of Children's Play and Developmental Possibilities of Symbolic Puppet Play

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Abstract

In the first part of the paper we present different theoretical views on children's play as well as features of children's behavior while at play. According to Kooij and Mayjes (1986), two basic aspects of exploring the concept of play can be distinguished: cognitive and affective play concept. Regarding the direction of the individual play concept, features of children's behavior while at play are indicated too.

The following three parts of the paper will explain developmental possibilities of children's puppet plays. In a puppet play, many manners of behavior can be seen according to the concepts of play mentioned above.

In the last part of the paper we analyze the relationship between children's play, creation and art. Many authors notice the connection between play and art – because both of these fields lead to establishing an independent, self-defining form of behavior as a basic feature of creativity, i.e. of children's play.

Key words: *art; children's psycho-social cognition; creation; features of behavior in children's play; symbolic puppet play.*

“A child plays in order to play, and such a play brings joy, movement, even creation of the play itself. Play has the meaning of ‘life and growth’, thus it arouses the interest of those cooperating with a child and taking part in the ‘play of life’.”

Nola, 1980

Features of Children's Behavior at Play – Affective and Cognitive Play Concept

Play is the basic activity of children. At play, children actively engage all of their abilities and with an astonishing certainty discover those games which anticipate their mental and physical development. As a multi-layered children's creation, play carries messages about itself as a product; as an externalization of children's possibilities, it carries messages about the development of mental functions; as a part of children's subculture, it carries messages about the way of growing up and about childhood, which is not just an area of socialization and learning from adults but also an autonomous socio-cultural reality, with its own tradition, structure and functions, in which children appear as self-aware, active subjects. Thus, understanding children's play as an integral phenomenon requires a holistic or at least an interdisciplinary approach (Duran, 2001).

Bruner (1976, as cited in Duran, 2001, p. 14) believes that the phenomenon of a play cannot be completely and unmistakably covered with a single definition. Most of the authors dealing with children's play, and belonging to different theoretical courses, are satisfied with trying to define and systematize features for distinguishing play from other kinds of activity, thus providing a more or less systematic descriptive definition of play (Duran, 2001, p. 14). However, many authors list the following features as the basic features of play: internal motivation, flexibility, connection between play and positive emotions, being process-oriented and not product-oriented, (Chowdhry, 1984, p. 416)¹.

Ivić (1981) explains children's play in the following way: besides the fact that play presents an external practical and independent behavior, it also has different features; autotelicity, divergence and expressivity.

Play is an autotelic activity (Greek *auto* – self, *telos* – purpose, end, goal), which implies play having its own sources of motivation, being performed for its own sake, being more process-oriented than result-oriented (Leontjev, 1981). In play, means overcome goals.

Divergence (from Latin – to deviate, to move away, to part ways) is expressed in play through children's testing all of their abilities while discovering various possibilities hidden in things, objects, situations from children's surrounding. While playing, children appear to be creative, inventive and flexible, all of these features being features

¹ Chowdhry (1984) mentions definitions of a play given by various authors. For Schiller and Spencer (1875), play presents a use of energy in surplus. Gross (1898) considered a play to be instinctive learning for later life, and Gullick (1898) believed a play to be recapitulation of the early stages of human life. Dewey (1922) thinks that a play is 'an activity' not being performed in order to consciously reach a goal outside the play itself, although he believes that a play is something more than physical activity itself. According to him, in a play, a child builds a thesaurus of terms and creates a world of meanings necessary for his/her intellectual development. Huizinga (1950) provides a thorough definition of a play: "A play is not just a physiological or psychological reflex. A play is a function of a culture, one of the main bases of civilization and it is not connected to a specific level of civilization, but it is a universal and an integral part of the overall human and animal life. Civilization does not rise from a play – it grows in a play and it never leaves the play" (Chowdhry, 1984, p. 416).

of divergent thought. Play offers numerous solutions, all of them being the right ones, all of the combinations being acceptable and being able to prolong the play (Duran, 1988, p. 22).

Matejić (as cited in Duran, 1988, p. 22), on the basis of his thorough research of the sources, lists the following features of children's play: activity, mostly connected to childhood, "unused" activity, free and spontaneous activity, activity whose only principle is satisfaction, stimulating activity and activity which appears with no specific external necessity.

Kooij and Mayjes (1986) linked a number of different theoretical views on play (presented by more than 100 authors) and they explained the types of behavior occurring in children's play in a systematic way. According to these authors, two basic aspects of exploring the concept of play can be distinguished: cognitive and affective play concept. Piaget (1928) and many other East-European authors often stress cognitive aspects of behavior in play, highlighting their significance for social adaptation (e.g. Elkonin, 1981). Levy (1978, as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p. 360) highlights more affective views on play, such as: intrinsic motivation, internal control, and suspension of reality.

Intrinsic behavior, which is considered to be the result of a child's own decision, is defined by Levy (1978, as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p. 361) as the need to be active, and this need comes from the person himself/herself or it is derived from the activity itself. Taking into consideration Levy's opinion and the opinion of many other authors – Atkinson and Birch (1978), Berlyne (1968), Deci (1975), Ellis (1973), etc. – regarding intrinsic motivation, Kooij and Mayjes (1986, p. 361) list five significant features of play. They are: the need to research, the permanence of behavior in play, the intensity of behavior in play, the level of satisfaction with play and the duration of play.

The concept of "internal control", developed by Rotter (1966, as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p. 361), can be explained as the level to which a child controls his/her activities and their consequences. The freedom of an individual's action in play, on the one hand, and the help of the rules which control the play, on the other, present important aspects of internal control. Based on this description of internal control, as well as the descriptions by many other authors from Europe and the USA, Kooij and Mayjes (1986) list five features of behavior in play important for internal control: the targeted nature of play activities, the existence of play strategies, taking over the lead in play, the existence of a play plan, and the experience of success.

Reality suspension is explained in terms of a key feature of children's play, "to work as if", "to pretend", "to imagine". In a play, reality and imagination coexist. Thus, Levy talks about detachment from reality referring to the loss of the real "self" and temporary acceptance of the imagined "self". Buhler (1930, as cited in Kooij and Mayjes, 1986), was one of the first authors to describe this "dual" relationship of a child and his/her surrounding at the moment of playing: the relationship which is at the same time real and imagined. For different authors (Vigotski, 1966; Neumann, 1971;

Hetzer, 1972; Piaget, 1972, as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986), dynamism of imagination and activity of presentation make up the key part of different theoretical views on play. Taking into consideration such views on reality suspension in play, Kooij and associates (1983, as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p.362) list the following five aspects: level of creativity, level of complexity, relationship with reality, scope of imagination and dynamics of imagination.

In bringing together those theoretical aspects which focus on explaining internal mental activity while playing, Kooij and Mayjes (1986) take into consideration three concepts pointed out by Piaget (1972) and many East-European authors (Mentschinskaja, 1974; Elkonin, 1980; Galperin, 1980; Vygotsky, 1981; Pinskij, 1981) as well as by authors from western Europe (Kingma, 1981; Van Pareren, 1981). The concepts include: self-regulation, mental activity and flexibility.

The term "self-regulation" means that an individual's activity is a consequence of his thoughts and desires. An opposite term is "guidance from the outside". Self-regulation means that a child himself/herself decides on his/her activities, their planning and realization. The concept was operationalized by Kooij and associates (1983, as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p.362) through the following: persistence in a specific type of play, duration of an activity, concentration, solving problems through engaging in an interaction with one's surrounding, being interested in a goal that should be attained, not being interrupted, and gaining a experience regarding the result (as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p. 362).

The terms "mental activity" and "intellectual initiative" refer to being focused on a spontaneous action, without being stimulated from the outside. Children act spontaneously and imitate what they had noticed in adults' actions, but they introduce changes into the imitation. If a child is mentally active, this means he/she is focused on the surrounding so that he/she can follow the action. This term was operationalized by Kooij and associates (1983, as cited in Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p. 362) through the following categories: stimulus, systematic approach, creativity, the level of variations in the elements of play, an overview of the plan of play, critical position, and maintaining balance at the level of activity.

"Flexibility" presents a structural aspect of play enabling a child to overcome the variety it happened to be faced with, and without learning something new. The variety may relate to a type of a situation or a structure of an action. Internal speech control is an important precondition for the development of children's flexibility. The mentioned authors operationalize flexibility by means of the following components: the analysis of problems in play, variety regarding the topic of play, stability of opinion, taking over the lead, control, transfer to other situations. Based on play, mental potentials develop flexibility as their immanent quality (Kooij & Mayjes, 1986, p. 363).

Different approaches to exploring children's behavior in play as well as bringing the approaches together, indicated here in the way explained by Kooij and Mayjes (1986), can be, as the authors point out, of great importance for practitioners. "We hope," say

Kooij and Mayjes, “that the way we organized the information on the importance of various aspects of behavior in play offers a whole series of approaches to finding a solution to practical problems”.

The views on children’s play indicated here prove that play is a very important activity in children’s life. According to Vigotski (1977, p. 58), in a play, like in a focus of a magnifying glass, all guidelines of a child’s development are found. Unlike in other practical activities in childhood, in play adults give a child the highest level of independence. Thus, at play a free movement is outlined, as well as the actual development, creative independence, which means that a child “demonstrates” his/her competences in play (Duran, 2001, p. 165). “If play enables the models of behavior to get transformed and the new models to occur, those models that so far have not existed, we should logically assume that play influences the development of mental potentials, too” (Marjanović, 1987, p. 94).

A Puppet in a Symbolic Play

Transition to the play of pretending or to symbolic play, also called imaginative play, the play of imagination, the role play, the “as if” play, dramatization play, etc., is one of the most important children’s steps in their development. Numerous authors point out that symbolic play is (main) children’s activity and that it presents a path towards the development of children’s emotions and abilities. Symbolic play comprises all the features of play mentioned here.

Symbolic play is the “ability of symbolic transformation of an experience, i.e. a way or a form of adaptation, understanding, even of explaining the experience” (Marjanović, 1977, p. 10). The development of substitutive situations, substitution of an object with another object, of an activity with another activity is the basic feature of children’s symbolic play. In a symbolic play, a child is capable of using an object in the way that overcomes its goal and purpose, in a completely new sense: a stick in a play can become a horse, a leaf, a plate, a rock, and a soap can turn into a father, a conductor, a sportsman, even a ghost, for which a child has no a model in any real situation. Through imagining that he/she is “something” or “someone” else, a child slowly stops relying on the real world.

In the substitution of real objects and activities with their symbols, a removal from reality can be seen, which refers to the beginning of abstract thinking². In other words, in the beginning, the perception of an object dominates over its meaning, i.e. a child gradually “lets” an object become another one, which means that the sense starts to prevail.

In a play with a puppet, as in a symbolic play, children do something with puppets, they talk to puppets, perform with them, “as if” the puppets were persons: children use different gestures, speech, in order to present what they imagine. What makes a

² According to Ivić (1978), a symbolic function is a general ability to acquire and use, i.e. to create signs.

puppet a symbol in a play is the communication through symbolic movements, voice and visual appearance, through costumes, masks, or a shaped object. When a puppet master transfers his/her energy to an object – by animating an object with his/her look and hands – a puppet gets a new, symbolic meaning, it becomes a new creature. A puppet becomes a person, a metaphor (Majaron, 2004).

“An animating component of a puppet, a puppet's being simultaneously in the ‘real’ and the ‘unreal’; we do know a puppet is but immobile matter, but thanks to a puppet master's actions (actions of a child or an adult), a puppet is animated, it performs certain actions, talks to us, expresses the state of mind, it communicates through emotions” (Broggini, 1995, p. 25). A wondrous suggestiveness coming from an animated puppet, explains the author, ‘an impression that lives’, that has ‘a soul’, enables both children and adults to get used to the pleasance of fiction, to the “as if” play, “to an empire of illusion, belonging to objects and transitive changes, all this being a basis for the life to come” (Broggini, 1995, p. 36).

The one who plays, transforms himself/herself into a puppet, his/her focus being transferred into the puppet. By lending voice to a puppet, the one who plays identifies with the puppet, despite the fact that he/she is separated from it and knows that all this is “as if”. From a material which is seemingly shapeless, complex symbols are created, which in contact with other puppets and objects form a new unit. “In this matter, we are talking about the joy of discovering and creating, the joy of broadening experiences, enriching personality” (Bastašić, 1990, p. 9).

By representing an action, a person through a puppet requires a child to be decentralized and, in a way, to separate his/her own viewpoint from the viewpoint of other people, i.e. to overcome cognitive egocentrism – the inability to understand other people's impressions of an object. Moreover, representing certain emotional states of a character of a puppet, which is achieved through the voice and the gestures of the puppet, contributes to understanding the emotions of the character and to the development of higher emotions – compassion, for instance. A dual affective plan sometimes happens to be clearly distinguished in a play, sometimes it does not. In a play, an “animated” puppet helps to distinguish the emotions of the puppet from the emotions of the person more clearly (Bastašić, 1990).

In the beginning, a child performs those activities with a puppet which happen to be important for the child and current in his/her life, the activities which happen daily and which the child has performed a number of times. In a puppet play, a child imitates (it plays) adults doing something, the child imitates the way adults do it, and sometimes a child adapts what has happened to himself/herself. Thus, the symbols – substitutions (puppets) which the child uses in the beginning are very similar to what they substitute (a puppet must be similar to the child, children's cart must be similar to the real cart, etc.), and later on the similarity becomes slighter. Therefore, only when a child has reached a certain mental maturity, toy-symbols have a somewhat different and more complex function in a play. A child is then capable of playing something

which he/she does not have a direct experience in, but he/she might have seen that in a puppet play, heard while listening to a story, seen on TV, or a child can combine all these (e.g. a character from a puppet play can fly over a town). A child is capable of deciding what to play in advance, and then looking for the toys to be used in a play (for instance, an idea to perform a puppet show with characters from a story and preparation of everything needed for the performance – a stage, music, light, etc.). Toys (puppets)-symbols are used now to help the child realize the imagined play, and in the previous stage it was vice versa. Through speech, objects and activities in a play (depending on the topic of the play) now function as substitutions (symbols) for the real ones. Toy-symbols become less and less similar to the real objects, they substitute something, they are present instead of something else, and this includes a modification of the relationship with the reality. Now, the toys – puppets do not have to be similar to the child, they can be very stylized, imaginative or open; a puppet can be replaced by a big ladle, a stick, or a child can, with a pure movement of his/her hand, show how he/she puts a puppet to sleep (Miljak, 2009, p. 16).

Observing children's puppet play, an educator finds out how a child behaves towards a certain puppet's character, whom the child identifies with, what problems he/she encounters regarding social relationships, what he/she is afraid of, what makes him/her happy, what kind of imagination he/she has, and to what extent his/her speech and communication competences, movement skills, musical skills etc. are developed. A puppet will stimulate a child to act spontaneously in a play, to show his/her skills, all this being a valuable source of information on a child and of great help in education in the future as well as in communication with parents (Ivon, 2010).

Children's Puppet Shows – for the Development of Psycho-Social Cognitions

Engaging a puppet in the realization of an educational process can offer many possibilities for a creative pedagogical approach. A puppet as a visual, auditory and tactile “instrument” will incite a child's susceptibility to external stimuli and significantly incite communication (verbal and non-verbal) with an educator and with the child's peers. Through the forms of puppet stimuli: puppet plays, puppet shows, talking with puppets, learning with puppets, we will reach curricular objectives more easily and significantly “soften” the common directive approach to children (Renfro, 1982).

Researchers from the CRESAS Center (Center for education and school preparation) explain, within their theoretical framework of interactive pedagogy, the possibilities for building psycho-social cognitions of children in a situation when children create and perform puppet shows on their own (Stambak & Sinclair, 1990). In these symbolic puppet plays children develop their psycho-social cognitions related to human reactions as well as cognitions regarding their influence on other people's behaviors. Interactive actions initiated by this have a positive influence on the development of

cooperation, dialog, and confrontation among children, all of which present important factors in the learning process.

According to the results obtained by the above-mentioned researchers, there are two situations in puppet shows that are of key importance for building psycho-social cognitions in children. The first one is present in the phase of defining the topic of a puppet play, when children try to reach an agreement regarding the idea or the topic of a puppet show, and the second one is present in the phase of developing the accepted idea through a puppet show.

In the phase of defining the topic of the puppet play, children (age 3 to 4) usually do not announce its content but they define the topic through an exchange of rebuttals, starting with the first proposition. Their agreement is often direct: one child proposes an idea by holding his/her puppet. A partner goes on with his/her rebuttal which in a way develops the idea of the first child: the play is already present. Such a performance, "organized" by children with ease, comprises demanding communicative and cognitive skills. In order for the partner to react efficiently in play, he/she has to understand the fictive content expressed by the topic's initiator. He/she has to be able to decode communicative actions (linguistic expressions, gestures, posture/attitude, mime) of his/her partner to discover the meaning. The authors believe these realizations would not be possible if, in the course of their life, children had not acquired the framework of common references facilitating mutual agreement. On the basis of such a common framework children very quickly manage to give sense to their partners' statements and show their possible agreement (Breauté & Rayna, 1995).

In a case when the first reaction of a partner does not contain acceptance of the proposed idea, children start the process of real negotiations. In order for their intentions to be accepted, their main strategy is the use of interpersonal persuasion. To reach their goal, children use different means: maneuver, transposition, backing down, blackmailing, authority, and they avoid sharp conflicts. Negotiations are done "in quiet", someone in the end backs down and children eventually agree. "It seems they are aware sharp conflicts could block the show" (Breauté & Rayna, 1995). Mutual organization of puppet shows (two, three children or more) is appropriate for negotiation exercises.³ Building their scenario, children imagine, assign roles, discuss the role logic and each child's actions, they discuss possible change of roles and of the plot. In this phase, children learn how to realize their intentions adjusting them to the intentions of other children. The process of mutual adjustment, ending with an agreement regarding the topic of the play, leads to ascertaining and developing children's interactive skills and their cognitions related to the "other people and me" relationship.

³ L. G. Katz and D. E. McClellan point out that scene-drama plays unite the demanding cooperation asking for greater social skills of children. "The level of social-cognitive skills needed for reaching an agreement on the roles and goals chosen as well as the scenarios defined requires mutual orientation of two or more children in dramatization" (1999, p. 48).

In the phase of developing the topic of the puppet show, the characters chosen by children usually happen to be humans. The roles vary depending on whether the characters have a similar or different status: adults – children, which can be determined by authority; relationships among peers, or relationships among adults and children marked with attachment and friendship. If an animal occurs as a character, in the relationship human – animal fear is mostly dominant.

Games dealing with adults – children relationship are dedicated to authority. Adults do not appear as standard characters, as being demanding and strict, but rather as being more or less strict, more or less tolerant, characters who reach an agreement with a child. Adults – children relationships on stage are far from showing only the relationship of subordination. On the contrary – such relationships show different ways of opposing to authority. Thus, we can see that children are completely aware what different relationships of power can be like and how they depend on the personality of the characters included. We can see how children possess a nuanced reflection regarding the requirements of adults. Subtlety with which children in their play show the relationship of power of adults towards them proves children are able to analyze their social environment in details, obtain various notions from the environment, even typical features which can be used for caricaturing and reversal of authoritative relationships to a joke.

Children are indeed interested in a relationship that can occur between people of the same status (among adults or among children). By establishing a relationship of attachment on stage, children try to express the harmony of such relationships. In plays, relationships of identity are usually developed; satisfaction is expressed through stressing the features that are similar to other people's features. Thus, through characters expressing their satisfaction while performing the same activities and rituals, children express affective fellowship by imitating their partners' movements and words (as described long time ago by Wallon, 1971) as well as the joy coming out of this. It happens that characters express one or more intellectual agreements taking the same viewpoint regarding the behavior of a third party. Children then express alliance that can go so far as to reach a deal on mocking the dominant social values.

Children know, explain the mentioned researchers, that friendly relationships rely upon mutual trust tested in mocking play. Children show they have learnt what a friendly relationship is through mutually opposed characters. While doing so, they are aware that this is all for fun. Older children use techniques of provoking and confusing others, although they skillfully avoid interruption of a play by keeping aggression at the minimum. "Through their plays, they prove a solid self-awareness, and awareness of others, they show their skills to rely upon characters' features so that they provoke each other" (Stambak & Sinclair, 1990, p.62).

In other words, theater plays of this type are an excellent opportunity for children to assess, by borrowing various roles used to express their reaction, the position of the others and their propositions from a different perspective and different viewpoint

(Vigotski, 1976). Through such comparison, they build and create their cognitions. They show awareness of the fictive meaning of their scenarios, i.e. they are aware of the specificity of theater creations and they know scenarios they come up with exist as entities that can be re-played and in which actors can replace their roles. In this way, during the very theater play, children have a possibility to distance themselves from the psycho-social reality dealt with in their performances. The distance with regard to the content of a created play contributes to an objectivization of psycho-social cognitions being construed right at that moment. "We can assume that children manage to understand their social environment in their mutual plays by ascertaining what they already know and simultaneously using that knowledge. What is more, mutual puppet plays force children to take a certain distance in terms of reality and it is this that makes them reflect upon their own actions" (Stambak & Sinclair, 1990, p.70).

Researchers conclude that, taking all this into consideration, we can see how theater puppet shows enable the development of social cognitions, skills, regulations of emotions, and that they are an opportunity to practice various social skills, important components of social competence (Stambak & Sinclair, 1990).

Puppet Plays – for Stimulating Linguistic and Speech Creativity in Children

Most authors stress the importance of children's symbolic play for the development of creative potentials, i.e. creativity. Creation is a general developmental tendency, immanent to children, as children have a natural interest for their environment, for exploring and discovering the environment and for creative adaptation of their experiences. Creative behavior is defined within the framework of the divergent processes of thought, which implies authenticity and variety in finding different answers to the same situation, and not correctness and uniformity. It is play that enables creative adaptation of the objective and the real as while playing a child flexibly organizes the already familiar parts in a new and authentic way.

An early manifestation of those (creative, esthetic) activities, according to Piaget (as cited in Mitrović, 1978, p. 48), is conditioned by children's internal needs to harmonize their inherent tendencies and to express their individual realities. Piaget (as cited in Mitrović, 1978, p. 49) treats the activities as a series of children's tendencies to satisfy their internal needs, their individual lives with specific interests, desires, joys, excitement. The activities actually present self-expression and first creative expressions helping them gain maturity and contributing to establishing children's contact with reality. They enable the children's "self", not to remain closed, but to become expressed in a concrete and real way. Piaget assigns a fundamental meaning to the activities as they are important for the development of children's understanding of the world and of their conceptual thought.

Bateson (as cited in Bretherton, 1984) points out that play is not an attempt at faithful reconstruction but a process in which a child creates new "maps" and transforms the

old ones. In a symbolic play, for instance, children solve problems in an individual and specific way, they apply and adapt various types of behavior, they put themselves in new and unusual contexts in which they use already known forms and they assess the forms in this way, change them and acquire them. In these terms Brainerd (1982, as cited in Šagud, 2002) called play an “experimental” medium. In play there are new creations, turnovers, “new combinations, terms of use, addition, finalization and testing” (Miljak, 1996, p. 37). Individual objects combined in new settings lose their normal functions of use, acquire new identities, discover new possibilities. Objects can present anything a child chooses: they become visual metaphors to which a child gives a personal meaning in accordance with their intentions at the particular moment (Rodari, 2001). Most of all, it is important, stresses Fink (as cited in Duran, 2001, p. 16), that reward lies in the action itself and that it does not have to be confirmed through an external form. Play does not occur for the sake of future bliss but it is already happiness in itself.

Winnicott (as cited in Supek 1987, p. 57) derives creativity itself from play or from mental states conditioning play. He says: “Not until they play, and maybe only when they play, are children and adults free to show their creativity. A child is creative only when it plays, and only when it is creative, it is capable of discovering its ‘self’”. A type of “a creative way of perception (noticing) which gives an individual the feeling that life is worth to be lived” is important for creativity.

For a child of pre-school age, according to Supek (1987), “everything is in play”, a child’s spontaneity and imagination face stimuli and patterns from the outside, they merge into one in a child’s experience, they flow directly, without stopping or hesitation, in short, they make an inseparable union of movement, emotion, perception, or simply of experience. The experience of imagination, fiction, illusion, stimulated especially by puppets, helps the child acquire the reality, develop its cognition, provides experience that produces creativity and remains a basis of creative thought in the adult age.

Stylization of a puppet at three levels – the level of movement, voice and physical appearance, significantly defining any puppet, helps a child to feel, accept and understand the symbolic situation. This stimulates a child’s imagination, especially linguistic creativity. Majaron (2012) says a visual impression of a puppet requires shaping voice appropriately, and the need for a narrative expression is strongly supported by another creative action in animating the puppet. “At this, seemingly simple, example we can see an incredible strength of a puppet” (p. 15) and in this sense Paljetak (2007) says: “A puppet, a puppet-toy, with no doubt, introduces us into the world, into an illusion of the world, only to introduce us then, as a puppet-being, into the world of illusion, into the art of the world...” (p. 25).

As soon as a child takes a puppet into his/her hands, he/she wants to make the puppet speak; lending voice to the puppet, a child gives life to the puppet, Renfro points out (1982, p.1). The purpose turns from fun, from satisfaction of playing with a puppet into communication with others, communication with co-players or

viewers (Vigotski, 1977). Together with the puppet, language becomes an object of play, implying that language is not used only in order to communicate but a child's attention is directed towards features of the language itself.

Pokrivka (1980, p. 31) points out that physical appearance of a puppet stimulates a child to make up unexpected linguistic constructions or harmonies, longer monologs and dialogs, to play with sounds, syllables, words, grammar forms, to make up new words, to find the shortest and best expressions for what they want to say (from Croatian "dubina" = depth: "zadubiniti" – to dive; from Croatian "plaža" = beach: "plaževac" – a person who sunbathes at a beach, explains the author). Speaking through a puppet and through a literary text, claims the mentioned author, a child uses the vocabulary present in the text to a great extent, he/she adopts shorter linguistic structures, sentence stylization, figures of speech, composition, and thus a child develops esthetic linguistic component. Čukovski (1986, as cited in Mitrović, 1988) assigns important meaning to such play and considers them an important starting point for later children's ability to enter the spirit of poetry and of art of words in general.

The most common and the most interesting type of children's plays are puppet improvisations (plays, puppet shows) performed by pre-school children in various forms: monolog, dialog (Stenzel, 1995), in smaller or larger groups, with a screen or without it, in front of the "audience" – the other children in the group. "When children take control over a puppet and, hiding themselves behind a screen, try to animate a puppet and speak through it, they are offered a possibility to use different 'languages', to express freely and to develop their linguistic creativity" (Ladika, 1975, p. 36). Children have the need and the skill to realize the content, action, dialog using their own imagination, or through a writer's instructions/didascalies, playing several roles along with using bodily movements or moving puppets and objects. Here, we can see how everyday, usual children's play brings a child into the field of creating and creativity.

Children already at the age of three, according to Stambak and Sinclair (1990), as actors-puppet masters in their puppet improvisations combine the skills of manipulation and animation of puppets, using all the possible sound expressions, mime and movements. They speak using the voice of the character (in a scene where a wolf and a bird talk, a boy playing a wolf speaks in a deep voice, and a girl playing a bird speaks squeakily); they adapt their voice pitch according to the situation and to the other speakers with whom they keep the thread of the story and the sense of the plot (a cheerful voice when a child speaks about the guests coming over, a decisive voice when a child warns about the arrival of the wolf, a disappointed voice when a girl concludes she was late for train, a serious voice when she calls upon the boy to change the way he behaves, a strict voice when a child scolds the dog because he turned the chair over, or a quiet voice when a child sees a basket full of apples has gone, etc.); they make sounds and create onomatopoeias to illustrate the actions of pretending (noisy eating, when a whale swallows Tom Thumb; "yum, yum" when tasting a

cake; “tch, tch” to stress the puppet going behind the screen; “hush” when sleeping). Background sounds are used to animate actions from everyday life and sometimes to symbolize duration (sleeping and waking up) and space (going away from the scene and coming back). Also, background sounds are used to imitate animal call (meowing, barking, cooing...), i.e. to create a language of transformed resonance in order for a certain behavior to be understood and to show they use animal calls. While doing so, children perform emphatic actions: highlighting, expressing contrast, insistence upon something, stressing certain parts of the speech. They especially distinguish nuances regarding voice pitch to express the intensity of the feeling: a manner of saying proverbs, an educative manner of speaking, a protecting or sentimental manner of speaking (Stambak & Sinclair, 1990, p. 44).

By performing such actions of verbal and sound animation of a puppet, children broaden their vocabulary, learn to understand symbolic values of semiotic signs and the language of non-verbal communication, they acquire the “theater manner of speaking” and have the possibility to consider their attitudes, their judgment and possibilities of solving the problems they encounter while performing in the show. Finally, the necessity of keeping “the audience” makes children-puppet masters express themselves clearly and logically, defend their ideas, support their opinion regarding a certain way of behaving in a puppet they represent, etc. However, children-viewers often interfere with the play in a vivid way, they can direct the play, change its course, introduce new details in the plot, etc., which presents an opportunity for them to develop their linguistic competences, too. We can that say children-puppet masters – behind the screen – as well as children in the audience – in front of the screen – have the possibility to enrich their vocabulary and develop linguistic and other competences through a puppet.

A child’s favorite play is telling stories with the help of a puppet. In such play we can see the real strength of a puppet: physical appearance of a puppet suggests a child to make up an appropriate voice for a puppet, to use words, to form sentences, to make up dialogs, to form paraphrases of already known stories with same characters or to make up completely new situations (Majaron, 2004, p. 82). While speaking, children play with words, they repeat words, flip them around, change their order, make series of words or new sentences, and while doing so children themselves are both speakers and interlocutors” (Delaš, 2006, p. 83).

To conclude this part of the paper, it seems that we could accept the opinion of Singer and Singer (1990, as cited in Kitson, 2002) stating that we cannot escape the impression that an imaginative play, such as puppet play, has an important role in the development of personality. “It seems that individual differences in frequency and variety of a symbolic play are connected to a richer and a more complex language, as well as to a greater potential for cognitive differentiation, for divergent thought, instinct control, self-entertainment, emotional expressiveness, and perhaps also self-awareness” (Singer & Singer, 1990 as cited in Kitson, 2002, p. 93).

Children's Play – Creation – Art

Long time ago Lascaris (1928, as cited in Mitrović, 1978) established the ludic principle, a form and symbols characteristic of art creation and she concluded children's play to have the elements making it an esthetic, artistic activity. Children aged 3 to 7, point out Piaget and Chateau (1954, as cited in Mitrović, 1978), show great artistic tendencies, such as: drawing, building, modeling, singing, drama performances. The authors call these activities free expression, self-expression, symbolic play, or esthetic activities.

Children's play, as we have pointed out, occurs without a direct practical purpose or use; children play for the sake of joy of playing itself, and anything from the outside trying to define the play, to limit (lead) it, disturbs its freedom. A child plays for the sake of playing, just like in art – the purpose without a purpose, a realization striving only to realize itself, points out Grlić (1980). Starting from Gadamer's concept of play, Grlić believes that play is a being in itself, but also a being of a child. "And play itself, this great and inexhaustible force of creation and survival of children, and of the world in general ('a cosmic play'), might help us notice and more easily establish connections between the world of a child and the world of art" (Grlić, 1980, p. 7).

It is known, Nola (1980) also points out, to what extent a child is able to reach the highest layers of creative play by using a paint brush, words, a puppet, "the sense of the beautiful", "so that a number of artists such as Dostoyevsky, Winnicot, Tartaglia and others, wonder if this already presents art, an artistic play" (Nola 1980, p. 84). Children's play, therefore, contains in itself an important artistic feature: it is not a copy of life, just like art is not a copy of life. Art is also a type of a play in terms of the real life, says Pražić (as cited in Nola, 1980, p. 85).

"Playing within the sphere of the creative, but also of the surreal, is an unomittable content of art", says Zagorac (2006, p. 69). Vigotski (1976) also points out that art and play are mentally related activities or processes for a child. "A common type of children's art is very similar to play – while playing, through the use of words, rhythms, sounds . . ., a child expresses a tendency to create a world of its own turned upside down to more reliably convince himself/herself of the existence of the laws governing the real world. This reinforces (and does not undermine) the feeling of reality for a child" (Vigotski, 1976, p. 326).

Therefore, in children's play, just like in the process of adults' artistic creation, there are, the same mental (emotional) processes, such as excitement, focusing, followed by enthusiasm – *flow* (Csikszentmihalya, 1990). However, a child is privileged over an artist, points out Winnicott (as cited in Supek, 1987), because it actually "sees things as if for the first time", with no effort, completely spontaneously and intensely. For instance, Winnicott says: "A painter Matisse obeys an impressionist rule – an impression an object has on us should be painted, and not the object itself, but he tries to achieve this through objects and special effort of abstracting from the object, so that creation in Matisse is a longer process of elaboration" (as cited in Supek, 1987,

p. 60). However, “a child realizes its creative actions as play, without effort and special elaboration, admittedly, not without any elaboration but certainly without painstaking elaboration. Sometimes, an artist is destined to wait for inspiration to come, and inspiration comes to a child in a moment, if a child is stimulated from the outside but also from the inside” (Supek, 1987, p. 61).

Winnicott (as cited in Supek, 1987) stresses it is still necessary to distinguish creativity from an artistic work. The creativity in question is something universal, an inherent fact typical of any individual, enabling him/her to approach the outside world. This creative aspect occurs in each one of us – a child, a boy, an adult, or an old man, but still it can be blocked, destroyed, if we are under any sort of compulsion, which we often happen not to be aware of. “An individual is not able to see what he/she might have become, nor what might have been lost or what he/she might miss, if he/she is under any compulsion” (Supek, 1987, p. 52).

A child will “live artistically” if it “lives daily in a disturbed, lively, spontaneous innocence and beauty of play, which might lead it to the artistic expression”, says Nola (1980). Thus, it is up to us, points out Malaguzzi (1997), to offer an enriching and inspirational surrounding to a child, to subtly stimulate play, to observe it and assess it through a description of a child’s emotional entering the spirit of play (dipping into play) while he/she creates and expresses the feeling of amazement running through him/her in all of his/her discoveries. The act of interpreting this process, points out the author mentioned, becomes our basic criterion for assessing the artistic in play (Malaguzzi, 1997, p. 42).

The above-mentioned highlights the importance of a child’s creative play through which a child learns and develops, but it also highlights the need for a sensible stimulus, “challenge and support” by adults. To stimulate a play in this way, it is useful, points out Prentice (2002), when adults take a position in which they, at close range, observe children’s actions with interest rather than directly interfere with the play, when they “put” themselves at children’s service. In this way adults can better prepare the “width of an experience” and serve as “a source” to children, which does not imply answering children’s questions but helping them more to find the answers on their own and, more importantly, points out Malaguzzi (1997), to ask themselves good questions. Creativity of play will also be stimulated when we direct children to what helps them feel better but also to the things that bother them and disturb them, as well as when they feel their propositions, ideas are taken into consideration seriously. The most favorable situation for the occurrence of creativity, points Malaguzzi, is an interpersonal exchange of ideas, with disagreement and agreement as its decisive elements.

Hayman (1980) points out the following: “Art is a natural human language and all human beings are born with creative skills. The way these inborn “talents” are directed, developed or inhibited depends on the earliest educational and socio-cultural experience of a child. Therefore, the author points out, when we pay attention to a child, to his/her needs, interests, problems, and developmental potentials, enabled by

play at the early age, we introduce a great gift of art in the life of any child” (Hayman, 1980, p. 55).

We will accept the conclusion by Brigljević (1985, p. 212), “...whether we talk about art, music, literature, acting, or the art of watching, communicating, all of our future paths are a continuation of our first paths in a play... Any child himself/herself is an artist of living, and some of them might also become artists of expression.”

Conclusion

Theories of humanist pedagogy, accepted in pre-school education already at the beginning of the 1990s, have led to a greater acknowledgement of children's culture and a right to be what they really are. A pre-school child is put into the center so that we take care of his/her interests and desires in a surrounding full of trust which a child enjoys. The influence of childhood on a child's personality is recognized without doubt, as well as the importance of pre-school education to be based on a play which presents a child's lifestyle and life framework within which a child develops completely and in harmony. Play as a specific activity suits children's nature best as well as basic laws of his/her mental and physical development. Play enables integrity of physical, intellectual, emotional and social development. At play, a child actively engages all his/her skills and with an astonishing certainty finds those games which anticipate his/her mental and physical development (Vigotski, 1977).

In some features play is different from all other activities. It is free, spontaneous, it occurs with no external necessity. It comes from the internal need, has a logic of its own, which is distinguished from the logic of the outside reality. Its logic lies in the reality being adjusted according to children's impression. Freedom and indeterminacy are, therefore, in the very bases of any play. “...play is a willing activity or action, (...) whose aim lies in play itself, and which is followed by the feeling of strain and joy and by being aware that play is ‘something different’ than ‘an ordinary life’”, states Huizinga in the famous work *Homo ludens* (Huizinga, 1970, p. 44). Caillois (1964) presents a similar viewpoint stating that play is a free activity which we enter willingly, in which we make our own rules, which occurs in a serious sphere but develops within the scope of the unreal. The feeling of satisfaction in play, coming from the very freedom, implies also a creative energy, i.e. creative expression of play. Those who engage in a serious observation of children's play discover amazing strength and exceptional skills in it, related to an inexhaustible need for children's expression and creation.

Many authors see a connection between play and art – because both of these fields bring about an independent, self-defining behavior as the basic feature of creativity. Play, as well as art, if being stimulated imaginatively, offers a possibility for the occurrence of imaginative leaps, imaginative use of ideas and material, outside of conventional limitations (Nola, 1980).

Excitement of play, however, points out Winnicott (as cited in Supek, 1987, p. 51), depends not only on inborn children's curiosity or the need for manipulation of

objects but also on the affective factor mediated from the outside by the role of a mother or a similar person. In an interaction between a child and the outside world, the role of an adult (mother, educator, teacher) as a mediator is interpolated, the effectiveness of this role being dependent on the ability of the adult to understand a child, on his/her intuitive readiness to be "a mediator" or "a partner" in children's play, therefore, on his/her love for a child. Many researches on children of pre-school age, points out the mentioned author, confirm that without an active role of a mother or an educator replacing a mother, children are backward regarding their mental and physical development. Similarly, research on eidetism or the occurrence of lively, vivid images in children, done by the beginning of the past century, showed that the images occur in children in those classes in which a teacher teaches in a vivid way, and they do not occur if the teacher is boring, monotonous.

"In the best case, a child should play to develop *in a right way* and to learn about the world surrounding him/her, and it is even better if learning is disguised within play", states Zagorac (2006) and continues, "in the school system a trend of learning in play is actually reduced to the realization that children through play open the door of their own world offering a skillful and aware educator a ticket for 'an insertion' of the values that will enable a child to become a society member of high quality" (Zagorac, 2006, p. 74). As Nola said long time ago (1980, p. 52): "...the way of living, and thus of learning, should be a world of true, real play, play leading to cognition about the world but also to a creative role in this world".

Therefore, educators in kindergartens must be aware of an exceptional responsibility regarding enabling favorable conditions for play through which a child will be able to express himself/herself, to further develop and "cultivate" his/her creativity. "To direct children's skills and tendencies appropriately and to develop their creativity, it is necessary to get to know their souls, their world, and this can be done only by those who understand the language of children's play" (Kunić, 1991, p. 10).

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Obilježja ponašanja u dječjoj igri i simbolička igra lutkama

Sažetak

U prvom dijelu članka iznosimo različita teorijska motrišta o dječjoj igri i obilježja ponašanja u dječjoj igri. Prema Koiiju i Mayjesu (1986.) mogu se razlikovati dva osnovna aspekta u istraživanju koncepta igre: spoznajni i afektivni koncept igre. S obzirom na usmjerenost pojedinog koncepta igre, navode se i obilježja ponašanja u igri.

U sljedeća tri dijela rada obrazlažu se razvojne mogućnosti dječje igre lutkama. U toj se igri uočavaju mnoga ponašanja prema spomenutim konceptima igre.

U zadnjem dijelu rada promišljamo o odnosu dječje igre, stvaralaštva i umjetnosti. Mnogi autori vide vezu između igre i umjetnosti – jer oba područja dovode do neovisnog, samoodređujućeg ponašanja kao osnovnog obilježja kreativnosti, odnosno dječje igre.

Ključne riječi: *obilježja ponašanja u dječjoj igri; psihosocijalne spoznaje djece; simbolička igra lutkama; stvaralaštvo; umjetnost.*