Students and Preschool Teachers in Play with Children: Playfulness Approached through the Ego States

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of the research which approached playfulness through the concepts of Transactional Analysis. The aim of the survey (n_1=61 students, n_2=50 preschool teachers) was to determine the incidence of Ego States (the Child, the Adult, the Parent) during play with children. Although both teachers and students often use all three Ego States, the results show a statistically significant expression of the Adult Ego State of teachers, and a lack of expression of the Child Ego State of the students. Regression analysis indicates that the Adult Ego State predicts the participation of teachers and students in the play (β=-. 245; t=-2.64; p=.009), and t-test indicates the statistical significance of difference between means of the Adult and the Child in favour of teachers (Adult: t=2.718; p=.008; d=.5, Child: t=2.167; p=.0032; d=.42). During play, the Adult is regarded as the most productive basis for developing playfulness. The importance of shaping professional development towards developing knowledge and analytical experiences in the context (the Adult), and achieving spontaneity, and emotions during play (the Free Child) is underlined.

Key words: *early childhood education; ego states; playing competences; transactional analysis.*

Introduction

Qualitative research, which was conducted with students, future preschool teachers, in the academic year 2015/2016 (Pribišev Beleslin & Šindić, 2017), resulted in rethinking students' playful competences by using the Transactional Analysis theory of the Ego States, a popular approach in psychotherapy today. The purpose of that

research was related to the assessment of efficiency of contextual learning in real, kindergarten environment during students' integral practice through exploring their introspective insights of experiences in playing and relationships with the puppets. In response to open-ended questions, students presented their experiences, impressions and feelings during play, the benefits they had from puppets, and how it helped students to understand children and motivate them to initiate communication (Pribišev Beleslin & Šindić, 2017). During the inductive analysis of students' responses, it was noted that students more often cogitated while they used puppets (behaviour from the Adult Ego State), or evaluated oneself, children and play (behaviour from the Parent Ego State), but rarely were left to the enjoyment, current experiences and emotions (behaviour from the Child Ego State).

Following knowledge about students' insights into their playing competences framed by a theoretical perspective of Transactional Analysis as a starting point, the further step was to prove correlations on playing competences and the Ego States of in-service teachers (Suzić & Šindić, 2016). It was suggested that teachers have established rich competences of playing and possessed a multitude of diverse play experiences with children. For this research, a particular instrument was designed, under the supervision of an experienced psychotherapist in Transactional Analysis, Ms. Nadežda Savjak. The results showed that, when teachers play, the Adult Ego State is more pronounced and statistically significant ($t = 2.6$, $p = .012$), and it enhances expression of the other two Ego States, so assessments and insights made by a strong and an active Adult in preschool teachers contribute to activation and empowerment of their Child and the Parent. Besides, a representation of the Parent Ego State is in a negative correlation with the age of pedagogical group – it decreases as the age of children increases ($\chi^2 = -0.283$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). This inverse proportionality showed that the engagement of the Parent Ego State in order to foster, support and encourage children is more present when children are younger.

The study presented in this paper, as a step further, was initiated with the aim to adjust the theoretical construct of the Ego States into the framework of playfulness as a transversal professional competence, as well as to empirically compare students' and teachers' Ego States expressed in play with puppet and children.

Theoretical Construct of the Ego States and Playfulness of Preschool Teachers

The Ego States is a fundamental concept in Transactional Analysis, offering numerous models for understanding behaviour, personality and relations in humans, as well as for practical approaches in working with people. In the early 1980s, it started establishing its place within the field of upbringing and education, and since then, Educational Transactional Analysis has been developing as a particular scientific discipline and a psychotherapeutic approach (Emmerton & Newton, 2004). It involves work with mentally healthy children and youth in the context of learning

and formation of personality, emphasizing orientation towards the development of human resources and prevention of disorders in the psychological sphere.

In order to understand human behaviour, it is necessary to postulate the internal dynamics of personality as an integration of its components – the Ego States. The man, in some situations feels, behaves and thinks like an adult, in others acts as a little child, in third, as his parents do. Consequently, personality consists of three Ego States, the Parent, the Adult and the Child (Bern, 2008; Džejms & Džongvard, 2008; Stjuart & Džoins, 2011; Vidouson, 2011). The Ego States are manifested through a set of consistent internal functions and external behavioural patterns. Thus, from the Parent Ego State, a person evaluates and judges, whereas this condition includes and integrates attitudes, judgments, prejudices, rules and moral values. Dominant behaviour patterns are connected with criticizing, advising, suggesting, showing care and love for others, acceptance, understanding, and authority. The Adult Ego State is characterized by thinking, evaluating, objective assessment and understanding. When a person acts from this state, he/she deals with facts, seeks accurate information, perceives reality, and plans. On the emotional level, person affects indifferently, alertly, vigilantly, carefully, calmly, tactfully. From this condition, a person is acting as a "human computer" (Wadsworth & DiVincenti, 2003, p. 156). The Child Ego State of an adult human hopes, looks forward to, imagines, daydreams, believes, expects. The Child contains the desires and needs. As intuitive and creative, its sub-state, the Free Child, is a source of emotions, freedom, relaxation, spontaneity. The person entertains, plays, runs, sings, jokes, shares love, recreates, plays, and has pleasurable and joyful activities. From the Child, also, person behaves and acts in a childish, impulsive, and explosive manner. For most people, the manifestation of the positive behavioural patterns of the Child and the Parent Ego States can be assimilated into the Adult, and become its integral functional part (Temple, 1999). In other words, the ability to understand the behaviour and transactions of all Ego States, make the person "being open on all channels, and skilled to create safety, encouragement, structure, to give information, consideration, and enjoyment" (Napper & Newton, 2000, as cited in Emmerton & Newton, 2004, p. 287).

According to Educational Transactional Analysis, understanding teacher's behaviour during various interactions and relationships with children within an education process is very important (Emmerton & Newton, 2004). In activities with children, a teacher performs, primarily from the Adult Ego State, but also from that of the Parent and the Child. During play, teacher should observe, assess, think, plan, and watch play situations. However, they collect information and reflect on the play moments and episodes, think about roles that players (children) act, detect its plot, but also follow the communication between players, observe individual and group transactions between the children involved in the context of playing, contemplate and anticipate. To respond to these challenges, teachers should have enough knowledge about children and play, but also, should act from the position "now and here", in a word, to be in the Adult Ego State.

On the other hand, a teacher provides support and care for children, teaching them how to behave nicely and interact with other children and adults. Contemporaneously, the teacher praises and criticizes, but also regulates, controls and directs, channels behaviour and impulses, conveys to children the importance of respecting the rules, helping them gain insights about situations they are in, and ultimately, assists (directs) them to resolve their conflicts. All of this can be achieved from the Parent Ego State, which consists of two sub-states: the Nurturing and Criticizing Parent. A teacher who is unaware of his Parent in the play, whether it comes from one or the other sub-states, may seem authoritative and dominant in children's play, turning, disturbing or, even, interrupting it. On the other hand, the dominance of the Adult in the play can lead to "switching off" the Child Ego State, because "a task" of the Adult is to take care about the emotions and behaviour driven from the Child and the Parent, so as not to interfere with the decisions that a person makes (Wadsworth & DiVincenti, 2003).

Acting from the Adult Ego State that assimilates positive and valued behavioural features of the Child and the Parent, teacher becomes "good-enough teacher", who provides psycho-social, emotional and physical environment favourable for the well-being of the child (Alcock, 2016, p. 131). However, the activation of the Child from the Adult Ego State, is the most important for the adult's playing experiences. Teacher is spontaneous and relaxed, and intuitively knows how to play with the children properly, abandons oneself to the flow of "as if" experiences. Simply ruling the emotions, imagination and movements in the mutual relations with children, the teacher attracts children with naturalness, openness and possibilities of improvisation in the play context. Given that children are naturally in this Ego State, they can easily respond to impulses of the teacher's Child, then enter the communication, and activity and play with adults in the most direct way.

View on the Playfulness

Within pedagogical discourse, the phenomenon of children's play is usually determined in relation to its potential for early learning and development (Hyvonen, 2011; Singer, 2013; Sutton-Smith, 1997). In particular, the outstanding possibilities of play in the learning process, through enabling research, experimentation, initiative and imagination, are emphasized, and supposed to be the 'building blocks' for children's knowledge and experience as the basis of tacit knowledge, as well as a conceptual and procedural understanding (Hyvonen, 2011; Lynch, 2015). Furthermore, benefits of children's play are perceived from the perspective of the development of a preschool curriculum and organization of educational process on play-based teaching strategies, even though free play, optionally chosen by children, still remains in the field of recreation and "just for fun" (Lynch, 2015, p. 354), which is reflected in the continuous reduction of time devoted to 'just' playing within an institutional context (see Lynch, 2015).

Understanding the role of adults in play is subordinated to such a dominant discourse and shaped by it. Consequently, expectations from adults to enter into

children's play are situated on a continuum: from the requirements not to disturb children's free play, to demands for structuring play-like activities for children, laid on learning aims and outcomes. In our pedagogical tradition, the concept of "cultivating children's play" stands in the middle as a pedagogical and teaching methodology process by adding to learning activities the generic characteristics of the play, which becomes a favourable space for children's learning (see Pribišev Beleslin & Šindić, 2017).

Therefore, a question like "are playing and pedagogy of early childhood in a conflict of interest" (Rogers, 2011, as cited in Slunjski & Ljubetić, 2014, p. 129), or the dilemma that the preschool curriculum, which uses play as an educational tool, might be an outdated pedagogical approach (Singer, 2015) are becoming more pronounced. This then leads to a new understanding of the "pedagogy of free play" (Rogers & Evans, 2008, as cited in Slunjski & Ljubetić, 2014, p. 130) that includes awareness on building qualitatively different relationships with children based on mutual connection, trust, sharing, and meaningful interaction where the role of adults is to provide an enabling, creative and challenging environment. With regard to this shift in pedagogical perspective, play is seen from the aspects that emphasize relations and interactions of the players within playing situations, not primarily cognition. From this point of view, Alcock (2016) states that "play is relational; it involves children connecting within themselves and with others in historical and cultural contexts that include the physical environment as well as fields of feelings that extend well beyond the physical place of play" (p. 4). It refers to two important play features: it is focused on the *process* rather than on its products, and play has its *social context* (Morgan & Kennewell, 2006, as cited in Hyvonen, 2011, p. 50).

"Being in relation" (Alcock, 2016, p. vi) is one of the conditions for children and adults in play, but it is also the central concept of Transactional Analysis from the perspective of the Ego States. The Ego States are functions of personality, and all arise in the transaction between persons (Thomson, 1972). Thus, in the space of the play, many subjective, conscious, and unconscious, but also hidden processes occur, encompassing both inner and intrapsychic dimensions of relations (Alcock, 2016).

Playfulness as a Professional Competence of Preschool Teachers

Preschool teachers' competence for playing, as a theoretical concept and a real phenomenon, is still in the process of determination and definition. In pedagogical discourse, concepts like playfulness, 'play-based teaching' or 'playing-learning child and teacher' are still developing (Hyvonen, 2011; Pribišev Beleslin & Šindić, 2017; Singer, 2015). Play, especially free and spontaneous, is certainly framed by early childhood, with domination of 'rhetoric of play as a progress' (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Playful adults, or playing of teachers within the institutional context, as a theoretical reflection and a research problem, therefore, are mostly related to description of the teachers' roles, status and strategies of intervention and involvement of adults in children's play in the

institutions of early childhood education (see Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999), or as instructions, like it is said elsewhere, that "playful practitioners use many different approaches to engage children in activities that help them to learn and to develop positive dispositions for learning" (QCDA / DCSF, 2009, p. 14).

Simultaneously, within a worldwide research community, particularly in psychology, as Shen, Chick, and Zinn (2014) noticed, "a strong, coherent theoretical framework for studying playfulness as a personality trait" (p. 59) is not developed yet, pointing out that the research focus is more geared towards playfulness of children. Authors sum up the reasons for this state in two groups. First, adults' playfulness can be seen as a less desirable form of social behaviour, and the second, playing has no greater practical value and utility for an adult who is facing rational decisions. However, researchers agreed that the essential properties of adults' playfulness are intrinsic motivation, freedom and spontaneity (Shen, Chick, & Zinn, 2014), and it is connected to broader psychological and physical well-being of the adult person (see Proyer, 2012). In addition, Lieberman (1977, p. 5) suggests that playfulness, which connects the behaviour, imagination and creativity that develops during children's play, can become or "survive" as a characteristic of the mature individual. By becoming, somehow, a link between the playful child and the playful adult, playfulness can be "operationally defined as physical, social, and cognitive spontaneity, manifest joy, and sense of humor" (Lieberman, 1977, p. 23). From the perspective of Transactional Analysis, teachers' playfulness is driven from the Free Child Ego State, the most important features of which rest particularly on playfulness, spontaneity and impulsiveness (Wadsworth & DiVincenti, 2003).

Rich early experiences in playing in own childhood, particularly in the 'period of its sensitiveness', as a Russian psychologist had found in early 20th century (Zaporožec, year XIVc, as cited in Pribišev Beleslin & Šindić, 2017), could become a part of the professional competence of teachers, although experiences may be completely hidden and unconscious. At this point, Lieberman's (1977) insights can be added, that playfulness has its own development and maturation dimension. As an individual and personal characteristic, teachers' playfulness has its starting point of development in their Free Child, long before teachers enter the formal system of preparation for their future profession. At the same time, the rational part of teachers' playfulness as professional competence can be developed through systematized process of learning and education. Lieberman (1977) noted that during the study period, playfulness of students received an "academic" connotation, i.e. playfulness is becoming more oriented towards high school classroom behaviours and patterns, where the learning process is considered very seriously.

In that context, teachers' playfulness as professional competence is not just a matter of individual traits, but rather a collective issue of cultural and professional identity that reflects the characteristics of the profession. Requirements and ways in which the play activities of children and adults are seen in the pedagogical and institutional context, within the theory and practice of early childhood education, as well as, through demands of curriculum and education policy recommendations, shape perspectives on it. Lynch

(2015) reveals several factors that influence playfulness as the professional competence: *intrapersonal*, which are related to knowledge, beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and emotions of teachers about the value of play but also their ability and willingness to relax, engage and indulge in a playful situation; *organizational,* which describe the influence of the organizational ethos and climate of institution connected to the perception of the teachers' play (e.g. administration, or other colleagues' attitudes towards the values of play, especially, as teachers' activity, and in relation to the other types of their activities), as well as more broader *factors related to the educational policies* that determine which values, principles and types of actions will dominate the curriculum.

Nowadays, playfulness as professional competence is a generally known issue and common principle of curricula worldwide. According to Singer (2013, 2015), playfulness is a central place of the preschool curriculum, and the important adult's role lies in providing a safe and supportive space for children's play, which will support children in establishing relationships, ritualized interaction and creating their own meanings. "In a play pedagogy, teachers gently structure young children's lives by means of routines, rituals, songs, dance, rhythms, rhymes, and humor", concludes Singer (2013, p. 182). Hyvonen (2011) distinguishes several dimensions of this concept: different roles of teachers in different play and playing situations; caring for playful learning process integrated into the play, environment and curriculum; enabling children's creativity taking into account the individuality of each child, and, the individual skills in playing, as a fun and enjoyment dimension that ensures that the play takes place and is experienced as a pleasant, social, fun, genuine and meaningful activity for all players.

Playfulness as professional competence of teachers, causes the playing child and the playing adult to possibly become more alike, as Lieberman noted (1977, p. 149), increasing the possibility of co-creating a play-based curriculum. As Temple (1999) concludes,

> "a functionally fluent teacher will tune in to both internal and external stimuli (in accounting mode), will empathize with others showing compassion and understanding (in nurturing mode), will be appropriately directive and firm about boundaries (in structuring mode), and will demonstrate a friendly sociability (in cooperative mode) along with creativity and expression of wants and feelings (in spontaneous mode)". (p. 170)

A competent preschool teacher in view of playfulness, holds theoretical knowledge, insights, thoughts, strategies of behaviour and activity. Also, he or she has a well-developed dimension of skills and practical ability to play, participate, interact with others, and, simultaneously, to handle and control all the factors that can be an obstacle or challenge for the play. Whilst emotional, and conative component that includes motives, willpower, emotions within the "emotional impulses" dimension, provides a state of flow, and helps teachers in building their professional sensitivity to play. Integrating all these dimensions, playfulness as competence gets a transversal value, and "functional fluency" (Temple, 1999, p. 164), and represents the ability of the

Integrating Adult Ego State to establish a positive nurturing environment and engage children through play's spontaneity and flexibility.

Method

The study was conducted with an idea to expand previous insight into the issues of adults' playfulness, raised in the context of the Ego States, as the basic concepts of Transactional Analysis and reflected through the perspective of early childhood education. Continuing on generated knowledge about playfulness as important teachers' competence which includes understanding, and knowledge, as well as skills for play management and evaluation (by the Parent and the Adult Ego States), but also the motives, pleasant emotions, feelings and desire to play, authenticity and relaxation, coming from the Child Ego State (Pribišev Beleslin & Šindić, 2017; Suzić & Šindić, 2016), the research objective was to determine and compare the representation of the Ego States connected to playing situations in preschool teachers and students. In order to gather the relevant information, an empirical study, descriptive, explorative and correlational in its nature, was conducted, with a characteristic of survey method, and usage of scaling technique.

The three research questions were accentuated:
(1) Do teachers and students act out from different Ego States during play with children?
(2) Are there differences in emphasis of different Ego States when comparing teachers and students during play (since students do not have so much work and life experience as teachers)?
(3) Do the Ego States which are reflected during play predetermine its stakeholders (teachers or students)?

Three research hypotheses were set based on research questions, in order to investigate the Ego States of teachers and students during the play with children. The hypotheses are:

H1 During play with children teachers and students use different Ego States, which are evenly represented. In other words, in play situations, the Child, the Adult and the Parent are inherent and active.

H2 It is expected that there is a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of the Ego States of teachers and of students during play.
(a) It is expected that there is a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of the Adult Ego State between teachers and students during play.
(b) It is expected that there is a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of the Free Child Ego State between teachers and students during play.
(c) It is expected that there is a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of the Parent Ego State between teachers and students during play.

H3 Representation of the Ego States during play predicts teacher's or student's participation.

The survey instrument (*ESTI* - The Ego States During the Play), specially designed for the research and first used in a previous study (Suzić & Šindić, 2016), indicated satisfactory internal consistency and reliability in both studies (Cronbach Alpha Coefficient .80 and in this study .832). Originally, instrument *ESTI* contains 30 items separated by two main statements: *When I use a puppet in activities with children ...*, and *When kids play alone ...*, on which participants can express the level of their agreement on a five-point Likert scale (5=always; 4=often; 3=occasionally; 2=rarely; 1=never). In the second study, 27 items were left, due to their metric characteristics. Identification of an appropriate Ego State and its representation during play, are tied up with *verbs*, especially, to the action that person performs at a given condition in accordance with her intrapsychic function and transaction. In other words, the Adult Ego State discusses, thinks, etc., the Parent evaluates, controls, cares, etc., and the Child feels, enjoys, etc. Statements are grouped into three subscales describing three Ego States.

Statements that highlight the Ego States of teachers and students through *ESTI* instrument are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Statements describing the Ego States of a preschool teacher

The Adult Ego State	
When I use a puppet in activities with children ...	... I *plan* which contents children learn within the various developmental aspects of a preschool programme.
	... I *follow* children's confidence to puppet or their projections into it, to better *understand* the psychological situation of a child.
	... On the fly, I *analyse* and *plan* how to motivate children further.
	... I *follow* children's needs and emotions in order to *gain* children's attention.
	... I *give* special attention to the speech development of children.
	... I *give* special attention to the development of children's drama skills.
	... I *give* special attention to the emotional development of children.
	... I *prepare* well and *come up* with good course of activity.
	... I *follow* children's reactions and *contemplate* how best to answer them.
When children play alone...	... I *follow* children's developmental skills and *reflect* on them.
	... I *identify* possible obstacles and problems in a child's development.
The Parent Ego State	
When I use a puppet in activities with children ...	... I *care* and my *attention* to the children comes to the fore.
	... I *provide* additional *support* to children who need it.
	... I *achieve* better discipline.
	... I try to take the opportunity *to praise* and *criticize* children using puppets.
	... I *validate* the performance of my activities.
When children play alone I ...	... I try to be involved in a play *to encourage* and *praise* a child who has difficulties to be included in the play.
	... I *follow* how children *behave* and *teach* them good relations to their peers.

The Child Ego State	
When I use a puppet in activities with children ...	... I am more interesting for children as a teacher.
	... I *feel* happy, too.
	... I'm *more relaxed* than usual.
	... I *feel* comfortable.
	... I *perceive puppet* as a friend who *inspired* me to work.
	... I *spontaneously take* on the role.
	... It looks like the puppet *takes me in a fantasy* world.
When children play alone ...	... They easily sneak me into their play and I *enjoy* the roles I *play*.
	... I want to *play* with them, too.

The research sample consisted of 50 preschool teachers working in the Centre for Early Childhood Education Banja Luka, and 61 students (36 third- and 25 second-year students) of the Study Programme of Early Education at the University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Philosophy. Survey with the teachers was conducted in August 2016. After collecting the data, we conducted the statistical analysis in SPSS. The second part of the study was conducted with students in January 2017. Participation in the study was elective and based on the anonymity of each participant. The collected results were pooled together and statistically processed using the aforementioned statistical program.

Data processing was carried out on the level of descriptive statistics (frequency, mean value, standard deviation), and analytical statistics for the evaluation of significant differences. In order to examine the difference, a *t*-test for independent samples was used, and for the correlation Spearman's coefficient, as well as multiple regression were used.

Results and Interpretation

First, an emphasis of respective Ego States in teachers and students during play was statistically processed, based on the assumption that play activates all of them.

The mean for the teachers' Child is $M = 4.21$, and points to the fact that teachers often use their Free Child Ego State when playing with children in kindergarten. When exploring their Adult and the Parent, data are similar. The mean for the representation of the Adult is $M = 4.39$, and for the Parent $M = 4.23$. In this way, all the three Ego States in play with children are active. Figure 1 describes the percentage of teachers' Ego States, and as it can be seen, the Adult is somewhat more represented (34.2%), then comes the Parent (33%), and the Free Child ego state (32.8%).

To check whether there are statistically significant differences in the representation of the Ego States of teachers, *t*-test was used and *t*-ratio of the difference between means of their Ego States is shown in Table 2. The differences are statistically significant for the Adult and the Child ($t = 3.89, p = .000, d = .58$) and for the Adult and the Parent ($t = 3.01, p = .004, d = .48$). The difference between the representation of the Parent and the Child are not statistically significant ($t = .24, p = .811, d = .06$). Effect size values
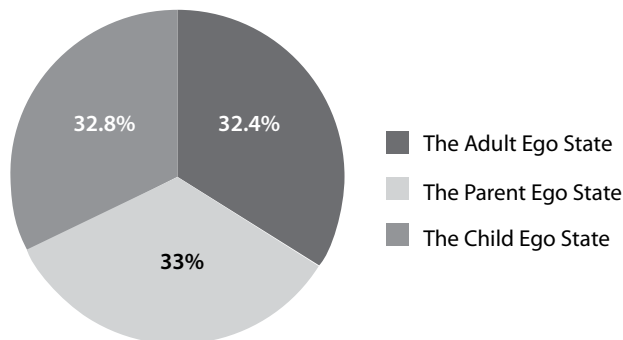
Figure 1. The Ego States of the teachers in children's play

show large and typical significance in relationships of the Adult and the Child, and the Adult and the Parent, respectively, but smaller than typical practical significance for relations between the Child and the Parent. Thus, although play is a space where all the Ego States are included, there are significant differences which indicate that the most dominant teachers' Ego State during the play is the Adult.

Table 2

Expression of teachers' Ego States in the play

The Ego State	N	M	SD	t	p	d^a
The Adult	50	4.39	.29			
The Child	50	4.21	.32	3.89	.000	.58
The Parent	50	4.23	.37			
The Child	50	4.21	.32	0.24	.811	.06
The Adult	50	4.39	.29			
The Parent	50	4.23	.37	3.01	.004	.48

Note: d^a presents a value of an effect size for Cohen's d Family (based on Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2004, p. 91); d greater than .50 can be described as "large", between .20 and .50 is "medium or typical" and less than .20 is "small or smaller than typical".

The key to successful involvement of teachers in the children's play is an ability to carefully observe and to choose the style of interaction that best suits their current interests, styles, and play activities and situations (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1999), which is an activity of the Adult Ego State. In other words, the results provide a basis to reflect how adults can effectively enter into play, as 'play managers' or the co-players. Consequently, it is important that the Adult Ego State be represented in play, because it allows a good estimation of the reality of the playing situation, and provides moderation between other Ego States through their coordination. The Adult of teachers, that is highly functional, contributes to a good perception of the situation, 'calling' the Parent and the Child when it indicates a favourable situation. That ability is useful not just to allow both of the States to be intrusive (which happens when Ego States of the Parent or the Child function inadequately) or inconspicuous (lack of these two Ego States), but also to take all the transactions as functional.

The mean of representation of the students Child is $M = 4.05$, and points to the fact that the students often use the Child Ego State of play. Similar data were obtained for the Adult ($M = 4.22$) and the Parent ($M = 4.19$). Consequently, all three Ego States are active when they play with children. Using the percentage, the Adult (33.87%), the Parent (33.62%), as well as the Free Child (32.5%) are almost as expressed (Figure 2).
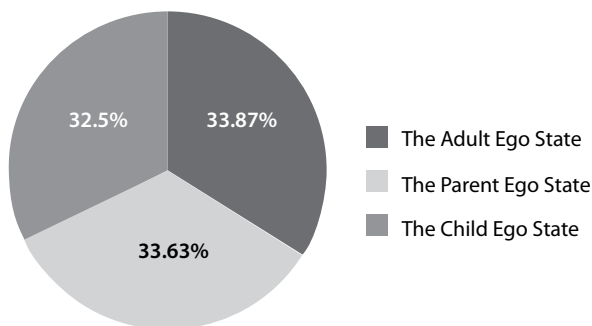

Figure 2. The Ego States of the students in children's play

Although students used all the three Ego States through the play frequently, there are significant differences in their emphasis. We applied a *t*-test, calculated *t*-ratio of the difference between the arithmetic means, and obtained interesting results (Table 3). There was a statistically significant difference for the Child compared to the other two Ego States, i.e. it is statistically more pronounced. For the Child and the Adult ($t = 3.109$, $p = .003$, $d = .41$) and for the Parent and the Child ($t = 2.776$, $p = .007$, $d = .32$) the differences are statistically significant at .01 level. Although there is a difference in the presence of the Adult and Parent Ego States, statistically it is not significant ($t = 0.431$, $p = .668$, $d = .07$). Effect size values show small significance in the relationships of the Child and the Adult, and the Parent and the Child respectively, but smaller than typical practical significance for relations between the Adult and the Parent.

Table 3

Expression of students' Ego States in the play

The Ego State	N	M	SD	t	p	d^a
The Adult	61	4.22	.39	3.109	.003	.41
The Child	61	4.05	.43			
The Parent	61	4.19	.43	2.776	.007	.32
The Child	61	4.05	.43			
The Adult	61	4.22	.43	.431	.668	.07
The Parent	61	4.19	.39			

Note. d^a presents the value of an effect size for Cohen's d Family (based on Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2004, p. 91); d greater than .50 can be described as "large", between .20 and .50 is "medium or typical" and less than .20 is "small or smaller than typical".

These results indicate that, within play, students' Free Child is less active, and that the Adult is not so differentiated and highlighted as the teachers' Adult, their experienced

and older professional colleague. Further work on personal development of students is important, especially in the direction of construction of theoretical, but also practical knowledge and experiences in the real context of a kindergarten. Besides, greater spontaneity, relaxation and improvement of pleasant emotions in working with children should be achieved.

Based on Figures 1 and 2 and the results shown in Tables 2 and 3, it can be seen that all the three Ego States were often represented both in the teachers, and the students, which proves the first main research hypothesis. During play, adults use different Ego States, which means that there are more than one dominant states. This speaks in favour of the claim that play is a complex activity, and participation of the adults/teachers in play is deliberate. They use theoretical knowledge (the Adult), evaluate the activities of children (the Parent), and act creatively and spontaneously (the Free Child). These are important prerequisites of the development of playfulness as teachers' professional competence.

However, the key assumption which engaged us in this research, refers to the comparison of the Ego States of teachers and students, especially the representation of their Free Child. Although the results suggest that both teachers and students often use all three Ego States during the play, there are still some differences that can be seen in Figure 3.
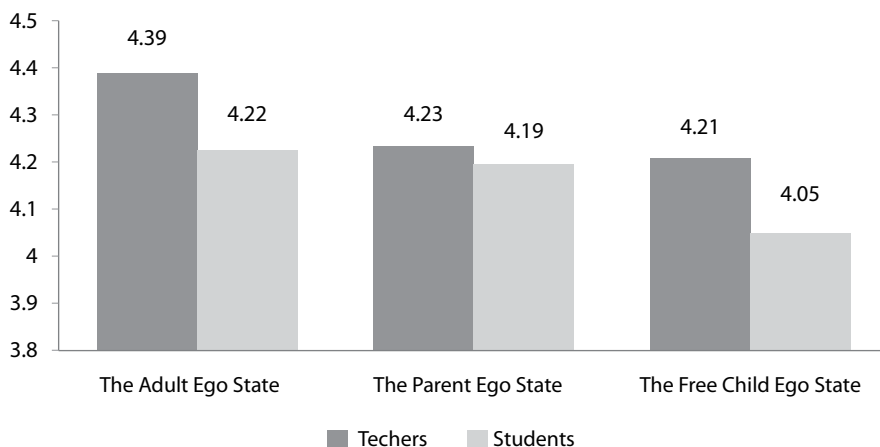

Figure 3. Comparison of means for the Ego States of teachers and students

Proving the second main hypothesis and its specific hypotheses by *t*-test holds a central place in this empirical study. The means of the different Ego States of teachers and the means of appropriate Ego States of students are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Difference in prevalence of teachers' and students' Ego States in the play

The Ego State	Participants	N	M	SD	t	p	d^a
The Adult	Teachers	50	4.39	.29	2.718	.008	.50
	Students	61	4.22	.39			
The Parent	Teachers	50	4.23	.37	.380	.705	.10
	Students	61	4.19	.43			
The Child	Teachers	50	4.21	.32	2.167	.032	.42
	Students	61	4.05	.43			

Note. d^a presents the value of an effect size for Cohen's d Family (based on Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner, & Barrett, 2004, p. 91); d greater than .50 can be described as "large", between .20 and .50 is "medium or typical" and less than .20 is "small or smaller than typical".

The *t*-ratio for the difference between the arithmetic means of the Adult of teachers and students from the sample is statistically significant at .01 level ($t = 2.718$, $p = .008$, $d = .50$). These findings indicate a statistically significant difference in the representation of the Adult in favour of the teachers, consequently, the first specific hypothesis is proved. It is similar to differences in the prevalence of the Child. The calculated *t*-ratio is statistically significant at .05 level ($t = 2.167$, $p = .032$, $d = .42$) in favour of the teachers. Consequently, the second specific hypothesis is proved. However, based on the calculated *t*-ratio of arithmetic means ($t = .188$, $p = .705$, $d = .10$) the difference between the prevalence of the Parent Ego State of the teachers and students is not statistically significant. Thus, the third specific hypothesis can be rejected. Also, computation of the effect size for different *t* values shows the emphasis of an actual size of the differences among the population (Ellis, 2010), i.e. perceived presence of this phenomenon in the population (Cohen, 1988, as cited in Morgan, Leech, Gloeckener, & Barrett, 2004). The obtained results (Table 3) indicate that the difference in emphasis of the Adult and the Child in play is present, and that is a typical and a visible significance (for the Adult $d = .50$, and for the Free Child $d = .42$). The effect size for the Parent is smaller than typical ($d = .10$), and considered to be of a low influence within the population, based on Cohen's criterion. Exploring the second main hypothesis through its three specific hypotheses, we can conclude that the second main hypothesis is partially proven.

Exploring the differences in the representation of teachers' and students' Ego States in play (Table 3), the point is on the reflections on what and how to teach students in favour of nurturing playfulness as professional competence. As statistically significant difference is evidenced for teachers and students in the Adult Ego State ($M_t = 4.39$, and $M_s = 4.21$), for further understanding, it is important to further differentiate this Ego State into the Analytical and the Empirical (Kuijt, 1980), to consider it from the theoretical perspective, and from the perspective of practice in institutional early childhood education. It can be assumed that practice, experience and group work can influence the development of this Ego State, and it is dependent

on situational learning within the community of practice. It provides a realistic assessment of the kindergarten reality, its understanding, reflection and action 'here and now' (the Analytical Adult), but also, it is assertive and empathic, and has an ethos of practice (The Experiential Adult). From its position, teacher plans, analyses, contemplates, observes and concludes, as well as performs similar actions relevant to play and other learning activities. It coordinates the other Ego States, when the teacher assesses that the playing condition is a real and adequate opportunity for acting within other Ego States. Therefore, teachers working with children, should be aware of the reality and able to interpret reality objectively; that is, the representation of the Adult Ego State is the most important in working, and in playing with children. We can say that it is a foundation for playfulness as one of teacher competences.

It was noted that while teachers act from the Free Child Ego State, it occurs less frequently in students ($M_t = 4.21$, and $M_s = 4.05$). Although the difference is minimal, the t-ratio is statistically significant at .05 level. So, these insights could become important at the university education level, influencing perspectives on students' professional development. Reflection of the students' needs, respecting holistic and emotional development rather than only intellectual, and the overall personality of a student, is an essential prerequisite for the development of playfulness as competence. So, it is not enough that the student has theoretical knowledge about play, to be able to contemplate, plan, assess and improve children's play on the theoretical and practical levels, but students should learn how to participate in playing situations spontaneously and casually, giving it individual distinctiveness, experiencing pleasure and other positive emotions that are basically connected with intrinsically motivational processes, freedom and spontaneity.

For the purpose of comparing the representation of the Ego States in teachers and students during the play, correlations of the Ego States in our sample were calculated. Values of the Pearson's coefficients are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Pearson's coefficients of the Ego States of teachers and students during the play

The Ego State	The Child	The Adult	The Parent
The Child	1	.448**	.406**
The Adult	.448**	1	.511**
The Parent	.406**	.511**	1

Note. ** Correlation is significant at .01 level.

The Pearson's coefficients are high, and indicate a statistically significant correlation between the Adult, the Parent and the Child (Table 5). In other words, if one Ego State is more pronounced during play, the other two are also reinforced. Correlations exceed the value of .8, which indicates that the value of the Ego States can be taken into the calculation of predictor variables in the calculation of multiple regression (Bryman & Cramer, 2001). These insights are especially important in order to apply regression analysis.

Table 6

The Ego State as a predictor of participation of teacher or student in play

Predictor - The Ego State	Participant in play	β	R^2	t-value	p
The Adult	Teacher - Student	−.245	.06	−2.64	.009

We were interested in which Ego State predetermines the participation of an adult (teachers and students) in play with children (Table 6). As can be seen, the Adult Ego State predicts the involvement of teachers and students in play (β = -.245; *t* = -2.64, p = .01). The Parent and the Free Child are excluded from the calculation of predictor variables. This finding explains 6% of the variance (R^2 = .06). In other words, only 6% of the variance of the dependent variable (*Participant in the play*) may be explained by the action of predictor variables (*The Adult Ego State*). However, this finding indicates that a more pronounced Adult in play is the teacher, while a less pronounced Adult in the play is the student. Based on the results, and their interpretation, the third major research hypothesis is accepted.

This result complements the findings of prior research (Suzić & Šindić, 2016), where it was noticed that years of service positively predetermined the Adult Ego State. This means that the teachers with longer working experiences are more willing to act from the Adult Ego State during children's play, i.e. they are able to become detached from the Child or the Parent, and to observe a child, or a playing situation, and kindergarten reality as the Adult. Therefore, the time a person spends in practical activities, play and work with children enriches the Adult Ego State in the professional sense, so it is more pronounced, and represented in experienced teachers than in students who are at the beginning of their professional development. On the other hand, more, richer, and contextualized activities in the kindergarten context enable the development of the Experiential and the Analytical Adult of students.

Conclusion

Three major hypotheses were set in this study. Having confirmed the first (*H1*), it is possible to claim that, during play with children, all three Ego States are often represented both in teachers, and in students. *H2*, which consisted of three specific hypotheses, was partially proved. The first and the second specific hypotheses were proved based on statistically significant differences in the representation of the Adult and the Child in favour of teachers. The third specific hypothesis was rejected, as the prevalence of the Parent Ego State of the teachers and students was not statistically proved. As the third major hypothesis (*H3*) was proved, it might be concluded that the Adult Ego State predicts an adult as a participant in children's play, for the benefit of teachers. Playful competences of teachers are more developed than those of students.

Thus, the study adds new knowledge about how playfulness as professional competence can be developed through situated learning in 'communities of practice', through theoretical and practical training at the level of higher education. University

education in the context of playfulness primarily stimulates the activity of the Adult Ego States, and ignores the Child. During higher education of future preschool teachers, more attention should be paid to the quality of students' Free Child Ego State during play, which should be nurtured through a wide range of activities where students can act with spontaneity, immediacy, authenticity of expression, creativity, and pleasant emotions. Modernization of teaching activities that stimulate the Free Child can make teaching more attractive: role play, socio- and psychodrama, imitation, dramatic improvisation, "as if" playing, activities that encourage imagination, empathy, expression of emotions and states without discomfort, dance and music activities, activities that encourage fluency of ideas and divergent thinking, relaxation exercises, etc.

Moreover, this study offers some implications for teacher training and development of professional competences from the Educational Transactional Analysis standpoint. The Ego States are the phenomena, as well as the theoretical constructs, which teachers and students can identify in their everyday behaviour and interactions with children, but also during other activities in the education process. Other studies indicate that people can recognize their Ego States after the training process easily and clearly. Even brief training can be helpful for personal growth, self-awareness, as well as professional development of educators (Lerkkanen & Temple, 2004; Thomson, 1972), making this psycho-therapeutic model more suitable as a theoretical basis and a meaningful skill in the transversal professional competence of preschool teachers that can be called *playfulness*. "Playfulness is an attitude of mind; [play] a passing outward manifestation of this attitude", said Dewey (1933, p. 210, as cited in Lieberman, 1977, p. 108).

In this case, linking the phenomenon of play and features of playfulness to the insights into the ways of behaviour through TA structural model of the Ego States offers expandability of professional competence, not only in the context of knowledge and behaviour, but also in relation to the understanding of emotions and conative dimensions of teachers playing with children. This also implies the insight into tacit knowledge and archaic patterns of preschool teachers' behaviour, attitudes, assumptions, experiences, etc., constructed during their childhood as children who were playing. Transactional analysis, when used as a framework for understanding the playing behaviour in the process of education in the context of a real educational process, provides tools for different levels of reflection on one's playfulness as individual, group, or collective transactions with other adults and children in different situations. As such, if other concepts of Transactional Analysis are included besides the constructs of the Ego States, such as strokes, recognition of game scripts, and so, it may be a good model for reflecting on teachers' implicit theories about the education of young children.

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Studenti i odgajatelji u igri s djecom: pristup igri posredstvom teorije stanja ega

Sažetak

Ovaj rad predstavlja rezultate istraživanja koje je igri pristupilo putem koncepcije transakcijske analize. Cilj istraživanja (n_1=61 student, n_2=50 odgajatelja) bio je odrediti učestalost pojave stanja ega (Dijete, Odrasla osoba, Roditelj) za vrijeme igre s djecom. Premda se odgajatelji i studenti često koriste svim trima stanjima, rezultati su pokazali kako postoji statistički značajna razlika kod stanja Odrasle osobe u odgajatelja, kao i manjak iskaza stanja Djeteta u studenata. Regresijskom analizom došli smo do spoznaje da stanje Odrasle osobe predviđa sudjelovanje odgajatelja i studenata u igri (β=,245; t=-2,64; p=,009), a t-test je otkrio statistički značajne razlike u srednjim vrijednostima između Odrasle osobe i Djeteta na strani odgajatelja (Odrasla osoba: t=2,718; p=,008; d=,5, Dijete: t=2,167; p=,0032; d=,42). Za vrijeme igre Odrasla se osoba smatra najproduktivnijim temeljem za razvoj igre i zaigranosti. Naglašava se važnost oblikovanja profesionalnog usavršavanja prema razvijanju znanja i analitičkim iskustvima u kontekstu (Odrasla osoba), kao i postizanje spontanosti i poticanje emocija za vrijeme igre (Slobodno dijete).

Ključne riječi: *kompetencije za igru; predškolski odgoj i obrazovanje; stanja ega; transakcijska analiza.*