



Contribution of Plays and Toys to Children's Value Education

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Abstract

Plays and toys have an important place in the education of children. Children learn by seeing and doing rather than reading, listening and understanding. Play is an important “job” for children. The basic function of plays is to facilitate children's adaptation to the world. Children can understand the real world by playing. They deal with unwanted situations by playing games. Moreover, they construct the building blocks of language and concept development through playing. They try different social roles by playing games. Again, through playing, they find the stimulants that are not readily available in real life. Children learn self-regulation, setting up rules and abiding by these rules through plays. They play to experience, understand and learn the things they cannot do in real life. For a child who ascribes a meaning to toys and objects, playing games and playing with toys is a serious business. Situations which are imaginary at first help children learn some rules, take a step beyond their development and construct their own zone of proximal development. All children have an imaginary friend when they are small. During this process which is a normal development pattern and a helpful occupation, the playmate is usually a toy. Playing games and playing with toys is not just an occupation, but also an activity that supports children's mental health and helps them establish and develop emotional relationships. Plays and toys have a close relationship with education, history, geography, sociology, psychology, politics, industry and tourism, in short, with culture. Plays and toys are used as a method for early diagnosis of some disorders such as learning difficulty and autism. In these days where we seek solutions to digital addiction, plays and toys emerge as an important alternative. Plays also provide a suitable environment for value and morals education. Introducing plays and toys which have an important place in child education and using them more effectively in value and morals education together with other fields of development is of critical importance. In this theoretical article, we tried to address the importance of plays, toys and toy museums from this perspective.

Keywords: Play, Toy, Toy museum, Child education, Value education.

Citation | Mustafa ÖNDER (2018). Contribution of Plays and Toys to Children's Value Education. Asian Journal of Education and Training, 4(2): 146-149.

History:

Received: 6 March 2018

Revised: 27 March 2018

Accepted: 2 April 2018

Published: 4 April 2018

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Publisher: Asian Online Journal Publishing Group

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

Transparency: The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study was reported; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained.

Ethical: This study follows all ethical practices during writing.

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1. Introduction

Development and change of human characteristics is possible to a great extent through education. Improvement of existing abilities and personality development occurs through education. This means that there is a need for educators, educational environments and materials. Plays and toys are two of the most important components that contribute to the development of children. In addition to the other fields of development, plays and toys make a significant contribution to the value and morals education. While children make their wishes and desires come true while playing games, they gain some values within the framework of their knowledge and experience without being under the influence of others. They develop their conscience and emotions. They develop a loving personality that can self-regulate and perform internal control (Sevinç, 2009; Balat, 2012; Koglin and Petermann, 2013). Children who play games were found to be more social, more easy-going, more creative and open to sharing than those who do not play games (Akın, 2016). Plays reinforce positive behaviors and help changing negative behaviors (Yörükoğlu, 2008).

Plays and toys have a close relationship with education, history, geography, sociology, psychology, politics, industry and tourism, in short, with culture. It is possible to clearly see that in the toy museums established abroad, and recently in Turkey. Plays and toys are used as a method for early diagnosis of some disorders such as learning difficulty and autism (Bakırcıoğlu, 2013; Çakar, 2017). The long history of toys and the way they spread provides valuable information for anthropologists. Nursery rhymes, folk songs and dialogues used in plays are very important for philologists (Sen, 2012). Plays and toys also include beliefs, values and moral elements. We tried to address these issues in this article.

2. Plays and Their Importance

Plays and toys have an important place in all cultures. The history of plays is as old as the history of human civilization. Their importance has begun to be realized better in today's world. In our history, plays have already had a special place. There are also some cross-cultural similarities between plays. It can be seen that various games are known and played in different countries and geographies by similar names (Poyraz, 2017). Ibn-i Sina says all children must play games (Önder, 2014). Mahmud al-Kashgari also mentions about children's games. Evliya Çelebi mentions about hundreds of stores that sell toys for children (Sevinç, 2009). Article 31 (1) of the "Convention on the Rights of the Child" adopted in November 20, 1989 reads as follows: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." (Sen, 2012).

Play is defined differently by different researchers. Dönmez defined play as follows: "Play is the most effective learning process for children, which serves a specific purpose or not and is played with or without rules, but always is a part of a real life and lies the basis for physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social development (as cited in: Poyraz (2017). Playing games is the second most important need after love for the physical and personality development of children. It is impossible to think a childhood without plays. Freud defines mental health as the ability to "love and work". Yörükoğlu briefly defines children's mental health as "being loved and playing". In his book titled "What men live by", Tolstoy says men live by love (Tolstoy, 2011).

Children learn by seeing and doing rather than reading, listening and understanding. Play is an important "job" for children. Playing is also a useful occupation for adults, but its function is different. The basic function of plays is to facilitate children's adaptation to the world. Children can understand the real world by playing. They deal with unwanted situations by playing games. Moreover, they construct the building blocks of language and concept development through playing. They try different social roles by playing games. Again, through playing, they find the stimulants that are not readily available in real life (Bacanlı, 2011). Mildred Parten, a researcher who conducts studies on children's games, recognizes six different types of plays and emphasizes their importance for child development. Among these six types of plays are Unoccupied Play, Onlooker Play, Solidarity Play, Parallel Play, Associative Play and Cooperative Play, all of which emphasize the importance of plays and toys (as cited in Bacanlı (2011)). Piaget, a cognitive theorist, classified plays in accordance with the theory he developed and said that plays derive from the desire to attribute a meaning to experiences. To him, play is an adaptation (Sevinç, 2009; Sen, 2012; Erduran and Yilmaz, 2016).

Another classification of plays put them into five classes as Movement Based Plays, Exploratory Plays, Imaginative Plays, Emotional and Tricking Plays and Imitation Plays. Peter Smith classifies plays into four as Locomotor Plays, Object plays, Social Plays and Imaginative Plays. In these plays, toys are one of the main elements. They are the best friends of children and even their confidants (Sezer, 2012). The psychologist Vygotsky states that children learn how to self-regulate, how to set up rules and how to abide by these rules through plays. He suggests that children try experiencing, understanding and learning the things they cannot do in real life by playing and plays provide the most suitable environment for the functioning of cognitive mechanism (Sevinç, 2009; Sen, 2012). For a child who ascribes a meaning to toys and objects, playing games and playing with toys is a serious business. Situations which are imaginary at first help children learn some rules, take a step beyond their development and construct their own zone of proximal development (Bacanlı, 2011). Children learn the most important roles such as being a mother or a father that they will experience in the future through plays. Between 2 and 3 years of age or 9 and 10 years of age, children have an imaginary friend. During this process which is a normal development pattern and a helpful occupation, the playmate is usually a toy. Playing games and playing with toys is not just an occupation, but also an activity that supports children's mental health and helps them establish and develop emotional relationships (Sezer, 2012). The process of playing also includes activities that help children learn values, beliefs and moral behaviors. Plays provide the ideal environment where we can teach children to clean, to help each other, to be honest and fair, to respect others and to love.

3. Toys and Toy Museums

Toys are actually a country's imagination of the future since they are designed by adults. There are some studies suggesting that the company which manufactures Barbie dolls today manufactured "German toy soldiers"

in 1933 based on Hitler's saying "ideas grow with children" dated many years before the World War II and helped winning the war through the perception and motivation it created 6 years before the war. Toys provide a common language for all children. At the same time, they are important indicators of the education system. The same holds true for our country, too. Small toy windmills (pinwheel) used once by the children have been a source for today's wind plants. Robot toys once loved by children are frequently used in daily life in various sectors today. Toy cars that transform like knight rider are in real life now. The paper kites of once are now in our life as Drones. It means that plays and toys are very important materials that incorporate the codes of a country's future.

In recent years, tech toys and plays have dominated the whole world. Such toys and plays do not allow children to make a decision. They do the entire job themselves, depriving children of the opportunity to research, explore and try. However, what is important in regards to plays and toys is that they provide children with the opportunity to do whatever they want, to try and explore and to be creative. Therefore, it should be discussed whether the existing toys are "smart" or not (Erduran and Yilmaz, 2016). Toy museums can be an alternative to this imported culture. One of the most effective methods to deal with children's electronic or digital addiction, which has emerged recently as a serious and frequently discussed problem (Bee and Boyd, 2009; Dilci, 2016; Göka, 2017) is to establish toy museums in which national plays and local toys can be used for educational purposes.

Toys are not just for kids. They also concern adults. There is no adult who is not affected or moved upon seeing the toys of his/her childhood. Since all children will be the adults, parents and teachers of the future, plays and toys are actually an important investment for the future. German educator Günter Stachel lists the outcomes of playing games with children and says that plays save a child from the complexity of the world which is under the hegemony of technology and provide children with the opportunity to create their own world (Stachel, 2009). Disregarding plays and toys means disregarding the child development (Akin, 2016). Yörükoğlu says the following: Play is a creation environment for children. They overstep and expand their bounds through plays. Children who play create their own imaginary world, but they imitate real-life experiences. They transfer their perceptions of real life into the play environment, incorporating them through their own interpretation. Children are as strong and skillful as adults while playing games. What they ride is not a stick, but a strong horse. The toy plane they play with is a real plane that can fly around the world. Their toy gun is more powerful than anyone (Yörükoğlu, 2008). A toy museum will also attract the attention of adults as much as children. Besides, it will contribute to the improvement of the national toy industry. In today's world where the traditional plays and toys fade into oblivion and electronic toys of foreign origin spread across the world, resurrecting and manufacturing our plays and toys means protecting our deep-rooted culture and introducing it to the world. Technocities are expected to make a supportive and creative contribution for the wooden toy manufacturers whose number has been decreasing gradually. Repair and manufacture shops which will be established in toy museums will attract the attention of not only children, but adults as well.

Toys and toy museums incorporate the history of dreams and imaginations. Humans first dream, and then they realize their dream. Everything starts with a dream. There are various examples of toy museums abroad, and recently, in Turkey. The toy museums founded by Sunay Akin in the cities like Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya and Gaziantep attract a great deal of attention and are liked by the children. The purpose of the Ankara University Faculty of Education Toy Museum, which was founded in 1990, is to preserve the toys which are at the risk of perishing during the times of swift social change in Turkey, to protect these toys, to hand them down to the next generations and to introduce them. Such museums are recognized as scientific institutions that serve the purpose of researching child culture. The toys in the museum were classified as traditional, fabricated, foreign origin, antique and new toys. The history of toy museums which were predominantly in the UK, Germany, France, Italy, Japan and Russia dates back to ancient times. Toys have changed in parallel with technological developments. Once made out of soil, wooden and tin, toys have gradually become more electronic-oriented.

It is a fact that the cities in Turkey are lack of social fields and activities for children. Social fields and activities are known to make a great contribution to the cognitive, affective and psycho-motor development of children. Universities and the Ministry of National Education have the most important role in making up this lack of social fields and activities. Pre-service preschool teachers studying at the Faculty of Education Preschool Teaching Department also feel the lack of toy museums. Establishment of toy museums has become a need that can no longer be postponed for these students to gain teaching experience. It is the responsibility of adults to make this dream of children who had to grow up without toys come true. Scientific studies revealed that toys are important materials for children in all aspects of their development. More toy museums should be established to meet this need of teachers and children.

Toy museums aim to have a collection of toys, which constitute an indispensable part of child education, and to contribute to children's creativity and their mental, emotional and psycho-motor development. Toys are the subjects of the argument of today's educators which is that "children learn through playing". Increasing the number and variety of toys will make children's learning easier and make the museums an effective practice center for preschool teachers. Besides, these museums will create cultural consciousness by introducing traditional plays (Âşık, Topaç, Kuş, Cüz, Karagöz, Hacivat, Orta Oyunu, Regional Plays) to our children as well as compiling the old toys used in Turkey and creating the opportunity to examine their sociological, psychological and educational function.

Functioning as a social and cultural activity, the projects for founding toy museums will attract the attention of not only the people in the region they are founded in, but also those living around the region. There are toy museums only in a few cities of Turkey. If we exclude Ankara, we can say that there is not toy museum in the Central Anatolia and Eastern Anatolia Regions. Toy museums should be established in at least the big cities of these regions as soon as possible. Toy museums will be a perfect practice center for the courses such as Material Design, Creativity and other Preschool Teaching courses offered in the Faculties of Education. The existing toy museums are visited by a large number of students. These visits will not only be limited to the toy museums, but also ensure that the other historical and touristic places are visited. This will also increase the quality of education.

The process first begins with visiting the toy museums at home and abroad. The toys used throughout the history are collected and those considered to make a contribution to children are identified and bought. Museums

can be established by receiving support from those who have expertise in this field (like Sunay Akın). The process is run with a group that will consist of the faculty members studying in this field, and if necessary of the students, from the Faculty of Education. Educational environments arranged especially for children constitute one of the most distinctive features of today's modern cities.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Playing games and playing with specific toys is an activity that makes a great contribution to learning, creativity, problem solving, personality development, mental health, cultural development and moral development of children. Besides, plays and toys are not just materials and activities that are needed in specific periods. Playing is an activity that needs to go along with formal education and that contributes to the development of children at least as much as formal education. We should make time for children to play games and play with toys as much as we make time for formal education. It is for sure that plays and toys will make a great contribution to solving our problems such as digital addiction, which has spread around the world, devaluation of values and weakening of social ties. Meeting with plays and toys, which is at least as important as love, is not just a need of children, but also is a teaching method for the adults who educate them. Plays and toys, together with the establishment of toy museums, are of critical importance for the protection of cultures and values, teaching these values, internalization of moral behaviors and development of language and creativity. In today's world where we frequently complain about the negative impacts of the media, plays whose content is well defined and which are guided by adults constitute one of the ways to solve this problem. We can say that the most important investment in the future of countries is to meet children with plays, toys and toy museums.

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