

Implementation of children's traditional games in early childhood

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The article 31 of the Convention on the rights of the child guarantees the right of the child „to engage in play . . . and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts“. In early childhood the play is the child's main activity and an important factor of its education.

Children's traditional games are an important part of the Czech cultural and educational tradition. These games which have been mostly created by children correspond to the needs of their development and pass from one generation to another as a part of children's folklore. Its creations (games, nursery rhymes, songs, riddles, and the like) have been preserved by oral tradition throughout centuries; some of them have lost their importance in the course of time and have fallen into oblivion. Others have been modified and supplemented with a new, either original or adopted creation. Those games which have been preserved until today are updated in different ways and they form a part of the present children's set of games.

Play of babies in the family

The lullaby in which love, tenderness, joy and care for the child find their artistic expression is a typical creation intended for babies. Lullabies originated as accompaniment to the movements serving for calming and lulling the suckling while rocking the cradle or nursing the child in one's arms. They fulfilled a double function: on the one hand they helped to satisfy the child's need of sleep and good humour, on the other hand they contributed to forming an affectionate relation of the people round the child to it.

When one sings to sucklings, it affects them as a sound, independently of the content of words. We can judge from the children's reactions that they certainly like it.

Besides lullabies the children's folklore contains the so-called „home playing“ which is very popular with children. For instance, it is playing with the child's body during which the adult makes movements of hands or legs with the child and accompanies them with a nursery rhyme or a song. The aim is to entertain and cheer the child, to stimulate its mobile and sensual activities and intensify the child's interpersonal relation not only with its parents but also with other family members and people round it.

These playing activities are very important because children begin to learn very early and they can in so doing make full use of the influence of family environment

In the second year of their life the infants achieve important progress in their development: the first steps and the first words appearing at the end of suckling's age are a presupposition of an ever broader involvement in life and learning of the child. In this respect nursery rhymes and tunes, connected with the different activities of children's life such as awakening, washing, dressing, lulling, and the like, use to be help and support.

These games very popular with children, have an irreplaceable role in rearing practices for babies, because they satisfy specific needs of development at this age.

Parents are the child's first educators and teachers. It is particularly mother who should often utilize the opportunity of getting in contact with the child by means of smile, word or song, by following its behaviour, by stimulating its cooperation, by supporting its initiative and experiencing with it joy and changes of moods. The mother's proceeding harmony with her child, developing in tender interactions, makes it possible for mother to record the child's progresses and to stimulate the child newly in their direction. The mutual emotional relation of mother and child is one of the starting points enabling its full and healthy development. A young mother should devote most of her spare time to playing with her child.

The preparation of young parents should contain besides recommendations on infant nutrition or hygienic aspects of baby care also an instruction on its psychic development and its education by playing.

Traditional children's games in the preschool institutions

In contrast to the family in which there predominate the child's games with the adults the nursery school provide the children with the possibility of playing in common with their partners. The folk singing games belong to the popular ones. They are in greater part group games with more or less fixed rules; all players are equal in them. These games make it possible for children to manifest themselves by means of connection of movement, word and music.

Every game represents a certain content expressed in a fixed stabilized form. The themes of games encompass different phenomena from the nature as well as social life, most frequently from human work and entertainment. The balance of individual means of expression is a specific feature of folk games: word, music and movement are the carriers of one idea, and this union is apparent on their artistic form as well. They contain a positive attitude to life, joy and humour. At the same time they provide the children with the possibility to manifest their fantasy, creative abilities, aesthetic feeling as well as promptness, and the like. Their most precious value consists in the fact that they are pervaded by love to the child and that they help to create by means of their joyfulness an atmosphere of cheerfulness and harmony which is necessary for the healthy development and feeling of happiness of every man, particularly then of the child in its first years of life.

The ever increasing pedagogical claims, force us to be dissatisfied with the more or less occasional inclusion of games into the educational process but to use them systematically and to aim at the creation of such a system of games as would optimally contribute to the development of every child. In the creation of such a system it is necessary to consider both the children's games of one's own nation and those of foreign nations and cultures.

The incorporation of the games of other nations into children's education has become topical at present times which are characterized by the plurality of cultures and their interpenetration. The games can become „envoys between nations“ because they draw other countries nearer to us, they promote deeper mutual understanding and international rapprochement as well.

The children become first of all acquainted with the culture of their own nation and only in consequence they have the chance of coming into contact with other cultures in a suitable selection.

The nursery school should be an environment which will make it possible for every child to satisfy its need for playing and learning in the company of children. This task is mainly ensured by preschool teachers.

The performance of singing games puts considerable demand on the teachers in the nursery schools. One presupposes both the teacher's preparedness in the respect of movement and music inclusive of playing an instrument and their knowledge of suitable children's games. For this reason they should be a part of the pre-service education and further education of preschool teachers.

The singing games contribute to an overall cultivation of children and they present the first stage of musical, dancing and dramatic education.

Children's games as objects of the research

Since the mid-nineteenth century the documentation of traditional rhymes and games was published in books for parents and educators. By the beginning of the twentieth century an increasingly standard set of traditional songs and games could be found in many reference books. Day-care institutions and schools thus became for years important centres for the cultivation of traditional children's games.

A number of well-known compilations of traditional children's games maintained their position on the market. And in nursery schools traditional games tended to remain as part of the every day programme, although they were in many cases superseded by modern educational games.