



CY-ICER2012

# A play, tens of teachers and hundreds of their ideas about child who doesn't play

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## Abstract

Most scientists and psychologists emphasize the positive effects of play on children. At this point, understanding teachers' opinions about play will be important for ensuring the arrangement of the environment based on play. The purpose of this research determines the teachers' ideas about play. Moreover, determines the teachers' natural play behaviours and also comparing the children's and teacher's thoughts about play are another aims of this study. A planned game and a poster were used for taking data. Descriptive analysis method was used for analysing the results. According to the results, participants have some stereotyped ideas about play. Although there are some differences, teachers' answers are mostly parallel to the children's thoughts, feelings and behaviours about play.

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*Keywords:* Play, stereotyped ideas about play, teachers' natural play behaviours

## 1. Introduction

Play is the way of exploring the world for children and also it helps children bring their experience, knowledge and understanding new things (Piaget 1975). Fisher (2008) states that play has critical role for socialization process because games with rules are seen as a key for children to adapt their social environment. Moreover, children have different roles and different play situations, these roles and relationship have positive effects on children development (Bronfenbrenner 1979). From this perspective, it can be thought that play enables children to learn the social rules and also help them to participate the society.

Benedict (2007) claimed that play exhibits some properties of children such as cleaning, nurturing, mastery, exploration, separation, power, aggression, and constancy. According to Gingsburg (2007) adult caregivers can understand their children's needs and their own world by observing their children when they are playing. In addition to positive different effects of play on children's physical, cognitive and emotional development, play also accepted as a right of children all over the world. Article 31 in Convention on the Rights of the Child: "*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*". The consequence is that parents and teachers have to supply environment and learning areas to children, based on play.

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A Bulotsky- Shearer, Domínguez, Bell, Rouse and Fantuzzo (2010) reported that children learn some concepts easier during play. Moreover, children’s problem solving skills develop in their games. They try to find original solutions in this process. In consideration of interaction between teacher and children, it is important what teachers think about play. Evans (2002) argues that sometimes teachers use play for reward and withdrawal of play as a punishment. At this point, determination of the teacher’s thoughts about play may be a starting point for developing child-centred education programs and environment, based on play.

The aim of current research was to determine the teachers’ ideas about child who doesn’t play, but that also enables understanding the teachers’ ideas about the play itself. In addition to this purpose, determines the teachers’ natural play behaviours and also comparing the children’s and teachers’ thoughts about play are another aims of the study. In this context the following research questions were posed:

- 1- What are the teachers’ stereotyped ideas about play?
- 2- How are the teachers’ natural play behaviours?
- 3- Is there any connection between teacher’s thoughts and children’s thoughts or feelings about play?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

The study was carried out with a total of 27 teachers from metropolitan pre-schools in Kırşehir. All of the participants were female and chosen randomly.

### 2.2. Materials

A poster with an unhappy matchstick man was prepared as an instrument for collecting data (Figure 1). On the picture there is a sentence completion which says; “if child doesn’t play, ...”. In addition to this poster, also a check-list poster which contains different opinions related to the questions on the former poster was prepared by Tuğrul & Güneş (Figure 2). When preparing check-list items, researchers benefit from studies of Evans (2002), Ginsburg (2007) and other literature about play. It can be seen from a comparison chart exhibits check-list items and other researchers’ findings about play is given Figure 3.

| Tuğrul & Güneş Check-list            |                                      | Evans (2002) article subjects           |                 |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| Be unhappy                           | Don’t obey social rules              | Solution for problematic behaviors      |                 |
| Be alone                             | Can’t develop language skills        | Movement/ physical activity             |                 |
| Be angry                             | Can’t develop making decision skills | Innovation                              | Controlling     |
| Unable to share, be selfish          | Unable to use his/her body           | Freedom                                 | Learning        |
| Be aggressive                        | Unable to give his/her attention     | <b>Ginsburg (2007) article subjects</b> |                 |
| Unhealthy development                | Unable to cooperate                  | Imagination                             | Socialization   |
| Unable to express himself, diffident | Unable to accept his/her fault       | Discover                                | Creativity      |
| Unable to develop owns creativity    | Unable to take responsibility        | Development                             | Enjoyable       |
| Stress                               | Unable to listen others              | Enable to show feelings                 | Prevent obesity |
| Show problematic behaviors           | Unable to have fun                   |   |                 |

Figure 3. Comparison chart of check-list items and other researchers' findings

However, participants were not allowed to see the check-list poster's answers before the game (Posters shown in Figure 1,2 and 4).



Figure 1. Unhappy matchstick man

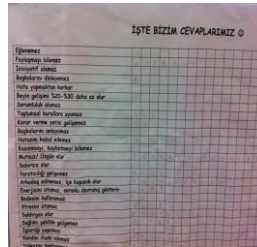


Figure 2. Check-list Poster



Figure 4. Teachers' answers on the poster

### 2.3. Procedure

The study was planned as a part of "Play is Health" conference organized within the Hacettepe University doctorate lecture and the conference was held in Ahi Evran University in the second half of 2011 academic year.

A game was designed for understanding teacher's opinions about play. It may be a useful strategy for determining teacher's ideas about play with the help of play. At this point, teachers just focused on the game and they reflected their stereotyped opinions related with the play. The rule of the game was so simple. The person, who finds more answers similar to the answers in the check-list, will be winner of the game.

From the beginning it was planned to give a gift for every participant at the end of the game. However, for raising motivation and make natural play observations of the participants, they were told that a gift will be given to the winner at the end of the game. All participants were given a gift at the end of the game.

Two minutes was accepted enough time for taking teachers' stereotyped ideas about the play. After the time was up, they checked their answers which were matching the answers on the poster. By this means, they did not only have the chance to see other opinions about the play but also they had the chance to raise their awareness of play.

After checking all their answers from the check-list poster, they stuck their answer papers on the former poster (Figure 4).

### 2.4. Data management and analysis

Descriptive analysis method was used for analysing data. Observation technique was also used for gaining data from participants' natural play behaviours. Moreover, information from literature also used for obtaining children's feelings about play.

## 3. Findings

Findings consist of three parts. Teachers' ideas about child who doesn't play, teachers' natural play behaviours and children's feelings and thoughts about play. The first data obtained from unhappy matchstick man and check-list posters. The second data based on researchers' observations. For the last part, researchers used some common information and findings which were published by other researchers.

### 3.1. Teacher's ideas about child who doesn't play

In this part, teachers' answers were categorized and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Answers of teachers' about a child who doesn't play

| Teacher's Answers | Frequencies | Percentage (%) | Teacher's Answers       | Frequencies | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Be unhappy        | 52          | 18.37          | Don't obey social rules | 10          | 3.54           |

|                                      |            |              |                                      |           |              |
|--------------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Be alone                             | 35         | 12.38        | Can't develop language skills        | 9         | 3.19         |
| Be angry                             | 23         | 8.13         | Can't develop making decision skills | 6         | 2.12         |
| Unable to share, be selfish          | 23         | 8.13         | Unable to use his/her body           | 6         | 2.12         |
| Be aggressive                        | 19         | 6.71         | Unable to give his/her attention     | 5         | 1.76         |
| Unhealthy development                | 19         | 6.71         | Unable to cooperate                  | 4         | 1.41         |
| Unable to express himself, diffident | 17         | 6.02         | Unable to accept his/her fault       | 4         | 1.41         |
| Unable to develop owns creativity    | 15         | 5.31         | Unable to take responsibility        | 3         | 1.05         |
| Stress                               | 14         | 4.95         | Unable to listen others              | 3         | 1.05         |
| Show problematic behaviors           | 13         | 4.59         | Unable to have fun                   | 3         | 1.05         |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>230</b> | <b>81.30</b> |                                      | <b>53</b> | <b>18.70</b> |

According to Table 1, there are totally 283 answers related with a child who doesn't play. All of them are categorized in 20 different groups and some of them are intense such as "be unhappy, be alone and be angry". Moreover the first six answers nearly constitute 60% of all answers from the check-list poster. Furthermore, unhealthy development, problematic behaviours, stresses and creativity issues constitute nearly 20% within all answers. It can be seen that some answers have a low percentage. For instance, "unable to have fun, unable to listen others and unable to cooperate" have less than 5% ratio within the whole answers.

While some items on check-list were not given as answers, some participants gave different answers from the check-list. These items are shown in Figure 5 & 6.

| <b>Items on check-list not given as answers by teachers</b> |
|---|
| Be stubborn   |
| Be impatient  |
| Unable to understand others feelings or thoughts            |
| Unable to accept loss or gain                               |
| Afraid of making a mistake                                  |
| Brain development occur 20%-30% less than normal            |

Figure 5. Answers from check-list not used by participant

| <b>Teacher's answers different from check-list</b> |
|--|
| Unable to learn life                               |
| Don't want to go school                            |
| Unsatisfied  |
| Failed   |
| Be obese   |
| Uncontrolled movements and tics                    |

Figure 6. Teachers' answers different from check-list

It is understood from Figure 5 that, participants thought that there is no correlation between play and being stubborn or impatient and also they thought that there is no correlation between play and brain development. These finding shows that items on exhibits in Figure 5 are not teachers' stereotyped ideas about play.

Some participants stated different opinions which were not in the check-list. These opinions are very valuable for identifying teachers' other opinions and developing the check-list for further studies. Figure 6 exhibits participants' other ideas.

### 3.2. Teachers' natural play behaviors

After teachers' play behaviours were observed, it was taken notes and behaviours list was prepared (Figure 7).

|                           |                                     |                              |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Many of them were excited | Many of them had fun                | Some of them assisted others |
| Many of them were happy   | Many of them wanted to gain present | Some of them played together |

Figure 7. Teachers' natural play behaviors list

It is understood from Figure 7 that, participants' play behaviours are similar to children's play behaviours. Like the children, participants were excited, had fun and were happy during the game. Also participants' behaviours matched up with their answers.

### 3.3. Children's feelings and thoughts about play

In this study, only the teachers and their ideas about play were examined. However, another aim of this research was comparing teachers' and children's perceptions of play. To reach this goal, a list utilized by studies of Evans (2002) and Tuğrul, Tokuç & Güneş (2011) was prepared, including children's feelings about play (Figure 8).

| <b>Children's feeling about play</b> | Evans (2002) | Tuğrul, Tokuç & Güneş (2011) |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| I am happy when I play               | X            |                              |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| I have fun when I play  | X |   |
| I feel myself free  | X |   |
| I want to play always at school                                   | X |   |
| I learn new things when I play                                    |   | X |
| I forget bad things that make me upset when I play                |   | X |
| I can understand things based on my curiosity if I play with them |   | X |
| I have curiosity about all games and also I want to play so much  |   | X |

Figure 8. Children's feelings and thoughts about play

According to Figure 8, there is a variation in children's feelings and thoughts about play. In general, it can be said that play means a source of happiness, fun, feel children free and helps children learn new things (Evans, 2002). Tuğrul et al. (2011) asked children "What are the things which are your curiosity?" some children said that all games and plays. Another question is "what do you do to resolve your curiosity?" and other children responded this question "if I play with them, I can understand them". These findings show that play for children as a means of curiosity and also help resolving their curiosity.

#### 4. Results & Discussion

Examining Table 1, it is understood that participants have some common stereotyped ideas about play. Almost 80% of the answers are related with children being unhappy, alone, angry, selfish, stressed, having unhealthy development, creativity issue, problematic behaviours and problems in social rules. The ideas stating play's preventative effects on "being unhappy an alone" are the most common stereotyped ideas (totally 30%). These findings are parallel to Evans' (2002) thoughts about teachers' approach to play. Evans (2002) states that teachers understand the true value of play and learning through play is accepted philosophy in preschool setting. Play time is still favourite part of the school day for most children and what they do in the playground at recess times remains highly significant in their lives. Newton & Jenvey (2010) claim that play also thought as solution of problematic behaviours in children. Moreover, participants' various thoughts about children who don't play resemble the other studies in literature. For instance, Hillman (2006) claims not enough physical activities cause unhealthy development, chronic disease and also obesity. This linkage is recognized similarly in participants' answers which related with physical activities and health obesity ( Figure 6). Health and play correlation is not only be considered by teachers, but also it is discussed by health professions. For example, Ginsburg (2007) had some suggestions about play to paediatricians. These suggestions are "pediatricians can promote free play as a healthy, essential part of childhood. They should recommend that all children are afforded ample, unscheduled, independent, non-screen time to be creative, to reflect, and to decompress" and "active child-centered play is a time-tested way of producing healthy, fit young bodies". It is understood from the Figure 5 that none of the participants thought that there is a connection between play and understanding others or being afraid of making mistakes or being patient etc. It can be said that there are some common stereotyped ideas about play but some vital effects of play are not in the list of stereotyped ideas.

Figure 7 show that teachers behave like children during the play. Natural play behaviours do not change over time and these behaviours give clues about personal characteristics. Although there are some differences thoughts of play between teachers and children, teachers' play behaviours are mostly parallel to children's play behaviours. Actually, more detailed studies are needed to analyse adult natural play behaviours.

Comparing Figure 8 and Table 1, it is clear that teachers are aware that the children are happy, not feel alone and not aggressive when they are playing (nearly 40%). Moreover, almost 30% teachers think that play prevent to be selfish, be aggressive, be diffident and also help the children's' creativity. However, in the given time, participants did not realize that children feel themselves free during the play, want to play when they are upset. Beside these feelings of children, they want to play all time in school, they also have curiosity of play, and they have fun when they are playing (Figure 8). Whereas, play is fun for children, only 3 teachers wrote this answer (Table 1). As a result, most teachers focus on play's social effects or physical and cognitive development effects, while children evaluate play a slightly different from teachers.

In-service training programs, organizations and applications related with play are useful for developing child-centred education programs and also useful for integrating play to many areas of children's life. This study or similar studies will be carried out with more pre-school or elementary teachers, and also with parents.

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