

EDU WORLD 2022**Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****THE GAME DURING THE PANDEMIC**

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Abstract

The game creates channels of communication with children in different directions. In addition, children express emotions and moods that they cannot or do not know how to verbalize. The degree of identification with certain statuses can be a clear indication of the child's emotional state, especially since at this age children do not recognize the states they are going through and do not know what to do to overcome them. The state of the pandemic affected the way children were able to get involved in games, but also the identity of the playgroup. The elements of artistic-aesthetic culture have to form from an early age by integrating them into children's games. Playing behavior is primary to and a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of the generation of culture. This study aims to identify how pandemic restrictions have affected children's playing behavior as well as the pandemic-altered aspects that have remained post-pandemic. We did a study research and a local research. The results have proven that playing behavior adapted to the new situation. The study should continue in order to discover the methods that recalibrate the playing behavior.

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1. Introduction

Spontaneous games - childhood games - are a source of knowledge with a defining role in shaping the child's personality. Operations such as organizing, comparing, estimating, observing, anticipating actions or effects are essential in successfully completing activities undertaken by children, even if they are activities supported by the teacher, in school, or are games proposed by children in the group of friends. The first socio-moral representations of the child are made through play. The rules of the game prohibit undisciplined behavior. Their violation entails the elimination of the person in question from the game and the sanction of the team when the final results are established. In order not to harm the team, the child is placed in a position to comply with the rules of the game. Thus, he practically acquires a societal habit, he also has the possibility to appreciate the conduct of his colleagues.

Play and game provoke discussions very often in society, but they are activities that support the tendency of human socialization. The game is defined by rules, being stricter, and children learn which rule cannot be broken and which rule can be broken, and under what conditions. Breaking the rules, however, is the starting point when it comes to play. It is the main manifestation of children, when they try to get rid of the routine of the day through imagination. For this reason he violates all the rules of nature and reality by creating fantastic characters, or attributes supernatural powers to himself, thus imposing their vision.

This spontaneous playful element appears in Romanian literature, both in poetry and prose, especially when the childhood of a character is presented. It is possible that, from this perspective, the best known character is Nică, by Ion Creangă. However, both Tudor Arghezi and Ion L. Caragiale were caught playing and playing.

Among the first works on play and game are *Les jinx et les hommes*, Roger Caillois in 1958 and *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Johan Huizinga in 1938. Later works on play and play refer to these works. R. Caillois captures the game from the perspective of its realization, but also of society, having an anthropological role. Caillois considers that the whole adventure of human civilization can be captured in its entirety in this slow but inexorable passage from traditional, pre-industrial, tribal society, where the mimicry binomial predominates (mask and vertigo, simulacrum and possession), the Orderly society, emancipating itself from the realm of chaos and supernatural forces, moving to a regime of order, hierarchies, bureaucracy and social contract, where there is "a healthy trade-off between heredity, luck, fate and personal ability based on competition, on merit and on following the rules (agon)" (Bulboacă, 2015, p. 233).

Huizinga states that "poetic language differs from ordinary language in that it is intentionally expressed in special images, which not everyone understands. Every language is an expression of the image" (Huizinga, 2003, p. 76). The author thus manages to convey and make himself understood. Childhood is the stage that allows the author the most variations, because the game and the innocence of childhood are regretted in adult life. The elements of artistic-aesthetic culture are formed from an early age by integrating them into children's games. Huizinga emphasizes the connection between play and the formation of a culture that is defined over several stages of life. Immanuel Kant will develop this aspect through a critique of taste. He defines aesthetic taste as the basis of the faculty of distinction and appreciation not by an intellectual effort, but by a reaction of feeling. In the game, it is the feelings that

prevail, that allow the children to relax and learn. In the same work he emphasizes that art - created or of nature - is beautiful in its simple appreciation, which ensures the formation of the elements of artistic-aesthetic culture through play. "If art directly seeks to produce the feeling of pleasure, it is called aesthetic art" (Kant, 1981, p. 200).

All this classifies games into essential, beneficial activities, games that develop certain qualities of the human personality: fair play, imagination, the spirit of competition, artistic-aesthetic culture, but also harmful games, which are on the border between play and impulsive manifestations. In their case the rules are required and their observance is enforced.

The game has been defined from several perspectives, often appearing as the act of playing, or, according to DEX, as a fun activity practiced for pleasure, especially by children. However, as we noted earlier, the game offers multiple possibilities for analysis and various perspectives of interpretation. When it comes to identifying the functions of the game, several variables appear here as well. The game acquires increasingly complex psychological roles: formative functions, relaxation functions, functions to facilitate the adaptation of children to more complex aspects of the environment, humanization functions, constituting a preparation of the child for life, functions of psychophysical development and Satisfaction of the need for activity, says Verza (2000, p. 124).

We can thus understand that the game has a multiple character, in which any activity takes the form of a playful behavior, if specific rules and conditions are imposed. At school age the child can discover various forms of the same game, can introduce dynamic, fantastic elements in the conditions of the game, all of which have as their primary goal their own satisfaction.

The adaptive function is manifested by "accommodating and assimilating the external reality - physical and social - and adapting to the given environment" (Piaget, 1969, p. 64) was one of the supporters of this function in any activity that supports learning. During the game the child appeals to acquisitions acquired from the external environment, finalizing by internalizing the rules of this world. During the age of childhood it is possible notice an increase in the child's ability to quickly and coherently translate into THE GAME the elements of reality: roles, attitudes, objects. The child creates a small world of his in the game, a world in which he transposes contexts from the real world, a world in which he "tries all the possibilities of reaction and chooses the one that satisfies both the requirements of society - the rules of the game - and his own personality" (Răduț-Taciu, 2004, p. 54).

According to Păiși Lăzărescu (2007) the formative function of the game "is somewhat detached from the first function, because the game allows the realization of some choices and the outlining of some own personality traits, following the choices made" (p. 103). The game allows the reproduction of reality and the direct involvement of the child from a perceptual point of view, of the reaction skills, of the thinking and communication abilities, all these being enriched both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The informative function is provided by the context of the game, its rules, but also its content. Every game appeals to both cognitive and social information. Thus the child acquires notions, concepts. "The game also ensures the realization of manipulations, orders, classifications, favoring the operations of thinking" (Crețu, 2009, p. 93). Through the actions performed in the game, the child discovers characteristics about objects, physical laws, similarities and differences, all of which represent permanent cognitive acquisitions.

The socializing function is also imposed by the social character of the age: the child begins to play with other children, not next to them. The game is now imposed in the group facilitating cooperation but also competition. The relationship with other children facilitates the acquisition of forms of behavior, ensures the choice of those appropriate forms of reaction in given situations. “The child is placed in given situations and can find elements of the self, to shape his own image” (Niculescu, 2007, p. 87).

The function of revealing the psyche is deduced from “the child's ability to be discovered by others during the game, not only by himself” (Șchiopu, 1970, p. 102). The child has different reactions during play unlike other reactions in the environment. The way the child chooses the work material, the work partners, the strategy for approaching the task of the game favors the observation of the psychophysical development, possible disorders or behavior dysfunctions of the child.

UNESCO described the impact of pandemic situation on children's behavior, all the more so as there are spaces where the only environment for children to play and model their children's artistic-aesthetic culture is school: “the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems globally, affecting the most vulnerable learners the hardest. It has increased inequalities and exacerbated a pre-existing education crisis” (UNESCO, 2022, p. 1) . At the same time, in its reports, UNESCO supports the promotion of playing among children because it is a major activity that allows them to overcome such severe crises. “Play is learning and helps developing creativity, motor skills and decision-making. It also reduces anxiety and develops emotional resilience. Use music, dance, painting etc. to bolster communication and interpersonal skills, as well as cognitive development, from concentration to risk-taking” (UNESCO, 2020, p. 4).

The issue of children's behavior in the new world conditions is a concern of UNICEF, specifying that “a broad involvement of actors at all levels and at all stages of the planning cycle is essential to outline the necessary interventions and ensure their readiness active support” (UNICEF, 2020, p. 8) The European Commission is supporting research and developing projects to improve children's ability to adapt to the new reality because “The COVID-19 situation has had a direct impact on children's play content” (COMISIA EUROPEANĂ, 2021, p. 55). Studies have been conducted in Spain on the emotional impact of the pandemic on children. The results showed:

Potential sources of discomfort were detected, the most relevant being boredom, the presence of which could be expected due to the movement of physical and experiential space during isolation. It is also very interesting that they detected slightly significant variations in these data in relation to age and gender differences, although a very common phenomenon in both, girls showed sadness, worry and fear more often than boys. (Muñoz et al., 2020, p. 42)

All these data determined me to study the problem of children's play behavior in a pandemic context.

2. Problem Statement

Fulfilling these functions certifies the major impact of the game on the mental, cognitive, emotional, social health and culture of children. The pandemic period had effects not only on the time the

children spent playing but also on the quality of the games played. The children no longer had direct contact, which led them to video games, to virtual space. What is more worrying is that these trends continue post-pandemic.

3. Research Questions

The present study aims at a two-way action:

Firstly, the analysis of official reports published during the pandemic and later until March 2022 in Europe and the question is: Have changes in playing behavior during pandemic period been identified?

Subsequently, a local research was conducted in Romania on a group of 200 subjects aged between 9 and 12 years, from the same school and the question is: Which are the most important changes that occurred in the playing behavior during the pandemic period?

4. Purpose of the study

This study aims to determine if during the pandemic period did occurred changes in playing behaviour and the specific type of these changes.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Selection of studies and reports

Selection of studies and reports included articles published on ProQuest Central, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. UNESCO and European Commission reports were also included. Keywords included were: outdoor games, imaginary games, role-playing games, video games, in-game behaviour, child, children, COVID-19, SARS-CoV-19, childhood, restrictions, consequences. In order to find as many related studies as possible, references to eligible studies as well as relevant articles were searched using a snowball technique. Articles examining play behaviours and play in general in children during the COVID-19 epidemic were considered eligible. Considering the game, indoor activities such as video games, board games, role-playing games, etc. were eligible and outdoor activities such as cycling, free play, sports, etc. In terms of study design, case reports, cross-sectional studies, case studies were included. Written studies in English and French were chosen and there were no gender restrictions. Information on the impact of the pandemic on children - how the family replaced the role of the playgroup - was selected and centralized.

5.2. Local research

200 students aged between 9 and 12 were selected, belonging to the same school in Constanța, without gender restriction. The children completed a questionnaire that included questions about the games they played before the pandemic, the degree to which they continued during the pandemic and post-pandemic. The time spent on electronic devices / video games, the number of sports activities performed in a pandemic week, time spent outdoors during the pandemic and post-pandemic. The questionnaire was completed in Google Forms and completed in the school space to avoid the

intervention of adults and to obtain information as close as possible to the reality of children. The centralization of the results was done graphically including statistical information on pre-pandemic playing behaviours, during the pandemic / lockdown and post-pandemic. The graphics helped me identify the percentage of children's favourite activities and also an overview of outdoor activities trends.

6. Findings

6.1. The results of theoretical studies

Information was provided describing that children's access to play was limited during quarantine periods, but without a significant change in children's play behaviours in general. In most countries, restrictive measures have banned or at least discouraged parents from using playgrounds or outdoor sports; thus, outdoor activities were limited among children. Studies have identified an advanced percentage increase in time spent on video games and a decrease in time spent on role-playing or imaginative games.

6.2. Local research results

Following the centralization of the questionnaires, we obtained essential information in understanding their playing behaviours. Comparing the information provided by primary school children with those in middle school during the lockdown period, we notice that they are more likely to spend time outdoors at a certain time and less on electronic devices:

90% of the children from the early period of COVID-19 chose activities in the yard or spending free time with grandparents in rural areas;

10% of the children participated in training sessions or team sports trainings through remote or streaming services.

Children's outdoor games or sports training were affected during the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, outdoor activities being restricted during certain periods, which led to the cessation of certain team sports activities - football, basketball, dancing, fencing. By contrast, there was a 30% increase in time spent playing board games, family games, attention and skill games. Time spent on video games decreases mostly in families where there is more than one child, but increases in families where parents worked from home. The overview of outdoor activities trends shows that the more time children spend with their parents, the greater desire to leave computer games and spend time outdoors.

7. Conclusions

The emotional state of the children was affected by the lack of social play during COVID-19. All the children surveyed complained that they missed friends or playing with other children in general. Playing with family members has been associated with stronger connections within family and improving the mood of children. Family has an important impact over the formation of the elements of the artistic-aesthetic culture through their own example and through their actions, sustaining the development of imagination and cultural exposure. This time spent during the game (both video games and conventional

gaming) was an important factor that contributed to the increase of well-being and the identification of beauty in a (virtual) environment different from those experienced mainly before the pandemic period. Worryingly, many children (40%) maintained the same post-pandemic behaviour towards play, avoiding group, role-playing or imaginative play. The impact is much more serious when, in the absence of the game, the activities specific to the formation of the elements of the artistic-aesthetic culture are limited. Thus, imagination and creativity are less trained, the effects becoming long-lasting and difficult to recover. New approaches to the game have to be discovered, in the context of the predominant use of virtual space, to ensure a complete formation of children's personality.

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