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PLAY ACTIVITY WITH MILITARY TOYS AT PRESCHOOL AGE

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The article analyzes various attitudes to military toys, both positive and negative, existing in Russia and abroad. Toy weapons are viewed as a separate type of military toy. The study looks at the impact of military toys on children's emotions and personality. The study looks at how children play games on their own and the way they organize them. We have conducted an experiment where three types of toys were used – military toys, soft toys and objects that act as toy substitutes. The study of games and the roles children took showed their poor playing skills. The research has detected existing connection between imagination and thinking ability and the children's play activity. None of the children took the role of 'the defender of the weak' or 'Patria's defender', which contradicts the results of an opinion survey of children's parents who think that military toys help to develop 'patriotism', 'courage', and 'teach to protect the weak'.

Repeated observation of the way the same children play with military toys has shown that they take the role of defenders of the motherland or the weak only after watching TV-programmes or fiction films which show male characters defending their motherland or the weak using weapons, which shows that children's games have social character.

The experiment's results detected what activity adults, who are concerned with the young generation's attitude to weapons and violence, should perform. It is vital to strengthen children's moral, ethical and cognitive spheres first, and only in second place fight against sales of military toys both in Russia and abroad.

Keywords: play activity, senior pre-school age, military toy, toy weapons, patriotism, courage.

ОСОБЕННОСТИ ИГРОВОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ С ВОЕННОЙ ИГРУШКОЙ РЕБЕНКА ДОШКОЛЬНОГО ВОЗРАСТА

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В статье анализируется различное – позитивное и негативное - отношение к военной игрушке, имеющее место в нашей стране и за рубежом. Как на особый вид военной игрушки выделяется игрушечное оружие. Акцентируется внимание на том, что влияние игрушки на эмоционально-личностную сферу ребенка необходимо рассматривать через изучение игровой деятельности с данной игрушкой. Основным методом исследования выбрано изучение уровня способности к индивидуальному построению игровой деятельности. Для проведения эксперимента использовались три различных набора игрушек – военная игрушка, мягкая игрушка и предметы-заместители реальных игрушек. Анализ игровых действий и ролей, которые брали на себя дети, показал низкий уровень развития игровой деятельности. Установлена взаимосвязь уровня игровой деятельности с низким уровнем развития воображения и мышления. Никто из детей не взял на себя роль «защитника слабых» или «защитника Родины», что не совпадает с результатами опроса родителей этих детей, которые считают, что военная игрушка помогает воспитывать «патриотизм», «мужество», «помогают защищать слабого».

Повторные наблюдения за игровой деятельностью этих же детей с военной игрушкой показало, что они берут роли защитников Родины после просмотра по ТВ передач, художественных фильмов, где мужчина с оружием в руках является защитником Родины или защитником слабых, что доказывает социальную природу детской игры.

Результаты эксперимента позволили определить направления деятельности взрослых, кому небезразлично отношение подрастающего поколения к оружию и насилию: она должна быть связана, в первую очередь, с

формированием нравственных качеств ребенка и развитием познавательной сферы и только во вторую очередь с борьбой с игрушечным оружием, которая проводится как у нас в стране, так и за рубежом.

Ключевые слова: игровая деятельность, старший дошкольный возраст, военная игрушка, игрушечное оружие, патриотизм, смелость.

Although play activity of pre-school children as a psychological phenomenon has been thoroughly studied, the research is important, because play activity prevails at pre-school age and allows all round development of children's psychology. Secondly, play activity provides a natural environment for conducting various experiments and studying children's psychology.

Theoretical grounding of the psychology of play activity has been given in papers by P.P. Blonskiy, L.I.Bozhovich, L.S. Vygotskiy, A.V. Zaporozhets, A.N.Leontiev, V.S. Mukhina, S.L. Rubinstein, D.B. Elkonin, etc.

The toy is an essential element of most children's games.

Recently there appeared many new kinds of toys including military toys, which have caused much debate among scientists and specialists in pre-school pedagogy both in Russia and abroad. There are controversial opinions of the impact military of toys on children – one group believes it is negative, while others see its positive sides.

Despite the wide variety of military toys at shops they are not mentioned in any classifications of toys made by Russian psychologists and specialists in pedagogy [1]. Moreover no research has been conducted in play activity with military toys and its possible impact on children's personality, which makes this study of great interest.

Let us take a closer look at Russian and foreign psychologists' attitude to the military toy. According to the Canadian IPA military toys increase aggressiveness in children. While playing with them children tend to show destructive behavior and perceive the war as an interesting game or an adventure where they may kill and where violence may be used to resolve problems and conflicts [4].

M.Brandl (Ulm, Germany) is of the opposite opinion. His research has shown that military toys do not increase aggressiveness in children. He claims that ‘despite the prohibition on modern military toys in European countries such toys play an important role in children’s life. They symbolize power and authority and help children overcome their negative experience’ [6, p.152].

S.V. Onoschenko is among those who see positive impact of military toys on children. According to her the impact is varied and affects the child’s cognitive sphere: ‘sets of plastic or tin soldiers reflect various historic epochs, show differences between countries and states, educate about military history and develop the child’s strategic thinking skills’ [3].

We can side with S.V. Onoschenko and agree that military toys can develop children’s psychology – mentality, imagination, memory, and will power if we take a look at play sets in toy shops. They are play sets of toy soldiers ‘Samurai’, ‘Scythians’, ‘Parachutists’, ‘Machine-gun group’, ‘Scouts’ which develop creativity in children and that can be used for collecting, play sets ‘Sheriff’, ‘Cowboy’, ‘Secret intelligence agent’, etc.

According to D.B. Elkonin they develop the child’s consciousness, however he noted that ‘the change in certain psychological processes during the game is obvious and can even be measured, but it is hidden and is determined by a substantial inner change in the child’s personality and consciousness which is however less visible’ [7, p.27].

We suppose that in our studies of play activity with military toys we should pay special attention to the type of military toys, which according to N. Nilsson can include toys that imitate weapons; construction kits to make models of tanks, fighting trucks, cannons, war-planes, war-ships; toy models of fighting trucks, soldiers and other things used in a war [4, p.175].

We assume that toy weapons (guns, machine-guns, cannons, etc.) have the strongest impact on children’s psychology. These toys have one particular purpose no

matter what the game is about – when using them a child is an ‘attacker’ or is ‘defending himself’ by ‘killing’ another participant of the game – real or imaginary.

Unfortunately, in Russia instruction manuals for such play sets provide only a brief historic note and simple recommendations on how to play with them. Only the children who can read, which is not always the case at pre-school age, can make use of this information. Thus in most cases pre-school children play with the toys using their imagination or act out plots of TV programmes which they watch.

In our study we assume that ‘unlike the game the toy is seldom important by itself as it is only an accessory, a real object used in imaginary reality of the game. ... That is why to study the phenomenon of the toy it is necessary to take a closer look at the game, not the toys and its elements.’ [2, p.9]. We used video surveillance cameras to look at how senior pre-school boys play with military toys and how the toys influence them.

We have used the method by O.K. Repina which allows detecting three types of play activity – linear, circular and intermediary. Only the use of linear type is an indicator of well-developed play skills. [5]

In the course of the experiment the child was offered three types of play sets. We used the toys that complied with the purpose of our study, different from what O.K. Repina mentioned. The first set contained various toy weapons (trucks, tanks, castles, swords, war-planes, catapults, toy soldiers, robots and warriors). The second set had soft toys and dolls. The third consisted of substitute toys – boxes, blocks, which the child could use the way they wanted.

The experiment was performed on an individual basis. Every child was invited to a play room where they were offered to play with any toys, which they could choose from any play set. After the game began the researcher showed interest and started asking the child questions: ‘What game are you playing?’, ‘Who are you now?’, ‘What are you doing at the moment?’

After some time the researcher had to introduce a new event into the game. They would take a doll and say in a mysterious voice: ‘Let’s imagine that once...’.

Some time later, after the child accepted the new character into the game the researcher explained that it was time to finish the game and suggested thinking of the right ending, for example: 'Let's think how this story finished?' or 'Let's finish as it's time to join the group', etc.

We have taken a closer look at the children's cognitive sphere deriving from D.B Elkonin's statement that the child's play activity depends on their mental development. The child's ability to imagine game plots in its turn depends on their imagination and thinking skills. To study these we have used conventional psychological techniques such as 'Finish the figure', 'Make up a fairy-tale', 'Classification'.

The study of play activity of pre-school boys showed that they preferred military toys from the first set, which allowed us to study how they played with this kind of toys.

We discovered that 90% of children used a 'circular' plot and 10% - 'intermediary' plot, which shows poor individual play activity.

Secondly, we studied the children's ability to make use of objects not connected to each other by their idea, to create imaginary situations and interweave them with the game's logic, and act out roles of game characters in their mind.

In the experiment 90% of children could not name the plot of the game they were playing or were going to play. Only one boy said he was playing circus. The rest of children when asked 'What game are you playing?' could only name the toys they chose ('I'm playing with these toys', 'with the cars', 'with the horses, they are fighting') or gave a vague answer: 'I'm playing nothing' or 'all this'. We could only suppose that the game plots were 'war', 'soldiers' battle', 'gangsters'.

Most games were about fighting, killing or shooting which the child repeated several times. Game plots showed combat between two parties ('us' and 'them', 'the red' and 'the blue') or all the characters were fighting each other without any division into warring parties.

In one case the parties' actions were motivated (for example they were sieging a fortress) in other cases not motivated (fighting or killing for its own sake).

50% of children did not take any roles, but acted as directors. The answer to the question 'Who are you now?' in most cases was: 'I am Danila', 'I'm me.' Other children chose very general roles 'I'm a soldier', 'I'm a warrior'. Only 10% of the children took particular roles and identified themselves with cartoon characters ('I am knight Mongol', etc.) However, none of them performed any action that would comply with the chosen role, but only 'directed' the activity of their toy characters.

Unexpected appearance of a new game character (a doll) suggested by the researcher did not cause any reaction in children, neither did they include it into their game plot. In most cases they isolated the doll – put it aside (70% of cases), put it into the castle (20%), or killed it (10%). The doll character was 'killed' very cruelly – the child tore off its legs, arms, head or cut it into pieces with a sword. The explanation why they did it was: 'gorilla killed the doll, because it didn't cure others'(other game characters).

Thirdly, we have detected average to poor imaginative and thinking skills in all the children under test (with the prevalence of poor). Neither of the children displayed well-developed cognitive ability, which proved our supposition of the interconnection between it and play activity with military toys.

The study of play activity with military toys allowed us to find the answer to the question asked by psychologists, pedagogues and the public about whether playing with military toys develops patriotism, courage and bravery in children, etc.

For this purpose we have studied the opinion of parents whose children took part in the experiment and found out that all of them thought the influence was positive. According to them, this kind of toys develop 'patriotism', 'courage', 'will power' and 'teaches to protect the weak', etc. Moreover, 60% of parents believe courage and bravery cannot be developed without military toys.

However, when they described the way their children played with military toys, they found it difficult to name the games' plots, which according to D.B.

Elkonin reflect the child's environment, or the role they chose in the game. In other words, parents found it difficult to identify their children's game roles, whether the child was a border guard, a policeman, a trooper, a gangster or a gunman. Parents could only name two types of activity their child performed with toy weapons: 'running' and 'shooting'. Neither of the parents could understand what particular action the child was performing – if they were attacking, protecting or killing somebody.

As we can see, the experiment showed that the children's play activity is different from the way their parents see it according to the opinion survey – neither of the children took the role 'to protect the weak' or 'defend the motherland'. In most cases children were fighting for some material values, some children 'killed' their 'enemy', but were unable to explain why.

To be fair, repeated observation of games with military toys played by the boys from this age group showed that they can perform the role of 'defenders of motherland' in the game 'Border Guards'. The game became popular because of the Border Guard's Day, which was celebrated at that period of time and many TV programmes and fiction films were devoted to it. After talking to the child who started this game we learnt that he had watched the film 'Border Guard's Dog Aliy' together with his grandfather the day before.

Finally, we have detected that play activity with military toys depends not only on the types of toys, but on the child's cognitive sphere. The game's plot and contents are of social origin, which L.S.Vygotskiy and D.B. Elkonin wrote about.

We suppose that structural elements of the game like the role and the actions it suggests (defending, attacking or struggling), may depend on the child's personality and emotions. However, this supposition needs a separate study.

Therefore, the study of play activity with military toys has shown certain patterns similar to those present in games with other types of toys. The conducted analysis of the roles children take when playing with military toys, the behavior they demonstrate, which is aggressive in most cases, and its motifs suggests that playing

with military toys does not strengthen patriotism, courage or bravery in children. To develop these characteristics it is necessary to educate children about the history of their motherland, teach them to love it and to make it better.

The experiment's results detected what activity adults, who are concerned with the young generation's attitude to weapons and violence, should perform. It is vital to develop children's moral, ethical and cognitive spheres first, and only in the second place fight against sales of military toys both in Russia and abroad [4].

Therefore, it is necessary to educate both children and parents. In our opinion, parents should be aware how the role the child chooses in the game and actions it initiates can influence their psychology and personality.

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