

Chapter 5

Towards a Pedagogy of Free Time

Abstract

Free time is often underrated in a society that aims at productivity. Even though free time, to relax, think, daydream and performing activities that satisfy and please the individuals, is necessary for every human being, for children it is quintessential. It is through play that children thrive and develop fundamental cognitive functions, soft skills and personality traits, that allow them to develop to their fullest potential. Even though the decrease in free time has been the norm for many years, favouring academic subjects thought to be more useful for the modern world and increasing competitiveness from an early age, numerous research shows the undeniable benefits of leisure for the overall development of children.

This chapter is divided into two parts: the first concerns the theoretical approach to the subject; the second compiles five workshops to be used by teachers/trainers when discussing the importance of free time with their students. In the first part, we will discuss the importance of free time and play, which is being constantly reduced due to the changes in family's and children's routines in the last decades. Different types of play are the focus of the second section: physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretend play, and games with rules, all have unique characteristics and contribute differently to the development of the children. All children require attention and caregiving to achieve the best developmental results; the third section is dedicated to the relationships that help children perceive and attribute meaning to the world. The workshops that follow are based in the theoretical concepts briefly approached in the first part and follow an experimental basis, to raise awareness for the need to invest in free time and play.

Aim of the chapter

This chapter aims to define the basic terms of free time pedagogy and explain the value of play and leisure for the psychosocial functioning of children. It analyses the importance of free time and its use in children development. It underlines the relevance of different types of play, and its specific benefits, as well as the involvement of the community and political actors in that objective. It aims to motivate educators to embrace free time as a prerequisite for children to learn and develop, through different play activities.

Objectives

Teachers will become able to:

- understand free time pedagogy and its importance for children;

- critically comprehend the conditions which allow the enjoyment of the right to free time or limit it;
- recognise the benefits of play for the improvement in children development, accordingly to its different types;
- prepare different play activities;
- involve the community and caregivers in promoting quality free time for children.

Part 1: Theoretical Background

Introduction

The first part of this chapter aims at introducing the main concepts that will guide us through the workshops, in part two. Topic one addresses the importance of free time and leisure for the psychosocial development of children, starting by relating modern society demands to the decrease of general free time and the way it is perceived. The second part provides suggestions for parents and educators to make the most of free time, introducing hints to plan that time and create conditions for expression during that period, through the different types of play and related characteristics. It addresses free time pedagogy in and out of school, underlining the importance of educational centres in the implementation of this concept. Finally, the third section refers to the importance of involving the community, extended family and friends in the process of education, improving leisure, in today's busy world.

Free time: what is it and why is it important?

Samara and Ioannidi (2019) clearly recognize the importance of free time for children, stating “The type of activities they choose and their performance in them can play an important role in integrating them into the peer group” (p. 1) and they are not the only ones. Milteer et. al (2012) confirm the importance of play, dedicating an entire chapter to this acknowledgment and focusing on the interactions promoted by playing. Referring to the family, they stated: “Play is essential to developing social and emotional ties. First, play helps to build bonds within the family. [...] Less-verbal children may be able to express themselves, including their frustrations, through play, allowing their parents an opportunity to better understand their needs. Above all, the intensive engagement and relaxed interactions that occur while playing tell children that their parents are fully paying attention to them and, thereby, contribute to a strong connection” (p. 205), then adding, concerning the other children, “[Play] allows them to learn how to share, to negotiate and resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills when necessary. It teaches them leadership as well as group skills that may be useful in adult life” (p. 205). There is also numerous research that links playing and taking full fruition of free time to better performances at school, which may be of particular importance to some parents (caregivers) who are highly driven. Bodrova and Leong (2003) claim that free time play is linked to the children's ability to master academic content, such as literacy and numeracy. Ginsburg (2007) also points out the link

between play and the academic environment; according to the paediatricians, children who play, with and without adult interaction, learn faster, have enhanced problem-solving skills and behave better. He sums it up: “Play allows children to use their creativity while developing their imagination, dexterity, and physical, cognitive, and emotional strength” (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 183).

There are different types of play. First of all, activities can be child-driven (less structured because they naturally arise) or adult-driven (more structured because they are pre-set or guided by an adult). Even though it is not the objective of this article to thoroughly differentiate them, we still think it is worth to mention the benefits of child-driven play, which tend to be less structured. Barker et al. (2014) conducted a study investigating the relation between the use of children’s time with the development of executive functions, that is, the cognitive control processes responsible for regulating thought and action for goal-directed behaviour. They concluded that “children who spent more time in less-structured activities displayed better self-directed control, even after controlling for age, verbal ability, and household income. [...] less-structured activities may give children more self-directed opportunities. From this perspective, structured time could slow the development of self-directed control, since adults in such scenarios can provide external cues and reminders about what should happen, and when” (Barker et al., 2014, p. 10). Ginsburg (2007) defends the same idea: “Undirected play allows children to learn how to work in groups, to share, to negotiate, to resolve conflicts, and to learn self-advocacy skills. When play is allowed to be child-driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue. Ideally, much of play involves adults, but when play is controlled by adults, children acquiesce to adult rules and concerns and lose some of the benefits play offers them, particularly in developing creativity, leadership, and group skills” (p. 183).

Free time can and should be enjoyed in more ways than just playing, despite its huge importance in children’s overall development and happiness, as mentioned before. However, children also need time to think and daydream, especially older children and teenagers. Daydream, however, may be seen as “doing nothing” and is not incentivized, although we all do it, whether because we want to or uncontrollably. The perspective of daydreaming as not beneficial, even as a cognitive control failure, which has been the classical perspective, “makes sense when mind wandering is observed by a third party and when costs are measured against externally imposed standards such as speed or accuracy of processing, reading fluency or comprehension, sustained attention, and other external metrics” (McMillan et al., 2013, p. 5). Even though there are times and places where daydreaming is indeed not advised (let us say classes, for example), daydreaming can be understood as something positive for the inner self. The same investigators state “For the individual, mind wandering offers the possibility of very real, personal reward, some immediate, some more distant. These rewards include self-awareness, creative incubation, improvisation and evaluation, memory consolidation, autobiographical planning, goal driven thought, future planning, retrieval of deeply personal memories, reflective consideration of the meaning of events and experiences, simulating the perspective of another person, evaluating the implications of self and others’ emotional reactions, moral reasoning, and reflective compassion” (McMillan et al., 2013, p. 5).

It is then clear that free time is essential in the life of children and that we should let children play and engage in creative and imaginative activities. In other words, allowing our children to be free and have moments in which they play by themselves will allow them to develop a great number of capabilities, reflecting on a better performance at school and on a clearer understanding of their environment and the world around them.

Obstacles that prevent the realization of the right to free time and play

Free time is part of our lives, both adults' and children's, but in the past decades, we seem to be facing an ever-growing movement to understand free time as something rather negative: it seems we are not doing enough, not being productive, not learning everything we could be learning. The crescent pressure put on adults, that often leads to anxiety and stress, inevitably reflects on children: "for some children, this hurried lifestyle is a source of stress and anxiety and may even contribute to depression", Ginsburg (2007, p. 185) states.

Modern jobs, increasingly demanding and less stable than in the past, tend to over occupy parents, who have less time to enjoy with their children. There is no doubt extracurricular activities have an important role in the children's socialization and overall development, but simultaneously over-scheduling can be sometimes troubling and it has become more common in our societies. Children that live in peaceful contexts with abundance of resources are "being raised in an increasingly hurried and pressured style" (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 182), similarly to grown-ups.

The way societies are organized, their cultural, politic and religious foundations, also play an important role in the way free time is enjoyed by children. Race, sex, social economic insertion are important factors, that can obstacle the right to free time. For example, in some societies girls do not have free time, because, after their school activities, they have numerous domestic tasks to fulfil. States have an important role, recognizing, or not, the importance of free time, and the right to play, for all children. The ones that have limited recognition of its importance constitute an obvious obstacle of those rights and their relevance in child development. And we should not have the prejudice of thinking only developing nations face this kind of limitations. For instance, developed countries, that have a competitive understanding of societal standards, tend to put the emphasis in filling up schedules with a vast number of activities, rather than letting children having free time to play. This kind of thinking will, sooner or later, lead to exhausted workers and unhappy people. The lack of playing spaces in the structuring of modern cities, as well as the confinement of children to small spaces, in which only technology plays a part, are also common obstacles to the right of full enjoyment of free time.

Educators can also be a part of this problem, by lacking the consciousness of the importance of free time, to be enjoyed in playing activities. Too much homework or prolonged school time are limitations that should be avoided by concerned educators.

On the other hand, researchers also point out that too much free time can have negative consequences, such as delinquency, substance use, and precocious sexual behaviour for older children and teenagers (Osgood et al., 2005). *So where does the balance stand?*

How to make the most of free time through various forms of play

Having spare time that is not filled with extracurricular activities can promote children's growth in a variety of ways. Having "nothing to do" opens space for creativity. Creativity and imagination are key ingredients on a successful childhood. Activities that promote those two key ingredients should be valued by parents and educators. Play time that allows children to create, to understand the role of others in the world and to think outside the box should be incremented in our society, to promote the wellbeing and overall development of children. David Whitebread et al. (2017) are responsible for the article entitled "The role of play in children's development: a review of the evidence", which we will closely follow, mentioning five different types of play and their benefits for the development of a child. Those are: physical play, play with objects, symbolic play, pretend play and games with rules.

Physical play or physical activity play is the first type of play that children start to do. This kind of play is normal in almost every mammal. Physical play can "include running, climbing, chasing, and play fighting" (Pellegrini, 1998, p. 577), but also "fine-motor practice (e.g. sewing, colouring, cutting, junk modelling and manipulating action toys and construction toys)" (Whitebread, 2017, p. 6). This type of play should be encouraged by parents, tutors and educators since the benefits range from health gains, "academic progress and cognitive self-regulation" (Whitebread, 2017, p. 8), and improvements on social and emotional skills.

Play with objects is the next category of play that should be encouraged by all adults that surround the child, as it is linked with the exploration of the world. The relations between playing with objects and physical play are evident, mainly when we refer to fine and motor development. This kind of play is a good way to increment and improve the bond between the child and the parents, since the child "uses gestures of pointing, showing objects, gaze and accompanying affective expressions as signals of their intentions to adult partners" (Bigelow, 2004, p. 518). These interactions, also called sustained joint attention, "indicates infant's understanding of others as intentional beings, like themselves, whose attention to objects may be shared, followed or directed." (Bigelow, 2004, p. 518). Moreover, the other benefits from this particular type of play are the "development of representational abilities, reasoning and problem-solving strategies" (Whitebread, 2017, p. 12), and the development of important skills involved in maths, spatial and linguistic notions.

Symbolic or semiotic play is the first type of play only referent to humans. In this type of play "the child is exploring or wilfully investigating the relationship between form and content, or between a sign and its meaning" (Van Oers, 1994, p. 23). By doing so, the child is absorbing and reconstructing the cultural meaning of his/her actions. This symbolic cultural meaning can be related to verbal or nonverbal means of communication. Lytinen (1997) states that children "who showed more symbolic play acts, (...), could comprehend more language" (p. 291). Moreover, there is also evidence that musical play, as a

type of symbolic play, is related to the improvement of communication skills and “higher cognitive functioning” (Whitebread, 2017, p. 16).

Pretend play is the most studied type of play. This type of activities lets the creativity and imagination flow, since the child is allowed to impersonate others. Putting themselves on the shoes of others let children understand their own emotions in a different way, as well as enhancing their sensitivity with the people surrounding them. Bodrova and Leong (2003) affirm: “When children assume different roles in play scenarios, they learn about real social interactions that they might not have experienced (not just following commands but also issuing them; not only asking for help but also being the one that helps). In addition, they learn about their own actions and emotions by using them “on demand” (I am really OK, but I have to cry because I am playing baby and the doctor just gave me a shot.) Understanding emotions and developing emotional self-control are crucial for children’s social and emotional development.” (p. 51). The same authors state that “children’s engagement in pretend play was found to be positively and significantly correlated with such competences as text comprehension and metalinguistic awareness and with an understanding of the purpose of reading and writing” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 50). Other aspect of pretend play that is beneficial for the child development is when children pretend to be a fantastic character such as a wizard or a superhero, because it “may relate to learning-to-learn skills such as executive function and self-regulation” (Whitebread, 2017, p. 22), also improving memory. Samara and Ioannidi (2019) affirm that role playing and theatrical playing help children understanding the other, developing empathy, communicating more appropriately, improving their imagination and creativity, fostering internal and external confidence and teamwork. In the special case of children with behavioural problems, it has proven to be an effective methodology as well.

Finally, there is the games with rules type of play. Children are very fond of games with rules, which include physical games (hide and seek, for example), computer and board games. Researchers confirm that “games allow examination, strengthening and improvement of ego functions. They may assist in controlling urges, checking reality, understanding the relations between action and outcome, regulation of frustration and anxiety” (Oren, 2008, p. 365). Furthermore, board games are connected to improvements in numeracy and mathematical abilities, physical games lead to a better adaptation to formal schooling. Whitebread (2017) also indicates that “games with rules may act as a proxy for an adult scaffolding” (p. 27).

Common to all of these types of play is the “mature play”, which Bodrova and Leong (2003) define as the children’s ability to use their creativity and imagination to create and change the rules. This concept is particularly important, as it involves various benefits: “In mature play, children assign new meanings to objects and people in a pretend situation. When children pretend, they focus on an object’s abstract properties rather than its concrete attributes. [...] Sometimes children even describe the missing prop by using words and gestures. In doing so, they become aware of different symbolic systems that will serve them later when they start mastering letters and numbers. [...] The roles associated with a theme in mature play are not stereotypical or limited” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 51).

These types of activities usually happen naturally for children, on their own, or driven by their peers, and adults should give them space to do so, but can also promote them. Children learn how to interact with their surroundings and, more importantly, with themselves through playing.

It takes a village...: involving the community to improve free time and play in today's busy world

In the previous sections, we have already shed some light on the necessity of having a support system behind the child, once “Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development – intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioural, and moral” (NSCDC, 2004, p. 1).

Even though we mentioned mainly the children's relations to their caregivers and educators, the community is not only composed by these actors. It can include “a parent, peer, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbour, teacher, coach, or any other person who has an important impact on the child's early development.” (NSCDC, 2004, p. 1).

Bronfenbrenner developed an important hierarchy on how the relations between the child and the world happen. He defined four systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. For this part we are mainly interested in the first and third ones. The microsystem concerns the closest people and institutions, since “the infant at first becomes conscious only of events in his immediate surroundings [...]. Within this proximal domain, the focus of attention and of developing activity tends initially to be limited even more narrowly to events, persons, and objects that directly impinge on the infant” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 9-10). The exosystem is composed by places and people outside the household but with direct contact with the infant: they are friends of the family, neighbours, extended family, media, among others. For the purposes of the current project, those systems are under appreciation.

Belonging to a community may bring positive feelings to both adults and children: we feel like we are accepted and safe, we can influence and be influenced by other members of the community, we may fulfil our needs and, most importantly when raising a child, we share an emotional connection, through shared experiences, places and stories. It is widely accepted that “The interactive influences of genes and experience shape the developing brain. Scientists now know a major ingredient in this developmental process is the “serve and return” relationship between children and their parents and other caregivers in the family or community” (CDC, p. 1-2). Contacting with the community through play, for example, enables children to observe, engage and expand their world. Living interdependently creates bonds and promotes concepts of citizenship, fundamental to living with others.

It is without much effort that we all understand that the environment in which the child is brought up will contribute to his/her development: “Stated simply, young children learn best in an interactive, relational mode rather than through an education model that focuses on rote instruction” (NSCDC, 2004, p. 5). The activities mentioned in the previous section tend to be family oriented, although there is also room for the community to be involved. There is the “need to promote the implementation of

those strategies known to promote healthy youth development and resiliency” (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 186), be it in the family, in the school or with the community.

Final considerations

Free time, play, daydreaming and community are the fundamental concepts of this chapter. Their obvious benefits explain why it is natural and so important for humans to rest and to have fun, in order to learn, think and belong. Especially for children, free time must be protected and supported as a definitive way to promote learning and psychosocial development. However, not all places are equal and not all children have the same opportunities. Enforcing the United Nations designs and “encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity” (UNICEF, 1990, p. 10) is a way to create those opportunities.

Part 2: Workshops

Introduction

This part is dedicated to the presentation of five workshops that can be used by university teachers, when training their students in the process of becoming educators; they can also be used by other teachers/trainers when providing training to school educators/educative personnel as part of the professional development of said actors; or they can serve as an inspiration and reflection-starter to anyone interested in the thematic of free time and leisure pedagogy.

All the workshops to be found below follow a linear and logical sequence, inspired by the topics firstly addressed (free time – types of play – involvement of the community). They are majorly practical, but start from the most theoretical and closed activities to culminate with the organization of a school event, to showcase what was learnt in this chapter and communicate it to the surrounding community, giving meaning to the whole learning process. To achieve the best results, all workshops should be conducted. However, they can be used independently as well, according to the needs, resources, time and objectives of each specific training. They are here presented as suggestions, which can be followed exactly or adapted to the context.

The first workshop relies on the first section of the first part and encourages students to think of free time and its importance, inviting them into a personal reflection of what would their life be without free time, exploring different imaginary scenarios and encouraging some reflection towards the life of children in different parts of the world. In the second workshop, trainees are called to learn about the five main types of play and plan five different ludic activities to promote learning. In the second part of this workshop (workshop 3), the activities get a bit more practical: trainees should choose one of the activities planned before and present it to their peers, not recurring to a traditional data show presentation, but concretely applying it to their colleagues or, better, to children. The fourth workshop is dedicated to preparing a strategy and all the materials required to explain to parents, caregivers, friends, enlarged family and the overall community the importance of leisure time and why we should let children play freely. Last but not least, the fifth workshop requires the implementation of a real school activity (including lectures, workshops etc.) to sensitize those aforementioned target-groups.

These workshops are as follows:

- Workshop 1: Discovering the importance of free time
- Workshop 2: Preparing different play activities (1)
- Workshop 3: Preparing different play activities (2)
- Workshop 4: Sensitizing caregivers and the community for the importance of leisure (1)
- Workshop 5: Sensitizing caregivers and the community for the importance of leisure (2)

Workshop 1: Discovering the importance of free time

Purpose-Rationale

This workshop is based on the first part of this same chapter, “Free time: why is it important?”, and its goals are to introduce the topic, that is often overlooked by academics and the overall society, and to trigger a new way of thinking towards leisure.

Facilitators

Teachers’ trainers

Target Group/Audience/Participants

Teachers/trainees/students

Aim

To recognize the importance of free time and the benefits of play towards the psychosocial development of children.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Identify the main benefits derived from free time, through play and daydreaming;
- Compare different socio-economic realities and their relation to children’s lives and routines, to show how they impact the existence and/or use of free time.

Materials

- Computer and projector
- Paper sheets and writing materials
- Pictures depicting -children’s living conditions in different parts of the globe
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31)¹

Duration

3 hours

Methodology-Process

Activity 1: Self Presentation of Self (45 minutes)

- 1) If the group and the trainer do not know each other, then the workshop should start with a round of presentations: name, age, professional and academic backgrounds, objectives and expectations could be some of the aspects inquired. You can be the first or the last to present

¹ It can be found here: https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_PRESS200910web.pdf?_ga=2.254574792.1162853729.1588524755-205592999.1588524755.

yourself, but this option should be weighted as to do so in the beginning or in the end has different impacts on the group: if done in the beginning, it can lead to trainees adjusting their speech to what they think the trainer expects and not being sufficiently honest; if done in the end, the trainer can elaborate some words on what the group stated and adjust his/her speech to what the expectations of the trainees are; on the other hand, trainees may not feel as comfortable to start presenting themselves without the introduction of the facilitator first.

- 2) The second step (or the first if the group is familiar with one another), is that each person introduces his/herself as the child they were. Not invading each life personally, the trainer should encourage participants to think of when they were children and ask them to elaborate on their normal days, their routines and favourite activities. This activity motivates trainees to recall experiences from their childhood, helping them understand the world through a child's view.
- 3) Explain the objective of the previous exercise, introducing the theme of this first workshop. To move on to activity two, participants could be given a piece of paper, to write down their weekly schedule and, after that, questions could be posed, such as: "How much free time do you have?", "Why? How is your daily life without free time/or with that free time (according to the responses)?" , "Would it be different if you had more free time? How?". Give trainees some time to think and motivate them to share their thoughts.

Activity 2: Theoretical analysis (60 minutes)

- 1) From the responses obtained in the introductory activities, explore the tacit ideas the group has concerning the importance of play. Ask the participants to think of a time that they daydreamed, making a sketch of what they daydreamed about. Explore with the group what this notion means and if they see it as something positive or negative.
- 2) Provide two different scenarios: one of a child that, for some reason, cannot play (the scenario will determine the conditions that prevent him/her from playing) and another that can play (Annex I). Afterwards, questions should be posed. The first question can be, for example: "Imagine those two children in 10 years. Describe them." These questions should generate a discussion, raising other questions, such as "What are the benefits of play?" and "What are the benefits of daydreaming?". They will allow trainees to reflect on free time, and why it is so important, especially for children. Other exploratory questions could go over the topic of families' new routines and the reasons behind them.
- 3) Conclude this part with a summary of the section.

Activity 3: Free time in different places of the world (45 minutes)

- 1) Show pictures of kids from different social-economic backgrounds, geographies, ages and ethnicities (Annex II). Make sure they depict children with privileged or less privileged living conditions, as this activity will be the basis for the reflection about inequality.
- 2) Ask the group to come up with a basic imaginary daily routine of these infants with various backgrounds, discussing how the demands of modern societies shrink the time and space for play and, on the other end, how the obligations of children with less privileged living conditions (domestic work and child labour) also steal them free time, despite having less school activities.

- 3) Propose the critical analysis of Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: “Is it being fully applied? Why? Why not?”. Analyse the main concepts (children’s rights to rest, leisure, play and participate freely in cultural life and the arts, as a need for their wellbeing and as a form of growing into successful, happy adults/adult’s responsibility to ensure children’s access to those rights and to promote equal opportunities for all children to have them, as a form of promoting healthier societies) from both paragraphs: “What is your understating of *these concepts*?”.²
- 4) In small groups, the trainees are welcome to think about children facing vulnerable situations and the impact on the future of society, presenting them in a brief plenary session.

Activity 4: Conclusion (30 minutes)

- 1) Summarize the session with the most important aspects learnt:
 - a) Play, recreation, rest, leisure, arts and culture are all interlinked and together serve to describe conditions necessary to protect the unique and evolving nature of childhood. Article 31 needs to be understood as a whole.
 - b) Play and recreation are essential to children’s health and wellbeing. They promote the development of creativity, imagination, self-confidence, self-efficacy and physical, social, cognitive and emotional strength and skills. They contribute to all aspects of learning. They are also a form of participation in everyday life, and are of intrinsic value to the child, purely in terms of the enjoyment and pleasure they afford.
 - c) Involvement in cultural and artistic life is important for children’s sense of belonging to their family, community and society and to their own sense of identity. Children reproduce, transform, create, and transmit culture in many ways. With their peers, they also create a ‘culture of childhood’. Children are at the forefront of using digital platforms, such as social media and virtual worlds, to establish new cultural environments and artistic forms. Children’s participation in cultural activities also provides opportunities to learn from other cultural and artistic traditions, contributing towards mutual understanding and appreciation of diversity.
 - d) Rest and leisure are vital to children’s development. Lack of sufficient rest will have a physical and psychological impact on children’s health, well being, and development. Children also need leisure time to fill as actively or as inactively as they choose.
- 2) Introduce the theme of the next section and encourage participants to think out of the box and imaginatively.

² A very interesting comment to guide the discussion and the facilitator’s approach can be found here: <http://ipaworld.org/childs-right-to-play/article-31/summary-gc17/>.

Workshop 2: Preparing different play activities (1)

Purpose-Rationale

This workshop is based on the section “How to make the most of free time through various forms of play”. It introduces the five main types of play and requires the active participation of the trainees in activity planning. It is the first part dedicated to this subject.

Facilitators

Teachers’ trainers

Target Group/Audience/Participants

Teachers/trainees/students

Aim

To learn about the main five types of play, identifying its main features and benefits.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Describe the main five types of play;
- Distinguish which type of play is better for certain specific cases;
- Critically plan activities for each type of play.

Materials

- Computer and projector
- Paper sheets and writing materials
- Flip charts/whiteboards
- Five computers with Internet connection
- Small clips illustrative of the different types of play³

Duration

3 hours

Methodology-Process

Activity 1: Exploring tacit ideas (50 minutes)

³ Physical play: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ag2wewYoxo>
Play with objects: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFRMuxXuXPk>
Symbolic play: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrO5aA9JjiA&t=1075s>
Pretend play: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPqdcf1Ag3k>
Games with rules: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MsbyzBl3B4>

- 1) Start by asking some general questions: “Would you say that there are different types of play? If so, how many? If not, why? What characteristics can differentiate the types of play?”. These questions aim to start discussion. It is not important whether the answers are right or wrong, the point is simply to motivate the group to start thinking about the topic.
- 2) Register on the flip chart/whiteboard the ideas that trainees suggest and then explore whether some of them are more applicable or effective while others are less.
- 3) Once the discussion is finished, elaborate on the main topics and clarify which ideas could be helpful to understand the topic and which should be revised.

Activity 2: Theoretical analysis (50 minutes)

- 1) Explain the five types of play or divide the trainees into five groups. Each group would be responsible for reading about one type of play (Annex III) and summarize its main characteristics. The trainees should be given a computer with Internet connection to deepen the research, if needed, and to prepare a visual presentation. The conclusions should be presented thoroughly to the rest of the group, because they will learn from one another.
- 2) At the end of the presentation session, show the excerpts of the YouTube clips randomly and ask the group if they are able to identify which type of play is depicted, as a formative evaluation process.
- 3) Think of children with different characteristics (you can opt for children with some issues as well, for example, linguistic, behavioural and/or relational disorders) or of different age (which kind of play is suitable for toddlers, teenagers and so on) and ask the trainees to relate them to the different types of play (example: “children 1 could benefit from this type of play because of so and so”).

Activity 3: Planning five different ludic activities (50 minutes)

- 1) Once the theoretical concepts are comprehended, trainees should prepare five activity plans with the orientation of the facilitator. The plan should include: the type of play, the target-groups (age, main characteristics), the duration of the activity, the general and specific objectives, the materials/resources required, the space and the clear description of the activity. Each group of trainees should also discuss and reflect upon the effects of this activity on children’s quality of life and well-being.
- 2) To keep the plans realistic, the trainer should inform, from the first moment, that they will be applied in the next session. Each group of trainees must be prepared to implement any of the five activities and the entire group must be prepared to engage in the role-playing as children and to help all colleagues achieving the objectives and having a good experience. Experimental learning and role-play create lasting memories and fruitful learning.

Activity 4: Conclusion (30 minutes)

- 1) Summarize the session with the most important aspects learnt, going over the trainees’ work with suggestions and emphasising the good aspects as a motivational strategy.
- 2) Remind the group that next session will be dedicated to the implementation of one of the five planned activities and that all groups will be involved in the class activity.

Workshop 3: Preparing different play activities (2)

Purpose-Rationale

This workshop is based on the section “How to make the most of free time through various forms of play”. It is the second and most practical workshop dedicated to this subject and it consists of the implementation of an activity plan previously planned.

Facilitators

Teachers’ trainers

Target Group/Audience/Participants

Teachers/trainees/students

Aim

To implement an activity plan with one of the five main types of play, recurring to role-play with the fellow colleagues.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Implement activities for the different types of play;
- Discuss and constructively criticize each other’s and one’s own work;
- Reflect on the best practices related to play pedagogy.

Materials

- Computer with Internet connection and projector
- Paper sheets and writing materials
- Filming cameras (optional)
- All materials the activities require (the facilitator must be previously informed – if some materials do not exist, they should be replaced with creative and free options)

Duration

3 hours

Methodology-Process

Activity 1: Preparing the session (45 minutes)

- 1) Introduce the session by encouraging the participants to feel at ease, emphasizing that these workshops are part of a learning process and that they will not be judged when implementing their activity, as the training is a safe space.
- 2) Suggestion: the session can be filmed for an autoscopic exercise with proved benefits in teachers’ training: it allows to go over one’s own performance numerous time and identify the strengths and weaknesses. In this case, the trainer must ask the participants for the written consent to film the session, explaining its purpose – it is not to film trainees playing but to focus

on the trainees in the educator role, the type of comments they make, if they interfere adequately or if some things can be improved.

- 3) Then, it is necessary to distribute work. Recurring to the computer with Internet, use a random generator to select which of the five activities prepared by each group will be implemented. He/she should make sure all five types of play are implemented. A random generator should also be used to find the order in which the groups will act as teachers, ensuring that everyone feels fine with it.
- 4) While one group is playing teachers, three others play children and another one is the observant group, taking notes from what they are analysing. All groups will play all parts.
- 5) Once all the work is clearly distributed, give time to the groups to prepare themselves.

Activity 2: Activities implementation (60 minutes)

- 1) Prior to each implementation, the responsible group should basically introduce the activity plan, so that the other participants know how to behave, accordingly to what is expected from the planned target-group.
- 2) Each group will perform its activity to the rest of the group, in a serious and safe environment, with everyone's collaboration.
- 3) Groups will follow without comments, so that the last groups will not benefit from the other group's mistakes, as this is not the objective of the activity.

Activity 3: Discussion (45 minutes)

- 1) Once all the groups have finished, conduct an open discussion about each group's performance, focusing on the positive points and the others where there is room for improvement. All trainees should participate in the discussion with an open spirit and fomenting positive criticism.
- 2) After the session, the individual videos can be sent to each group by email, if they consent to it, and a written individual reflection should be encouraged as a way to promote self-reflection with permanent effects.

Activity 4: Conclusion (30 minutes)

- 1) Summarize the session with the most important aspects learnt, going over the trainees' performance with suggestions and emphasising the good aspects as a motivational strategy.
- 2) Introduce the topic of the next session, which will also be practical but not as demanding as this one. Introduce the question "How would you raise awareness for the importance of free time in your community?", so as to create curiosity.

Workshop 4: Sensitizing caregivers and the community for the importance of leisure (1)

Purpose-Rationale

This workshop is based on the last section of the first part of this chapter, “It takes a village...: involving the community to improve free time and play in today’s busy world”. It aims at preparing a dissemination/sensitizing/information session/event/campaign for the importance of leisure in children’s development.

Facilitators

Teachers’ trainers

Target Group/Audience/Participants

Teachers/trainees/students

Aim

To prepare a dissemination/sensitizing/information session/event/campaign for the importance of leisure in children’s development.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Analyze the importance of the community in children development;
- Plan a dissemination/sensitizing/information session/event/campaign for the importance of leisure in children’s development;

Materials

- Computer with Internet connection and projector
- Paper sheets and writing materials
- Flip charts/whiteboards
- Computers with Internet connection
- Video on the importance of community in raising a child and changes in modern societies and routines (example below)
 - TEDx Talks “If it takes a village to raise a child – build your own”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf8h-szfl1U> (it can be downloaded previously)

Duration

3 hours

Methodology-Process

Activity 1: Exploring tacit ideas (45 minutes)

- 1) Start by asking some general questions: “Have you ever heard the saying “It takes a village to raise a child”? What do you think it means? What do you understand as community? What is

the role of community in your life? Has the role of community changed through times?”. These questions aim to start discussion and motivate participants. It is not important whether the answers are right or wrong in the first moment.

- 2) Register on the flip chart/whiteboard the all the ideas that trainees suggest, and then explore whether some of them are more applicable or effective while others are less.
- 3) Show the video on the importance of community in raising a child and changes in modern societies and routines and analyse it, recurring to open discussion, initiating it with questions like: “How can the community intervene in the leisure time of children?” (Political designs, creation of city public spaces, to promote children wellbeing and leisure, society values, valorisation of children thoughts, dreams and desires).
- 4) Once the discussion is finished, compile the main ideas that can be helpful to understand the topic.

Activity 2: Theoretical analysis (50 minutes)

- 1) Ask the trainees to read, in small groups, the section “It takes a village...: involving the community to improve free time and play in today’s busy world”. (Annex IV) In either case, the reading/lecturing should be accompanied by two main questions: “What is the role of community in a child’s development?” and “How would you raise awareness for the importance of free time in your community?”, the one introduced in the previous session.
- 2) Conclude this part with a summary of the section.

Activity 3: Planning a sensitizing session (50 minutes)

- 1) This activity is fundamental for the next and last workshop and it should be very well presented. Trainees will be responsible for planning a dissemination/sensitizing/information session/event/campaign for the importance of leisure in children’s development. In pairs or small groups, they will need to outline an event having into consideration that the community will be the target group and that the goal is to raise awareness for the importance of free time in children overall development. They need to consider the duration and type of the event and the required logistics and materials.
- 2) After planning the event, participants should think what materials will be needed, develop and prepare them (for example, brochures, flyers, leaflets, digital content, videos, PowerPoint presentations, posters etc.).
- 3) Evaluation questionnaires should be constructed to assess the impact of the activity on the community. Facilitators should ask some questions to orient this process: “How will you reach the public? How will you collect their contacts if the evaluation form will be passed after the event?”.

Activity 4: Conclusion (35 minutes)

- 1) Summarize the session with the most important aspects learnt.
- 2) Clarify that the main objective of the previous activity is to implement it in real context and outside the training room. This means contacts with schools should be made, if that is the case, for example. The facilitator should be available to help throughout the whole process.

- 3) Take note: if it is not possible to implement the activity in real context, all participants will use the time from the last workshop to present their outcomes to the other colleagues.

Workshop 5: Sensitizing caregivers and the community for the importance of leisure (2)

Purpose-Rationale

This workshop is based on the third section of the first part of this chapter, “It takes a village...: involving the community to improve free time and play in today’s busy world”. It aims at implementing a dissemination/sensitizing/information session/event/campaign in real context for the importance of leisure in children’s development.

Facilitators

Teachers/trainees/students

Target Group/Audience/Participants

Caregivers and the community

Aim

To implement a dissemination/sensitizing/information session/event/campaign in real context for the importance of leisure in children’s development.

Objectives

Participants will:

- Implement a dissemination/sensitizing/information session/event/campaign in real context for the importance of leisure in children’s development;
- Reflect on their performance.

Materials

- All materials constructed by the pair/group
- Computer and projector (for the follow-up session)

Duration

3 hours (it only applies if the events cannot take place in real context. The facilitator will be present in all the events, scheduled in advance. If not, the training will take place in the same regular room and all groups will present the work they planned and prepared in the previous session)

Methodology-Process

Activity 1: Implementing the activity (50 minutes)

- 1) The groups can implement their event in real world context, with the presence of the trainer and, if possible, other members of the training group;
- 2) If it is not possible, they will present their event to the other members of the training group, in the training room, and receive constructive feedback from them.

Activity 2: Reflecting on the event (closing session) (90 minutes)

- 1) Book a follow-up meeting between with the trainees to analyse the different events.
- 2) Participants are invited to write a small report with the results from the evaluation conducted to caregivers and the community.
- 3) Pictures and other evidence may be presented in the final session as a way of reflecting and sharing the best moments of the event with the rest of the group.

Activity 3: Conclusion (40 minutes)

- 1) Remind participants of the most important aspects of the training.
- 2) Thank all the participants for their involvement in the activities.

Summary

The present chapter approaches the value of free time and the pedagogy behind it. Free time is used to relax, play, think and daydream, essential for every human wellbeing and quintessential for children capital development. In the theoretical background, the term “free time pedagogy”, the importance of play, and the more relevant types of play, for the psychosocial functioning of children (as well as specific benefits of different playing activities) were explored, together with the relevance of leisure and daydreaming as elements for the children’s development, compromised with citizenship and community. This part also analyses the obstacles that prevent the realization of the right to free time and play and how we all, as individual adults, societies or communities, but specially as educators, can try to overcome those obstacles.

Afterward, this chapter provides a set of workshops conceived for teachers/trainers to sensitize trainees to discover the importance of the understudy theme, identifying the benefits for the psychosocial development of children. They also intend to create conditions to promote children’s play activities, helping the participants to identify its main features and benefits and recognize the different types of play, applying them to overcome some difficulties children might show. The last workshop proposed in this chapter was developed to sensitize caregivers and the community to the importance of free time and leisure in children’s development. Community awareness to this issue is capital for the success in the implementation of the play and leisure concepts, as basic fundamentals in children’s development.

“Towards a pedagogy of free time” – the title of this chapter – assumes a notion of progress, advance, on how we perceive free time and how teachers/trainers can transmit that notion. Here resides the main goal of the chapter, which will hopefully be achieved, resulting in more joyful children and adults.

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Appendices

ANNEX I

1st scenario: A 10 years old child, living in a country facing economic adversities, to help his/her parents, has to work, after school, in a home industry, sewing shoes (as the little hands come in handy for some jobs), until late in the night, having no time to play and just little time to eat and sleep, before doing it all over again.

2nd scenario: A classmate of the child referred in the 1st scenario, being from a privileged socioeconomic family, doesn't face the impact of the economic crisis, so he/she can enjoy free time after school, because his/her parents believe that overwhelming him/her with extracurricular activities will harm his/her normal development as a happy person.

ANNEX II

Retrieved



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ANNEX III

1 – Physical play or physical activity play is the first type of play that children start to do. This kind of play is normal in almost every mammal. Physical play can “include running, climbing, chasing, and play fighting” (Pellegrini, 1998, p. 577), but also “fine-motor practice (e.g. sewing, colouring, cutting, junk modelling and manipulating action toys and construction toys)” (Whitebread, 2017, p. 6). This type of play should be encouraged by parents, tutors and educators since the benefits range from health gains, “academic progress and cognitive self-regulation” (Whitebread, 2017, p. 8), and improvements on social and emotional skills.

2 – Play with objects is the next category of play that should be encouraged by all adults that surround the child, as it is linked with the exploration of the world. The relations between playing with objects and physical play are evident, mainly when we refer to fine and motor development. This kind of play is a good way to increment and improve the bond between the child and the parents, since the child “uses gestures of pointing, showing objects, gaze and accompanying affective expressions as signals of their intentions to adult partners” (Bigelow, 2004, p. 518). These interactions, also called sustained joint attention, “indicates infant’s understanding of others as intentional beings, like themselves, whose attention to objects may be shared, followed or directed.” (Bigelow, 2004, p. 518). Moreover, the other benefits from this particular type of play are the “development of representational abilities, reasoning and problem-solving strategies” (Whitebread, 2017, p. 12), and the development of important skills involved in maths, spatial and linguistic notions.

3 – Symbolic or semiotic play is the first type of play only referent to humans. In this type of play “the child is exploring or wilfully investigating the relationship between form and content, or between a sign and its meaning” (Van Oers, 1994, p. 23). By doing so, the child is absorbing and reconstructing the cultural meaning of his/her actions. This symbolic cultural meaning can be related to verbal or nonverbal means of communication. Lyytinen (1997) states that children “who showed more symbolic play acts, (...), could comprehend more language” (p. 291). Moreover, there is also evidence that musical play, as a type of symbolic play, is related to the improvement of communication skills and “higher cognitive functioning” (Whitebread, 2017, p. 16).

4 – Pretend play is the most studied type of play. This type of activities lets the creativity and imagination flow, since the child is allowed to impersonate others. Putting themselves on the shoes of others let children understand their own emotions in a different way, as well as enhancing their sensitivity with the people surrounding them. Bodrova and Leong (2003) affirm: “When children assume different roles in play scenarios, they learn about real social interactions that they might not have experienced (not just following commands but also issuing them; not only asking for help but also being the one that helps). In addition, they learn about their own actions and emotions by using them “on demand” (I am really OK, but I have to cry because I am playing baby and the doctor just gave me a shot.) Understanding emotions and developing emotional self-control are crucial for children’s social and emotional development.” (p. 51). The same authors state that “children’s engagement in pretend play was found to be positively and significantly correlated with such competences as text comprehension and metalinguistic awareness and with an understanding of the purpose of reading and writing” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003, p. 50). Other aspect of pretend play that is beneficial for the child development is when children pretend to be a fantastic character such as a wizard or a superhero, because it “may relate to learning-to-learn skills such as executive function and self-regulation” (Whitebread, 2017, p. 22), also improving memory. Samara and Ioannidi (2019) affirm that role playing and theatrical playing help

children understanding the other, developing empathy, communicating more appropriately, improving their imagination and creativity, fostering internal and external confidence and teamwork. In the special case of children with behavioural problems, it has proven to be an effective methodology as well.

5 – Finally, there is the games with rules type of play. Children are very fond of games with rules, which include physical games (hide and seek, for example), computer and board games. Researchers confirm that “games allow examination, strengthening and improvement of ego functions. They may assist in controlling urges, checking reality, understanding the relations between action and outcome, regulation of frustration and anxiety” (Oren, 2008, p. 365). Furthermore, board games are connected to improvements in numeracy and mathematical abilities, physical games lead to a better adaptation to formal schooling. Whitebread (2017) also indicates that “games with rules may act as a proxy for an adult scaffolding” (p. 27).

ANNEX IV

“It takes a village...: involving the community to improve free time and play in today’s busy world

In the previous sections, we have already shed some light on the necessity of having a support system behind the child, once “Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development – intellectual, social, emotional, physical, behavioural, and moral” (NSCDC, 2004, p. 1).

Even though we mentioned mainly the children’s relations to their caregivers and educators, the community is not only composed by these actors. It can include “a parent, peer, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbour, teacher, coach, or any other person who has an important impact on the child’s early development.” (NSCDC, 2004, p. 1).

Bronfenbrenner developed an important hierarchy on how the relations between the child and the world happen. He defined four systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. For this part we are mainly interested in the first and third ones. The microsystem concerns the closest people and institutions, since “the infant at first becomes conscious only of events in his immediate surroundings [...]. Within this proximal domain, the focus of attention and of developing activity tends initially to be limited even more narrowly to events, persons, and objects that directly impinge on the infant” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 9-10). The exosystem is composed by places and people outside the household but with direct contact with the infant: they are friends of the family, neighbours, extended family, media, among others. For the purposes of the current project, those systems are under appreciation.

Belonging to a community may bring positive feelings to both adults and children: we feel like we are accepted and safe, we can influence and be influenced by other members of the community, we may fulfil our needs and, most importantly when raising a child, we share an emotional connection, through shared experiences, places and stories. It is widely accepted that “The interactive influences of genes and experience shape the developing brain. Scientists now know a major ingredient in this developmental process is the “serve and return” relationship between children and their parents and other caregivers in the family or community” (CDC, p. 1-2). Contacting with the community through play, for example, enables children to observe, engage and expand their world. Living interdependently creates bonds and promotes concepts of citizenship, fundamental to living with others.

It is without much effort that we all understand that the environment in which the child is brought up will contribute to his/her development: “Stated simply, young children learn best in an interactive, relational mode rather than through an education model that focuses on rote instruction” (NSCDC, 2004, p. 5). The activities mentioned in the previous section tend to be family oriented, although there is also room for the community to be involved. There is the “need to promote the implementation of those strategies known to promote healthy youth development and resiliency” (Ginsburg, 2007, p. 186), be it in the family, in the school or with the community. “