

# PEDAGOGICAL VALUE AND RELEVANCE OF THE PLAY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARENTS OF STUDENTS OF YOUNGER SCHOOL AGE AND TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** The subject of the research is the pedagogical value and relevance of the play from the perspective of parents of students of younger school age and teachers. The aim of this research is to examine the opinions of parents and teachers about the importance of play in children's development. A descriptive method and surveying technique were applied. The sample consisted of 200 parents of students of younger school age and 145 teachers from the Republic of Serbia. The research results show that parents and teachers recognize the importance of play in children's development, while there are certain statistically significant differences between sociodemographic variables and the opinions of parents of students of younger school age and teachers regarding the importance of play in children's development. Interesting findings of the research show that unlike parents who self-assess that they know how to recognize the play that the child needs, teachers' agreement with this item is lower, while teachers do not fully agree that parents know how to recognize the play that the child needs. In accordance with these results, further research can direct attention to ways of promoting the play among modern parents. Also, further research can focus on the partnership between family and school in the context of children's play, whereby teachers as professionals and reflective practitioners should point out to parents the pedagogical value and relevance of play in children's development.

**Keywords:** play, parents, teachers, primary school, competent parenting.

**Field:** Social Sciences and Humanities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Child's play by researchers and authors (Vygotsky, 1978; Stagnitti, 2004; Krnjaja, 2010; Eret, 2013; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015; Klarin, 2017; Lai et al., 2018; Milošević, 2018; Andersen et al., 2023; Dodd et al., 2023; Kovačević & Gluvak, 2023; Sirojev, 2024) approach from different perspectives looking at this serious, crucial and all-time topic. The benefits of the play are multifaceted, „in addition to enriching imagination, developing thinking, broadening language expression, preparing for work, play includes the child in socialization processes, teaches him behavior“ (Vilotijević, 2002: 146). As primary and crucial persons, „parents constantly provide their children with knowledge about the world in which they grow up“ (Gordon, 2003: 248), where numerous authors point out that the play from the earliest days should occupy a special place within the family environment and family education. „The results indicated that parents' play when they were children was of better quality than their children's play today and that their children's play is more solitary“ (Gardašević, 2021: 38-39). Certainly, the obtained empirical results are worrying when looking at the dimension of the quality of children's play in modern conditions and circumstances when children have a range of games and toys. Looking at the time preschoolers and parents spend playing, „the results of the research show that only 22.6% of parents of preschool children have time to play together with their children every day“ (Nenadić-Bilan, 2014: 112). Certainly, in the context of striving for competent parenting, it needs to be given more attention and time in the family environment, because its benefits are exceptional. The play also has a pedagogical value and relevance for children of younger school age (Kopas-Vukašinić, 2006; Stojanović, 2017). In addition to parents, the role of educators and teachers in the play is extremely valuable and important (Klarin, 2017). A modern teacher „a reflective practitioner explores and examines his own beliefs regarding his possibilities of action and tries to change his beliefs and representations in order to expand his own sphere of action“ (Andevski et al., 2015: 101). Starting from the fact that the modern system of upbringing and education needs a pedagogical worker as a reflective practitioner, through the prism of our topic, a reflective practitioner teacher should understand the pedagogical value and relevance of play, nurture and apply it in their own professional actions, evaluate its effects, involve parents and points them to the benefits of children's play. With our research, we want to make a contribution to this topic and examine, observe and analyze the opinions of parents and teachers according to the pedagogical value and relevance of play in children's development.

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## 2. METHODOLOGY

The subject of the research is the pedagogical value and relevance of the play from the perspective of parents of students of younger school age and teachers. The aim of this research is to examine the opinions of parents and teachers about the importance of play in children's development. The descriptive method and scaling technique were used in the research. An assessment scale containing ten items was used as an instrument and was taken from the author Eret (Eret, 2013: 197). Respondents responded on a five-point Likert-type rating scale in modalities 1 - I strongly disagree; 2 - I mostly disagree; 3 - I neither agree nor disagree; 4 - I mostly agree; 5 - I completely agree. After the introductory part, the respondents gave answers to general questions. General questions for parents concerned gender of parents, age of parents, level of education, place of residence, gender of child and school performance of the child at school. The results were processed in the SPSS program. The sample consisted of 200 parents of students of younger school age and 145 teachers from the Republic of Serbia. The structure of the parents' sample is shown in Table 1, while the structure of the teachers' sample is shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Structure of the sample – parents

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<b>Parent's gender</b>		
Male	42	21
Female	158	79
<b>Age</b>		
up to 33 years old	27	13.5
From 34 to 38 years old	126	63
More than 38 years	47	23.5
<b>Level of education</b>		
High school	81	40.5
Faculty	88	44
Master	31	15.5
<b>Place of residence</b>		
City	164	82
Suburb	15	7.5
Village	21	10.5
<b>Gender of the child</b>		
Male	79	39.5
Female	121	60.5
<b>School success</b>		
Excellent	181	90.5
Very good	17	8.5
Good	2	1

Source: Milanović

Table 2 shows the structure of the sample of teachers. The general data of the teachers are presented – gender and years of service.

Table 2. Structure of the sample - teachers

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequencies</i>	<i>Percentages</i>
<b>The gender of the teacher</b>		
Male	23	15.9
Female	122	84.1
<b>Years of service</b>		
up to 7 years	48	33.1
From 8 to 15 years	68	46.9
From 8 to 15 years	20	13.8
More than 23 years	9	6.2

Source: Milanović

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parents' opinions about the pedagogical value and relevance of the play  
We start from the first research task, which was to examine parents' opinions regarding the importance of play in children's development.

Table 3. Parents' responses according to the importance of play in children's development

	N	M	SD
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	200	4.65	0.548
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	200	4.44	0.787
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	200	1.82	0.802
Children play too little.	200	3.41	0.908
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	200	2.46	0.756
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	200	4.42	0.675
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	200	4.51	0.709
Children should have more obligations than plays.	200	1.48	0.649
The play makes the child immature.	200	1.37	0.579
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	200	1.40	0.602

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

The obtained results in Table 3 indicate that the highest mean value was calculated for the item that children's play is an important part of growing up, that play should be part of a child's daily life, that a parent knows how to choose a play that a child needs and that the child will benefit from the play in the future life. Parents' opinions are divided when it comes to the issue of children playing too little. Parents' low agreement is present with the following items: if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else, that the play prevents the child from making good judgments, that children should have more obligations than play, that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible and that play makes the child immature. „The parents stated that the majority consider that play is an important part of growing up“ (Eret, 2013: 197), also, the research results show. With the second research task, we wanted to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between sociodemographic variables and parents' opinions regarding the importance of play in children's development.

Table 4. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinion on the importance of play and gender of parents

	t	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	-7.564	198	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	-9.696	198	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	6.918	198	0.000
Children play too little.	-6.014	198	0.000
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	-2.831	198	0.005
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	-7.816	198	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	-12.026	198	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	6.835	198	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	10.125	198	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	6.386	198	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results shown in Table 4, we can see that there are statistically significant differences between the gender of parents and their opinion on the importance of children's play. Unlike fathers, mothers more often believe that play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the children play too little, if the play is pointless, the children should be focused on something else, the child will benefit from the play in the future life, that play should be part of children's everyday life, while fathers more often state that play prevents the child from making judgments, that children should have more obligations than play, that play makes the child immature and that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.

Table 5. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinion on the importance of play and parents' age

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	50.493	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	43.120	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	61.703	8	0.000
Children play too little.	32.484	6	0.000
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	19.245	6	0.004
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	53.822	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	31.336	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	43.730	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	31.965	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	61.295	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. The obtained results show that the parents who in our research belong to the second group, from 34 to 38 years old, more often consider that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, they do not agree at all that the play prevents the child from doing well reason, they neither agree nor disagree that children play too little and that if the play is pointless, the children should be focused on something else, they fully agree that the child will benefit from the play later in life, that the play should be a part of the child's everyday life, they do not agree at all that children should have more obligations than plays, that play makes the child immature and they do not agree at all that it is important for the child to adopt the behavior of adults as soon as possible.

Table 6. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinions about the importance of play and parents' level of education

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	68.126	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	87.647	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	97.195	8	0.000
Children play too little.	34.559	6	0.000
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	102.620	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	65.448	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	43.513	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	48.496	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	69.600	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results obtained and shown in Table 6, we observe that parents with the faculty more often answer that they completely agree that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play later in life, that play should be part of children's everyday life. Parents and faculty usually do not agree at all that the play prevents the child from making good judgments, that children's obligations should be more than plays, that the play makes the child immature, that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible. Unlike parents with a master's degree, the majority of parents with high school and university degrees neither agree nor disagree with the item that if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else. The majority of parents with a high school diploma neither agree nor disagree that their children play too little. There are no statistically significant differences between the level of education of the parents and their opinion with the item if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else. Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated.

Table 7. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinion on the importance of play and parents' place of residence

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	87.621	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	112.392	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	102.804	8	0.000
Children play too little.	33.166	6	0.000
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	92.746	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	120.236	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	83.115	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	96.577	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	82.189	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results in Table 7, we can see that parents who live in the city more often respond that they fully agree that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play later in life, that the play should be a part of children's everyday life. The majority of parents who live in the city choose the answer modalities neither agree nor disagree and mostly agree with the item children play too little. Also, the majority of parents who live in the city do not agree that playing prevents the child from making good judgments, that children should have more obligations than playing, that playing makes the child immature and that it is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible. There are no statistically significant differences between the parents' place of residence and their opinion with the item if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else. Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated.

Table 8. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinions about the importance of play and the gender of the child

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	8.537	2	0.014
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	10.522	3	0.015
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	15.217	4	0.004
Children play too little.	9.575	3	0.023
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	10.224	3	0.017
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	7.186	2	0.028

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results shown in Table 8, we can see that parents of female children more often respond that they fully agree that children's play is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play in later life and that the play should be a part of children's everyday life. Parents of female children do not agree at all that the play hinders the child's good judgment. The largest number of parents of female children neither agree nor disagree that children play too little, while there are no statistically significant differences between the other items used to examine parents' opinions about the importance of play and gender of children.

Table 9. Statistically significant differences between parents' opinions about the importance of play and children's school success

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	80.460	4	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	74.288	6	0.000
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	66.507	8	0.000
Children play too little.	23.600	6	0.001
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	63.633	6	0.000
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	62.970	4	0.000
Children should have more obligations than plays.	51.827	4	0.000
The play makes the child immature.	57.240	4	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	68.027	6	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. The obtained results show that the parents of children with excellent school results more often completely agree that children's play



is an important part of growing up, that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, that the child will benefit from the play in the future, that the play should be a part children's everyday life. The majority of parents of children with excellent results do not agree at all that play prevents the child from making good judgments, that children should have more obligations than plays, that play makes the child immature and that it is important for the child to adopt the behavior of adults as soon as possible, while they neither agree nor disagree and mostly agree that children play too little. There are no statistically significant differences between children's school success and parents' opinions with the item if the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.

Teachers' opinions about the pedagogical value and relevance of the play

With the next task, we tried to examine the opinions of teachers according to the importance of play in children's development.

Table 10. Teachers' answers according to the importance of play in children's development

	N	M	SD
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	145	4.84	0.367
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	145	3.89	0.843
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	145	1.45	0.513
Children play too little.	145	2.37	0.634
If the play is pointless, the children should be directed to something else.	145	2.61	0.490
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	145	4.78	0.416
Play should be a part of children's everyday life.	145	4.91	0.287
Children should have more obligations than plays.	145	1.30	0.458
The play makes the child immature.	145	1.28	0.448
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	145	1.27	0.445

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Based on the results shown in Table 10, we can see that teachers recognize the pedagogical value and relevance of children's play. When we look at the mean value, the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs, a lower mean value was calculated for the teacher than for the parent, where we observe that the teachers do not fully agree that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs. The next research task was to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between sociodemographic variables and teachers' opinions regarding the importance of play in children's development.

Table 11. Statistically significant differences between teachers' opinions on the importance of play and teacher gender

	t	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	-4.155	143	0.000
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	-3.189	143	0.002
The play prevents the child from making good judgments.	5.140	143	0.000
Children play too little.	-2.017	143	0.046
The play makes the child immature.	4.697	143	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results shown in Table 11, we observe that female teachers more often respond that they fully agree with the items that children's play is an important part of growing up, that a parent knows how to choose a play that a child needs. Female teachers more often answer that the play prevents the child from making good judgments and that the children play too little. Male teachers are more likely to think that play makes a child immature. There are no statistically significant differences between the other items used to examine teachers' opinions about the importance of play and the gender of teachers.

Table 12. Statistically significant differences between teachers' opinions on the importance of play and years of service

	$\chi^2$	df	p
Children's play is an essential part of growing up.	15.995	3	0.001
The parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs.	33.744	12	0.001
The child will benefit from the play later in life.	11.291	3	0.010
The play makes the child immature.	42.689	3	0.000
It is important that the child adopts the behavior of adults as soon as possible.	17.948	3	0.000

Source: The scale was taken from the author Eret (2013: 197)

Results where there are statistically significant differences are tabulated. Based on the results in Table 12, we can see that teachers who belong to the category of work experience up to 7 years and from 8 to 15 years completely agree with the item that children's play is an important part of growing up, teachers who belong to the category of work experience of 8 to 15 years neither agree they neither agree nor disagree and generally agree that the parent knows how to choose the play that the child needs. Also, unlike teachers of other categories of work experience, teachers with 8 to 15 years of work experience fully agree that the child will benefit from the play later in life. Teachers who belong to the category of working experience up to 7 years and from 8 to 15 years do not agree at all that the play makes the child immature and they do not agree at all with the item that it is important for the child to adopt the behavior of adults as soon as possible. There are no statistically significant differences between the other items used to examine teachers' opinions about the importance of play and the years of service of teachers.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results of the research show that the parents of students of younger school age recognize the benefits, values and relevance of children's play. Certain statistically significant differences were observed. Unlike fathers, mothers more often recognize the pedagogical value and relevance of play in children's development. Parents aged 34 to 38, parents with college degrees, parents who live in the city, parents of female children, and parents of children with excellent school results are more likely to recognize the value and relevance of play. Teachers also recognize the pedagogical value and relevance of the play. Certain statistically significant differences were calculated between teachers' opinions about the importance of play in children's development and the teacher's gender and years of service. Unlike parents who self-assess that they know how to recognize the game that their child needs, teachers' agreement with this item is lower. Further research can focus on examining teachers' desire for training to promote play in curricular and extracurricular activities, promoting play among students' parents, and implementing volunteer activities with thematic play activities for parents and students.

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