

THE ROLE OF FOLK GAMES IN EDUCATION

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The folk game in itself has an invaluable role to help the contact creation between cultures and shaping normal human connections. While playing, children become accustomed to situations. They have to adapt themselves to each other at the very beginning. Teachers may turn this to their advantage when children make each other follow the rules, and it is not the teacher that needs to do so. We may integrate several branches of Hungarian folk culture into the teaching process. The vast amount of knowledge handed down from generation to generation can be exploited from the very beginning of childhood. Folk poetry, folk games and folk craft may be used in classes with tales, music and visual education. The game sequences will contribute to the development of motion. A vital question is then, to what extent can they be adopted today, and how can they contribute to the development of today's children? In my study I present the possibilities of using folk games considering the different scenes of human life.

Keywords: singing, culture, folk games

In the life and structure of a nation the formation of certain homogeneity and the appearance and repetition of certain rules are of essential importance. The lack of these in the life of communities generates uncertainty and personal and national loss of consciousness. What are these homogeneities? Among others, the mother tongue, the rules that co-ordinate our living-together, our every-day and celebration customs, the upbringing and the education of the young and the respect for the human rights are the most important of them. The homogeneity cannot be faked. Its history has evolved parallel with the history of man. All those who have tried to alter a nation according to an ideology have failed because they lacked the values that are necessary for the continuation of life and the co-existence with nature. The basis of these values originate from the experience of a thousand-year old culture and are handed down from father to son.

It is an important feature how a culture preserves its values and how it extends them. Important are the means that convey them between generations, too.

In the history of the Hungarian nation the preservation of values has not always been ideal, however hard communities tried. The geographical basis, the historical events have a great effect on the well-established order and customs. Sometimes certain domains of culture evolve more slowly and insufficiently or on the contrary, become even stronger. A good example is the struggle of the nation for keeping its mother tongue at the times of the

War of Independence of 1848, which affected huge masses and required immense power.

At the beginning of the twentieth century we, too had to face one or two insufficient domains of our culture that threatened the homogeneity of our nation. One of these domains, for example, is the suppression of our mother tongue: the great number of loan-words, the simplification of the language, the decline in the usage of synonyms, the increasing individualism in our moral life and the fact that the problems of the youth were neglected or superficially treated. Looking into these insufficient domains we can establish that these problems are rooted in our customs. Communities that lost ground under their feet act in most usual ways.

Kodály writes in his book likewise that when the first state schools were opened it was not folk games and tunes that children received. In nurseries and schools valueless non-Hungarian study-songs were taught. Most of these had a German musical background. Children were not aware of the fact that these tunes are strangers to Hungarian culture. Neither their musical value nor their words were suitable to form and develop children's emotional atmosphere regarding patriotism and taste for music (Kodály, 1958).

It is true that later smaller parts of collectors' works had been integrated in the national curriculum, however, it has not been able to evolve into a subject of its own. Only after 1946 based on the works of Jenő Ádám and Zoltán Kodály (Ádám & Kodály, 1995) were even the non-traditional songs replaced with original folk games and songs. It is still being debated what to teach to the new generations.

Parents who only chase money and career think that satisfying their children's material needs has fulfilled all their responsibilities. The school, although it claims to teach in a playful way and suitably to the age of the children, is rather didactic and lays emphasis on factual knowledge.

Our techniques to teach playing lack the intention to create a system of customs. The elder generations do not have the time to play. They might not even believe that playing develops personality or playing is a link of great importance in personality development from the point of view of a nation's culture and homogeneity.

The role of playing in personality development and the formation of communities

Nowadays the ways of culture mediation built in the traditional family life have narrowed down. The natural transmission of tradition has mostly died out. Today's children are born into a world saturated with global challenges. In this world the tasks of culture transmission transposes from family to school. The Hungarian folkdance and folk games have been part of the education as subject, learning domain, module, and dance art section. This process began in the seventies. Teaching folk games facilitates knowing our folklore, the reconstitution and the esteem of our cultural heritage.

However, whose duty is to teach the young to play? In school folk games go mostly with music and physical education. In the case of music the games are not acted out. Children only learn the tune and lyrics. In the case of physical education, the games are played simply without the lyrics or the tune in a sporty way. In both cases they only learn parts of the games, whereas they could only act holistically as one.

Theory and practice

In recent years, various and lengthy pedagogical writings have been published which describe and analyze folk games according to their potential role in personal development and school or nursery education. Earlier studies usually include teachers' and psychologists' empirical observations. Very few of them provide measurable and collectable data.

Therefore, I set the question whether there is folk game research in Hungary with the aim of examining games as pedagogical means and methodological opportunities, and whether its findings can be proven with measurable data.

Furthermore, I highlight some publications in which the study of folk games have an important role. Most of them do not contain any research but their content is necessary for future research to begin.

These publications are collections of folk games, they do not include any studies. The value of these writings is the collection of games and dances, and the pedagogical suggestions that the writer-experts made.

Conferences and its volumes, such as the Hungarian Dance Academy Conferences, *Perspektívák az új évezredben a táncművészetben, a táncpedagógiában és a táncutatásban* (Perspectives in the art of dance in dance pedagogy and research in the new millennia) (I., II. II.), *Annales*, such as the Studybook of ELTE – Gyermekek, Nevelés, Pedagógusképzés (Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education, 2007) and *Periodicals*, as the *Néprajzi Látóhatár*, *Neveléstudományi Egyesület*, *Iskolakultúra*, *Nyelvünk és kultúránk*, *Létünk*, *Óvodai nevelés*, *Fejlesztő Pedagógia*, *Tanító*, and *Folkmagazin* communicate suggestions and empirical observations.

In the case of *Thesis and dissertation*, Tóth Sándorné Csontos Zsuzsna's thesis (2011): *Az énekes, mozgásos, ritmusos népi- és gyermekjátékok fejlesztő hatása óvodáskorban. (The improving effect of folk- and children's games (folk games of songs, motions and rhythms) at kindergarten age)* and Tamásiné Dsupin Borbála's dissertation (2010): *A népi játékok és a mozgás relációja a 3-7 éves gyermekek személyiségfejlődésében. (The relation of folk games and motion in the personality development of children of the age of 3-7)* are significant to mention. I am sorry to say that the final theses I have read do not contain considerable results or they use a small number of samples. And in many cases they are built from secondary sources. In the case of dissertations the number of writings in connection with this topic is sparse. In the course of my research I have only met one, the one mentioned above.

The functions of folk games from the viewpoint of human development

First of all, let's take a look at where we can come across folk games. Most of all, at home in the family circle. The child gets new information about himself and his environment with the help of his parents and siblings in the natural atmosphere of the family. Then the first folk games are lap games, for example: stroking the face, finger games, dancing and riding games. This cognition goes on in children communities. Such games were, in years of old, the girls' circle games and the boys' instrumental and sporting games. Now this generation has disappeared from the playgrounds or plays destructive games in bands. I used to play hopscotch and skipping with rubber bands. And not to mention singing games. These are disappearing

now. Now unfortunately, passive activities such as watching television and surfing on the Internet have taken the place of games.

In school, after the lessons there could be a lot of time for singing games in the yard, however, this is a rare occurrence. Consequently, the functions of singing games are the following: *Getting familiar with our own body*.

Getting familiar with our own body

Besides the lullabies the children's folklore contains lap games. It is playing with the child's hands, legs accompanied with nursery rhymes or songs. The aim is to entertain the child and increase the interpersonal relation with the parents and family members.

Parents are the first educators and teachers. In Hungarian villages, games surrounded the child from birth in peasant communities. Grownups and siblings caressed the baby's face, identified parts of the face. Children can learn through lap games where their body parts are, and how they can move them. Early childhood is the age in which imitation has the most important role. Children learn to clap, stand, walk and even speak through imitation (Lázár, 2005:191-192).

Getting familiar with the outer world

At the age of 5 or 6, the games in which children play with peers come to the fore. At about the age of 6, children awake to the consciousness of rules (Lázár, 2005:193).

Although the parents and families provides the foundation for children's social skills development, schools and kindergartens are the main places where children learn to get along with their peers.

Getting familiar with the community and the society

To this process, play serves as an important vehicle to teach children social skills. Through a simple game children learn to subordinate their individual wishes to the goals of the group. They must develop an awareness of rules. These things are not innate, so the children must learn them. And all this takes place unnoticeably through games. The themes of games encompass different phenomena from human entertainment and social life.

Doing things without restraints and experiencing an achievement of success

No child's personality can be complete if he did not have the opportunity to enter fully the spirit of the remains of the culture enriched by the experiences of our ancestors. But playing activity is important not only from the point of view of preparing for adulthood and secure cultural values but also from the point of view of satisfying childhood needs (Bús, 1999).

Classes of folk games

In another viewpoint, we can group folk games such as *artistic* mean of activity. Singing games have versatile repertoire of tunes and movements, also increase creativity. Considering the 180 types of a circle game „Lánc, lánc, eszterlánc” in Dupin's dissertation (Tamásiné Dsupin, 2010).

There are also psychological means which also present in folk games. During play, personality, identity and emotional functions are improved.

Therefore we can establish that one undoubtedly important function is the *pedagogical* use of the traditional games. Applying games during educational process, and environment is important.

In the following section I present the other possible grouping using folk games. These groups can be characterized by the different fields of training.

1. *Therapeutic* (dance and music therapy) *approach*. Therapeutic practice often applies lap games. For instance sensory integration therapy or the dance therapy.

2. *Motor approach* (such as physical development and movement coordination). The various elements of movement forms in games play a part in developing and increasing physical stamina. The movements involved in walking, running, clapping, spinning and skipping require the activation of both physical and mental mechanisms. As a result, a close connection is formed between these two areas (Tamásiné Dsupin, 2010).

By repeating spontaneous movements children become aware of the consequences of their motor behavior. According to the movement analysis approach (Fügedi, 2003; Zórándi, 2003; Lévai, 2006) dance movements are taught starting from natural movements (for example: stepping, jumping, hopping, running and spinning) and these are rooted in the Hungarian traditional folk games.

3. *Cultural approach* (the traditional game as national treasure and part of the Hungarian culture). Folk songs represent an element of the culture of the group, dialect, or ethnic unit, and remembering and using them strengthened the awareness of belonging to that group. The importance of the words in the rhymes and songs becomes an important source for enriching the children's mother tongue vocabulary. Some of the words that children encounter in these activities are no longer used in everyday discourse, but the game situations enable children to understand rare words (Tamásiné Dsupin, 2010).

Although our children's games and folk songs look simple at first sight, they contain a lot of mysteries, traditional idioms, system of symbols that are not present in our use of language. For example: gold and silver are symbols of value or a playmate, tree and flowers or fruits are symbols of love.

4. *Social approach* (the formation of groups, the ability of following norms). During singing and playing, the sense of togetherness develops in children. Their inhibitions are reduced and the songs that they sing have a deep impact on their emotions (Tamásiné Dsupin, 2010).

Functions at school

In education we may integrate several branches of Hungarian child-folklore. Folk poetry (as tales and poems) may be used in literature classes or the folk games in music education and physical education. Folk craft can be used in visual education as useful generative instrument. All these should be considered in imbibing social skills. For example, if it rains and we would like to play inside but the classroom is too small, we can play the matching games and the castle circle games around the two outside rows of benches (pulling the benches a little bit into the middle). The players can act at the middle row of benches.

Other examples of the abilities which can be developed in the course of folk games: *Situational practices of decision making*. Before folk dance training the children usually make up a spontaneous game. Those who have

changed their clothes join in the game without being told to do so. While playing tags, they try to cope with the problems that emerge during the game. For example if a player is caught or not. We could see examples of making relationships, decision making situations (Who shall I go to? Who shall I choose?).

They have to bear the responsibility. I hold my partner during the swirl so that she won't fall down. There are other numerous processes and activities which are hidden at the first sight, but have effects on the children behavior, such as: helping to perform before others, coping with consequences, bearing the responsibility, making relationships, improving fantasy and creativity and so on. Also, memory skills, imagination, associative capacity, creativity, attention and interest will develop through folk game activities.

Summary

As I present it in my study, the teaching process can be facilitated with several good means through folk games. In my study I sat out to lay the emphasis on these opportunities. We can also read about these examples in other publications. However the stress should be put on practice. Our task is to integrate folk games into the curriculum. Folk games are of many colours, are versatile and their application in school is necessary.

Folk games can only fulfill their functions if we play together with children and, or teach them in a complex way. That is the game with the tune. We have to consider the fact that every game has its place and function. Every game is holistic in itself, because it does its work by itself. It depends on the teacher if they take this chance.

I assume that, dance and folk game education is a process that can act and promote the formation of rules for playing together and proper behaviour such as patience and tolerance. It would be a welcome idea to introduce folk studies as an independent subject in teacher training colleges. Knowing all this, I establish that there is need for further research. There have been many writing published in the past years. For the most part, unfortunately, these are only empirical descriptions and recommendations.

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