

Play therapy for children with behavior disorders

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Abstract: *This contribution is dealing with applying projective play techniques and methods in education, diagnostics and therapy for children with behavior disorders. It is a presentation of three casuistic studies in terms of individual play therapy.*

Key words: *children with behavior disorders, play therapy, projective techniques, case study*

Doll with no head

A girl is sitting in the street outside the house playing with a doll. People are walking past and she is talking to the doll. One man stops and tells her:

“How can you talk to the doll when it is not alive”?

“It is alive,” a girl answers quickly.

“How can it be alive, if it does not have a head”?

“It does” says the girl.

“There is no head” – says the man angrily.

“There is ...”

“There isn’t...”

“And you are not able to play.”

Dragan Lukič (from the Czech translation of K. Slabý).

1 Introduction

Dynamic conditions of the modern world alongside the emphasis on education – need to pay increasing focus on other components of mental development as well. Increased attention is given to activities such as play and creativity – their emotional relationship to harmonious development of the individual, to appropriate social adaptability, balanced relationship to oneself, to others and sensitivity to cultural values.

2 Some theories and opinions on children's games

A game is undoubtedly an important factor in the development of each child. It is one of the ways in which the child discovers the world. It also provides a wide opportunity for learning, training its abilities and has a great importance for social learning. According to Vygotsky (1976), the game always shows a child out of his everyday life, common behavior, e. g. in the game a child is a head taller than in reality. There are a lot of ideas and theories. Some authors emphasize its social resources, others biological, they understand and explain the game more or less deeply. Educational importance of games was highlighted by Comenius (1990), Schürer (1974), free activity, spontaneity, freedom, voluntary and enjoyable experience in the game were seen by Bühler, Bühler, Fröbel (Bartůšková 1970), Příhoda (1971). Representatives of the psychoanalytic direction thought the game as the gateway to the unconsciousness that stores all previous negative experiences, feelings of dissatisfaction, inferiority. Elkonin (1983) saw the importance of a game in preparation for future life. Social sources were described by Zaporozec (1968), Rubinstein (1967), Berne (1970), Huizinga (1971), Fink (1993). Erikson saw the means to cope with traumatic experiences in the game. According to Duke (1974) game is a way to talk about the problem and solve it in a different way. Abt (1969) in this regard says that the specific instruction on how to solve problems is creating a game. The play situation (Fink 1993) contains a mirror moment of duplication that can be demonstrated by the structural features of the game. The player hides behind his role – someone who plays a character in the game. He experiences these imaginary situations as reality and they can be repeated.

3 Diagnostic and therapeutic importance of a game

Diagnostic use of games (Horňáková 1976 to 1980) can provide useful information about:

- mental maturity of the child's knowledge and interests,
- social relationships (relationship to oneself, to people, social norms),

- socialization of the child, position in a group,
- social and cultural level of the environment in which the child grows,
- motivation, behavior and acting of the child, hidden conflicts, and experiencing the inner world.

Bateson (1976) highlights the game with a child, because it draws attention to the child's own process of communication and the structure of acts within which the structure of understanding takes place. Game (Amsterová, Millar 1978) allows understanding of a child in terms of the diagnosis, it is an optimal compensation of verbal techniques to the establishment of a therapeutic contact and means of therapy.

The therapeutic importance of the game is highlighted by Millar (1978), Axlinová (1947), Werner (1978), Kondo (1989), Borecký (1982) and others.

According to Borecký (1982) a game can be a means to sustainable and natural development of the personality only if it is still near at hand.

The therapeutic importance of the game (observing the child in the playroom, the nature of games, speech and overall behavior) was and is more dealt with by professionals. Werner (1978), Klein (Bos 1966), Axlinová (1947) describe it for children with behavior disorders. By means of the diagnosis they look for motives of inadequate behavior regardless of whether the child realizes it or not. It is possible to learn about the child's problems by observing changes in its behavior during the game, which sometimes reveal their causes. This phenomenon may not be the crucial in terms of determining the child's diagnosis. Observation is supplemented by examinations and available information about the child.

4 Play therapy

Play therapy is a planned process aimed at achieving the desired changes in behavior, attitudes and opinions of the individual. It is actually a method through which a child explores the world, learns about it and copes with it. At the level of a play, children have the possibility of self-knowledge, correct behavior, the development of expression and communication skills. Communicating through the game is even more important, the younger the child is and the poorer his vocabulary is poor.

In preparing a therapeutic group, or even in preparation for the individual play therapy, it is important to take into account (Horňáková 1976 to 1980):

- the age, general abilities and talent, interests, family and social environment of the child,
- symptomatology and etiology of behavioral disorders (if the affected individual)-type, seriousness of the disorder,
- therapeutic target, set in teamwork with more experts (or their recommendations),

- developmental aspects of the game, its attractive forms and expressive possibilities for various ages, as well as their potential therapeutic benefit,
- psychological, special pedagogical and therapeutic and educational requirements for working with the child.

5 Using projective techniques in play therapy for children with behavior disorders

A game is the means of communication, the child's speech. How this speech is "readable" depends largely on the play material. So called projective material is appropriate in terms of expression (puppets, furnishings, building sets, etc.) because they encourage children to imagine games into which they transform their experiences, current problems. In games with projective material may be revealed the causes of child's problems which often appear as disobedience, laziness, stubbornness, or neurotic symptoms (tics, enuresis, excessive drawing attention to itself, shyness, poor ability to concentrate etc.), responding to adults, child's relationship to itself, to peers.

In education, in the diagnosis and therapy puppet games are widely used and puppets belonging to the category of mimicry – including imitation, mirroring, pretense and duplication features (these create the principles of the games).

Figures in the projective game were first used by Melanie Klein (Millar 1978), who assumed that a free game symbolizes fears, joys, conflicts and desires. G. Von Steabsová used moving figurines. In her test she uses puppets (family members within three generations, figurines of animals), furnishings, natural elements. According to Von Steabsova (Borecký 1977) in applying of this technology it is dealt with the individual entry in a group where everyone creates his own scene. Rambert (1969) worked with puppets and she classified the intensity of the child's disorder according to gestures, posture, voice intonation, facial expressions. A. Freudová (Blazek, Olmrová 1985) used the game with puppets in systematic observation of the game and the method of free association. Schürer (1974), Kotásková (1966) and Veselá (1970) also worked with puppets and introduced us to the method of Moore's Doll-play. Inventory Doll-play contains a several bedroom house with equipment, complementary furniture items essential for the needs of daily life. The child solves the situations that occur in everyday family life. The method is suitable for small children – it helps to explore their imagination, reflects their relationships, feelings and opinions of the people who surround them. At the same time, this game provides an opportunity to create a variety of model situations necessary for social learning, formation and consolidation of educationally desirable responses. In our country this technique of Doll – play was applied in an orphanage by Horňáková-Prokopyová (1975), with preschool children Majzlánová (1985) and with children in pediatric diagnostic institution Erdélyová (1983).

The authors of the techniques of the world (construction of the world test) are M. Lowenfeldová and Š. Bühler (Millar 1978). It includes human and animal figurines, miniature models of fences, houses, trees, there are also water and bags of three types of sand. The game results in different creations – the country, valleys, cities with people, models of fantastic places with wild animals. The child is asked to describe what he or she has created and what will happen next. Another possibility of this technique is the game according to a scenario that allows users to create images of the environment in which the child lives, and often helps to clarify the basis of motivation of disturbed social behavior (Werner 1973). A scenery game is suitable for the less daring and less mature children. A similar technique to the world (in terms of composition of toys), is the technique of the universe by Borecký (1982). In his collection of toys there are also miniature toy trains, rails, cars and additional constructive material. The child plays alone or in a group. Team games lead children to cooperation, provoke the emergence of social situations that can be used therapeutically. The diagnostic value of the game and how to teach children to understand the game the author describes in the publication *Worlds of toys* (1982). Solomonov (Bos 1966) also describes the game with puppets. His active therapy is very popular, when the child characterizes the puppets as angry, sad, happy, and in this way reacts to situations in real life. The therapist asks questions about the city, suggests solutions. The game is suitable for aggressive, impulsive, anxious, hesitant children under 10 years. Leavy recommended the treatment by a puppet game. The aim of the therapy is to relieve child's anxiety and fearful reactions.

The importance of a game with puppets (Majzlanová 1985):

1. The game will transfer conflicts on puppets and some game parts allow them to speak freely about their problems.
2. The game deals with conflicts in the world of puppets, some of which may be indirectly removed.
3. Children learn appropriate social communication, develop freely, without pressure. Scenario games allow for a gradual, realistic adaptation of the child.

The importance of design techniques:

1. They do not make the child bored and tired, the child has an opportunity to regularly come back to them and gradually develop the game.
2. They offer the possibility of non-verbal expression of emotions, moods, problems of the child, so they can be used even for reserved and shy children.
3. They give the possibility not to interfere strictly into the development of the game and through it into the development of child's personality, and thus become an important means of therapeutic and educational activity for a child.
4. They allow a smooth transition from the diagnostic phase into the phase of a therapeutic game.

Individual techniques generally include all previously mentioned aspects, educational, diagnostic and therapeutic, which overlap and complement each other. In practice, we talk about diagnostic – therapeutic – educational approach.

6 Application of play therapy – case studies

In corrections of behavior disorders I used my own composition of toys, by means of which it is possible to create real situations from the family background, school background, situations in the street, in the park, in the playground, in a fairy world.

These composition of toys was put into three boxes – there were about forty – three dolls (men, women and children) animals, cubs, fairy beings, furniture, equipment, elements of nature, blocks, building sets, houses, means of transport, blackboard, scissors, drawings, pastel pencils, clay skewers.

I used puppets:

1. in an individual play of a child
2. in a play with a child
3. in a group play with 5–6 year-old children or in two parallel groups.

1. The individual play was based on free display of a child.

During the play I observed:

- the level of child's play with toys (touching, manipulating, short actions, developed actions)
- the relation to these toys (material, functional, emotional)
- the level of child's skills, knowledge and experience, creativity, imagination – according to child's age
- identification with a doll.

I used the individual play as a rule at the beginning and at the end of our play appointments. After that I analyzed and compared the results.

2. In a play with a child I concentrated on:

- the development of contents and a form of a play
- the development of communication
- the adequate usage of toys
- relationships: an adult – a child, a child – a child
- the solution of various social situations and conflicts (an adult – a child, a child – a child)
- the motivation of imagination and creativity aims, contents and the number of our play appointments. I started according to the level of child's perception, interest, problems of children according to the means of their receiving stimuli and reactions.

3. In a group play I concentrated on the observation of
 - social relations, knowledge and skills at the same time
 - formal changes and changes in contents and composition, spatial localization, features, expression of the situation, perception, conflicts, rejection of the substitute role of puppets, duplicate elements
 - the time of the theme (how long it took)
 - the number of dolls – their choice, manipulation
 - the scene, organization (as far as chaos)
 - exploitation of the space.

Casuistic 1

Ivan M. (7, 5) a pupil of the first form (his school attendance was postponed). His parents adopted him when he was three (3) years old.

His behavior at school was unpredictable: he damages his classmates' textbooks and exercise-books. Children reject to sit with him at one desk.

During the last month the problems in his behavior and learning were getting worse. Ivan has a close relationship with his grandfather but he is in hospital at the moment.

1. During the individual play of Ivan he was only looking at the toys and was replacing them, he did not develop any actions.
2. During the play with Ivan we chose the members of his family, furniture, the equipment together.

At the beginning we played common situations in a family. During our next session Ivan repeated some situations, verbalized them. Most frequently he identified with his grandfather. Mostly his father was missing in this composition which corresponded with the fact that his father was frequently absent. Then we concentrated on real situations – at school and in the family.

These plays provided us with a possibility to try new forms of behaviour and reacting.

This play showed that Ivan had had a very deformed ideas about expectations of his behaviour, possibilities of reacting and he even had not realized consequences of his behaviour. Some of the situations which were directed educationally we played according to topics from fairy tales by E. Čepčeková, by J. Paulovič.

3. After ten (10) sessions I put Ivan into a group of children, where he played some situations which he had seen by other children. His play was getting richer and organized and his perseverance was also getting better. Although Ivan's behaviour partly improved, it was necessary to pay attention to him and to be patient with him and also to keep his interest in cooperation.

Casuistic 2

Mirka B. (7, 4) was very capricious – she was sometimes silent and shy, another time she reacted very impulsively. In the last period she also grimaced. She couldn't concentrate on any activity and persist to its end.

A record of our play sessions:

1. During our first session Mirka was captivated by a puppet of a cat. The longest period of time she played with the toy dishes.

Her attitude to toys was more functional than emotional. Her play was simple, concentrated on manipulation and replacement of toys.

2. When she played a family she chose the following dolls – her mother, sister and herself. In the latest scene she played her mother and she was shouting at her father. "You are drunk and you are going to beat me again." Then she shut him into the wardrobe. In the latest scenes she mostly put her father in bed and she said: "He is tired, we must let him have a rest." Many things that I found out during the play were later confronted and confirmed by her mother. Their father often came home in high spirit, he used swear words and was violent, too.

Mirka's mother accepted this situation in their family apathetically, she did not realize its negative consequences on children. In our dialogues we tried to find some solutions – what she could do for her children, what she could change – especially for Mirka.

It was promising that she hadn't taken Mirka's behaviour as disobedience. She tried to help Mirka.

3. In a group of children Mirka composed her own situations. Her interest was bigger and bigger and her compositions were also becoming richer and more fixed. According to her teacher (she more often motivated, praised and incited her). Mirka was more concentrated,, her mood was without considerable changes.

Casuistic 3

Rudy (5, 2) was a careless child until his sister was born. Then he was getting more nervous, he was injuring other children in a nursery school, he was sometimes crying and did not want to play with his contemporaries. The reason of Rudy's problem was clear. He was jealous of his little sister and as she was growing, his behavior was getting worse.

1. In an individual play – Rudy played with a dog, he took it for a walk, he fed it, but his play didn't last too long.

2. In a play with Rudy I suggested to play a family. He chose dolls – his father, mother, sister and also himself as the members of his family.

They all took care of his sister – they fed her, took for a walk.

This game showed, that Rudy missed his father's attention, because he travelled a lot.

In our plays we also used fairy tales and short stories, which directly or indirectly corresponded with Rudy's problems.

3. In a group play Rudy joined the other children, he cooperated with them, his behaviour was getting (with the help of his family) better.

6 Conclusion

In educational process of institutions game activities are also applied. Their aim is to serve as a protective and preventive factor in the child's development. It is very important for a child to have enough opportunities to play. It depends on adults how they will utilize them for the development of their personalities. Although we try to help our children we should allow them to have the feeling of their own importance and their control of a play. The value of such a play was expressed by S. Eugster: "A play is not a little... A spontaneous and cheerful play is the maximum what children can be offered."

7 Literature

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