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The games 3-6 aged children's wish to play in the school garden

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Abstract

School gardens are places where children meet their needs such as breathe fresh air, relaxation, learning, movement and play. A well-planned garden should be able to meet children's needs. Whenever, school gardens are designed, children's views and recommendations should be given. Hence, the aim of the study was to determine what 3-6 aged children want to play in school garden. In the scope of research, games wanted by children to play in the school gardens were analyzed under three headings as activity types, structure and number of players. 139 girls, 145 boys, totally 284 children were taken place in research's sample. 3 aged children was 63, 4 aged was 77, 5 aged was 82 and 6 aged was 62. In the scope of research, it was asked from 3-6 aged children to imagine a game they wanted to play in school garden and to draw and describe this game. Data were analyzed by using percent (%), frequency (f) and chi-square analysis. Games were analyzed according to their structure; it was observed that gender wasn't cause significant difference. Children aged 3-5 drew imaginary games, while aged 6 drew co-operative games. When games were analyzed according to the type of activity, it was detected that girls drew games played with fixed game equipments such as swing, slide, while boys drew movement games without tools such as running, chase. With increasing age, it was seen that children wanted to movement games with tools like cycling, roller skating, games played with play materials like balls, ropes, games played with songs and tongue twisters and games played with fixed environment equipments such as climbing, swimming. With decreasing age children wanted to play with natural materials like sand, water, stable game like swing, slide and mimic and role-playing games. When games were analyzed according to number of the player, it was determined that gender wasn't lead to any differences. With decreasing age it was seen that children wanted to play individual games, while with increasing age children wanted to games played as a group.

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Keywords: school garden; type of game; age, gender

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1. Introduction

Game is one of the important concepts relating to childhood period (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey 2010; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman, 2013). Children show their development in every kind of experience by playing games (MEB, 2013). Children can play everywhere, every time, under every condition and with everything (Tuğrul, 2006). However; a healthy development depends on the time spared for games and the opportunities offered (IPA, 2014) because games play numerous different roles in the development of the children through providing experiences (Dockett & Fleer, 1999). Therefore; it is necessary to offer various game opportunities according to the children's ages, developmental needs and interests (Gronlund, 2010). It is essential to use games which are indispensable activities of childhood period (Cross, 2010; Greenman, 2003).

Games are a source of fun and entertainment for the children (Heidemann & Hewitt, 2010). Games are voluntarily done activities and have rules, mechanisms and orders (And, 2003). According to the The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); to play games is a basic child right (UNICEF, 2004). Children should plan, realize and conclude the games as they wish (Brooker & Woodhead, 2013). In this sense; it is vital to provide an environment which is rich in stimuli so that children can play games that support their learning experiences (Ebbeck & Wanigayanake, 2010). Play grounds should be safe places that do not restrict the children, offer different game opportunities and are children-centered with movement-game materials (Henniger, 1994; Naylor, 1985). According to Tuğrul and Metin (2006), play grounds should be age appropriate, attract their interests and meet their needs and be organized in a way all of the children can use.

Of play grounds; school gardens are important places for children. School gardens are places that answer not only fresh-air needs of the children but also their learning needs and game needs (Algan, 2008; Başar, 2003; Strickland, 2001; Terzioğlu, 2005). A well-designed school garden should answer children's individual needs and expectations, too (Frost, Brown, Sutterby & Thornton, 2004; Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999). The studies conducted indicate that enriched play grounds in school gardens have multiple effects upon children's development (Barbour, 1999; Frost, 1992; Frost & Wortham 1988; Guddemi & Eriksen 1992; Hennger, 1994; Rivkin, 1995). According to Maxwell, Mitchell and Evans (2008); game behaviors of the children in school gardens differ depending on the properties of play grounds. Also, Shim, Herwig and Shelley (2001) reported that children demonstrate more complex behaviors in peer relations during outdoor plays than indoor plays. Specialists of early childhood period, teachers and parents agree that garden games entertain children much (Chakravarthi, 2009; Clements, 2004; Davies, 1996). It is very important that children should participate in the design of school gardens that provide significant learning experiences for children (Guddemi & Eriksen, 1992). Yet; while designing school gardens, it is crucial to know what kind of games children play and what kind of games they would like to play in school gardens. In line with the "participation rights" of The Convention on the Rights of the Child; cooperation with children should be made and their opinions and advices should be taken into consideration while designing play grounds (CRC, 2013). In this respect; the main objective of the study was to explore the games that the children aged 3-6 years who attended to preschool education facilities wanted to play in the school gardens by considering their game and participation rights.

2. Method

2.1. Research design and sample

The main objective of the study was to explore what games the children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school gardens. Therefore; the study was designed in relational screening model. For the analyses of the data; frequency (f), percentages (%), arithmetic means (\bar{x}) and Chi-square analyses were used.

First of all, the necessary documents related to this study were prepared and given to the Ministry of Education in order to obtain permission in writing to collect data in schools. The study recruited the children aged 3-6 years who attended to the schools of Ministry of Education located in Erzurum Province. In the sample; there were 284 children who were selected with random sampling method (139 girls and 145 boys). 63 of these children belonged to the group of age 3, 77 to the group of age 4, 82 to the group of age 5 and 62 to the group of age 6.

2.2. Research instrumentations and procedures

The data were gathered by the researcher with interviews made with each child separately and privately. During the interviews; the children were asked to answer the questions like “What games do you play in the school garden?” and “What do you feel while playing these games?”. Later; the children were asked to imagine a game that they wanted to play in the school garden and to tell the game by illustrating it. In line with the children’s narratives; the illustrated games were assessed in terms of activity types, game structure and player numbers. The games were clustered into subtitles in terms of game structure (two subtitles: “imaginary games” and “co-operative games”), activity types (nine subtitles: “resting games”, “movement games without tools”, “movement games with tools”, “games played with fixed environment equipments”, “games played with fixed game equipments”, “games played with materials like balls, ropes”, “mimic and role games”, “games played with natural materials”, “games with animals and plants” and “games played with songs and tongue twisters”) and player number (two subtitles: “individual games” and “group games”).

2. Results

When the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden were analyzed in terms of gender and age; the following results obtained:

Table 1. Chi-Square test results showing the correlation between the structures of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and gender

Structures of the Games	Gender of Children				Total	
	Girl		Boy		N	%
Imaginary	86	30.3	82	28.9	168	59.2
Co-operative	53	18.7	63	22.2	116	40.8
Total	139	48.9	145	51.1	284	100.0

Pearson Chi-Square=0.83, df=1, p=0.36

When Table 1 was analyzed; it was seen that both girls and boys illustrated pictures describing “imaginary games”. According to the Chi-square test results; there was no significant difference between the structures of the games that children wanted to play in the school garden and gender variable (Pearson Chi-Square=0.83, p=0.36).

Table 2. Chi-Square test results showing the correlation between the activity types of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and gender

Activity Types of the Games	Gender of Children				Total	
	Girl		Boy		N	%
Resting games	5	1.8	1	0.4	6	2.1
Movement games without tools	9	3.2	22	7.7	31	10.9
Movement games with tools	10	3.5	17	6.0	27	9.5
Games played with fixed environment equipments	7	2.5	13	4.6	20	7.0
Games played with fixed game equipments	36	12.7	20	7.0	56	19.7
Games played with materials like balls, ropes	15	5.3	18	6.3	33	11.6

Mimic and role-play games	20	7.0	17	6.0	37	13.0
Games played with natural materials	16	5.6	21	7.4	37	13.0
Games with animals and plants	7	2.5	7	2.5	14	4.9
Games played with songs and tongue twisters	14	4.9	9	3.2	23	8.1
Total	139	48.9	145	51.1	284	100.0

Pearson Chi-Square=18.46, df=9, p=0.03

When Table 2 was analyzed; it was noted that girls illustrated “games played with fixed game equipments” such as swings and slides most (12.7%) whereas boys illustrated “movement games without tools” such as running and tag (7.7%) most. According to Chi-square analysis results; it was found out that there was a difference of .05 between gender and the activity types of the games that children wanted to play in the school garden (Pearson Chi-Square=18.46, p=0.03).

Table 3. Chi-Square test results showing the correlation between player numbers of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and gender

Player Numbers of the Games	Gender of Children					
	Girl		Boy		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Individual	67	23.6	72	25.4	139	48.9
Group	72	25.4	73	25.7	145	51.1
Total	139	48.9	145	51.1	284	100.0

Pearson Chi-Square=0.81, df=1, p=0.60

When Table 3 was analyzed; it was seen that both girls and boys drew pictures depicting “individual games”. According to Chi-square analysis results; it was found out that there was no significant difference between player numbers of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and gender (Pearson Chi-Square=0.81, p=0.60).

Table 4. Chi-Square test results showing the correlation between the structures of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and age

Structures of the Games	Age of Children									
	3		4		5		6		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Imaginary	52	18.3	60	21.1	44	15.5	12	4.2	168	59.2
Co-operative	11	3.9	17	6.0	38	13.4	50	17.6	116	40.8
Total	63	22.2	77	27.1	82	28.9	62	21.8	284	100.0

Pearson Chi-Square=67.15, df=3, p=0.00

When Table 4 was analyzed; it was seen that the children aged 3-5 years depicted “imaginary games” and “co-operative games” most while those aged 6 years depicted “co-operative games” most. According to Chi-square analysis results; it was found out that there was a significant difference between the structures of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and age (Pearson Chi-Square=67.15, p=0.00).

Table 5. Chi-Square test results showing the correlation between the activity types of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and age

Activity Types of the Games	Age of Children									
	3		4		5		6		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
* Resting games and movement games without tool	8	2.8	6	2.1	13	4.6	10	3.5	37	13.0
Movement games with tools	1	0.4	1	0.4	12	4.2	13	4.6	27	9.5
Games played with fixed environment equipments	2	0.7	2	0.7	13	4.6	3	1.1	20	7.0
Games played with fixed game equipments	15	5.3	28	9.9	8	2.8	5	1.8	56	19.7
Games played with materials like balls, ropes	3	1.1	2	0.7	18	6.3	10	3.5	33	11.6
Mimic and role-play games	10	3.5	22	7.7	2	0.7	3	1.1	37	13.0
Games played with natural materials	19	6.7	10	3.5	5	1.8	3	1.1	37	13.0
Games with animals and plants	4	1.4	4	1.4	4	1.4	2	0.7	14	4.9
Games played with songs and tongue twisters	1	0.4	2	0.7	7	2.5	13	4.6	23	8.1
Movement games with tools	63	22.2	77	27.1	82	28.9	62	21.8	284	100.0

Pearson Chi-Square=137.14, df=24, p=0.00

*Some lines were combined because a value less than 5 was calculated in 25% of the boxes.

When Table 5 was analyzed; it was seen that the children aged 3 years depicted “games played with natural materials” like sand and water (6.7%); the children aged 4 years depicted “games played with fixed game equipments” such as swings and slides (9.9%); the children aged 5 years depicted “games played with materials like balls, ropes” (6.3%), the children aged 6 years depicted “movement games with tools” like cycling and skating (4.6%) and “games played with songs and tongue twisters” (4.6%). According to Chi-square analysis results; it was found out that there was a significant difference of .01 between the activity types of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and age (Pearson Chi-Square=137.14, p=0.00).

Table 6. Chi-Square test results showing the correlation between player numbers of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and age

Player Numbers of the Games	Age of Children									
	3		4		5		6		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Individual	58	20.4	39	13.7	34	12.0	8	2.8	139	48.9
Group	5	1.8	38	13.4	48	16.9	54	19.0	145	51.1
Total	63	22.2	77	27.1	82	28.9	62	21.8	84	100.0

Pearson Chi-Square=81.03, df=3, p=0.00

When Table 6 was analyzed; it was discovered that the children aged 3-4 years depicted “individual games” most while the children aged 5-6 years depicted “group games” most. According to Chi-square analysis results; it was found out that there was a significant difference of .01 between player numbers of the games that children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden and age (Pearson Chi-Square=81.03, p=0.00).

3. Discussion and conclusion

In the study; the properties of the games that the children aged between 3-6 years wanted to play in the school garden were evaluated. The properties of the games assessed were limited to game structure, activity type and player numbers. It was analyzed whether or not there were any correlations between the games that the children wanted to play in the school garden and age and gender.

When the pictures of the games that the children wanted to play in the school garden were assessed; it was seen that the games were clustered into two titles according to the structures of the games. The games in which children demonstrated specific role playing behaviors by using their imagination and creativeness were called as “imaginary games” (Sevinç, 2004). The games which were played under certain rules and were organized with a special objective were called as “co-operative games” (Poyraz, 1999).

As far as study findings were concerned, it was seen that gender variable did not lead to a significant difference in the structures of the games that children wanted to play in the school garden. It was noted that both girls and boys made pictures depicting “imaginary games” most. Similarly; Matthews (1977) too emphasized that gender difference was not important -particularly- in the symbolic and imaginary games among the preschool children; which made us conclude that games that children wanted to play in the school garden varied depending on age, rather than gender. Thus; according to the study findings; it was noted that age variable resulted in a significant difference in the games that children wanted to play in the school garden. It was discovered that children aged 3-5 years drew pictures about “imaginary games” while the children aged 6 years made pictures about “co-operative games”; which pointed out that children inclined from symbolic and imaginary games towards the games with rules and social features as the children grew older. As emphasized by Flavell, Miller, Miller (2002) and Pierce (2000), too, it is a development-related outcome to encounter such a change depending on the age.

When the pictures of the games that the children wanted to play in the school garden were examined; it was seen that activity types of the games were clustered into nine subtitles (Heseltine & Holborn, 1987): “resting games” like reading and sitting on a bank; “movement games without tools” like hiding and tag; “movement games with tools” like cycling; “games played with fixed environment equipments” like climbing and swimming; “games played with fixed game equipments” like slides and swings; “games played with natural materials” like sand and water; “games played with tools balls and ropes”; “games played with mimics and role plays”; “games with animals and plants” and “games played with songs and tongue twisters”. According to the study findings, it was found out that there were significant differences between activity types of the games that the children wanted to play in the school gardens and age and gender. It was noted that girls illustrated “games played with fixed game equipments” most whereas boys illustrated “movement games without tools” most.

It was explored that the children aged 3 years depicted “games played with natural materials”; the children aged 4 years depicted “games played with fixed game equipments”; the children aged 5 years depicted “games played with materials like balls and ropes” and the children aged 6 years depicted “movement games with tools” and “games played with songs and tongue twisters”. All of these findings indicated that the children wanted to play different games in the school gardens depending on gender and age. In addition; in the literature, there are different findings about the fact that children’s game preferences may change depending on their ages and genders (Çok, Artar, Şener & Bağlı, 1997; Harper & Huie, 1998; Holmes, Procaccino, 1998; Ihn, 1998; Moore, 1992; Myers, 1981; Park, 1998; Shin, 1994).

When the games that the participant children wanted to play in the school gardens were investigated in terms of player numbers; it was seen that the games were clustered under two titles. Games in which the number of the players was one and which depicted the child as playing games alone were called as “individual games”. Games played by two and more children together according to the certain objectives and rules were called as “group games”. As far as study findings were concerned; gender variable did not cause a significant difference in the number of the players with whom children wanted to play games in the school gardens. As emphasized by Haciosman (2007); both girls and boys developmentally undergo same game phases. This finding made us conclude that the difference and the change in the number of the games that the children wanted to play in the school gardens depended on age rather than gender. As a result; it was found out that there was a significant difference between the age and the number of the players with whom children wanted to play games in the school gardens. It was seen that children aged 3-4 years drew pictures depicting “individual games” whereas children aged 5-6 years drew pictures

depicting “group games”.

All of these findings indicated that the games that the children aged 3-6 years wanted to play in the school gardens may have different features and properties depending on the age and gender of the children. Therefore; while planning school gardens; they should be designed in line with the children’s developmental needs as well as their interests, wishes and expectations. Finally, it is necessary to conduct the studies that will require the opinions and attitudes of those responsible for the design and utilization of the school gardens (educators, parents, administrators, toy designers, landscape architects, etc.). Thus, the effects of the sample school gardens that have been built in multidisciplinary collaboration upon the children’s developments will be investigated and new generation play grounds may be built up. We are of the opinion that in the future, all of these studies that include the participation of children will make important contributions to the formation of children friendly play grounds.

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