

LEISURE TIME OF SCHOOL CHILDREN – THE VIEW ON STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

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Abstract: The way children spend their leisure time individually or with friends and family, can have the positive impact on development of their personality, or, on the other hand, it can lead to developing some undesirable forms of behavior. Educators should help children achieve constructive and productive use of leisure activities corresponding to their age and needs. This paper analyzes pedagogical literature concerning different approaches to the phenomenon of leisure time, studies its definitions and results of previous researches which investigate leisure activities structure and their organization. The main aim of this paper is to analyze the different orientations towards leisure time and the way those activities should be structured and organized. Finally, it emphasizes the importance of popularization of structured leisure time activities and neutralization of the negative effects of passive activities.

Key words: *leisure time, structured and unstructured activities, organization of leisure time*

Introduction

Leisure time is a phenomenon that has a long presence in social sciences and has been studied from the perspective of various sciences and scientific disciplines. The time that people can manage independently, as this term is usually defined, is directly related to the understanding of working time, which shows that the history of social change has also changed the attitude towards leisure time. The advancement of society and the development of technology has led to shortening people's working hours and increasing free time in which people have the freedom to choose the activities they want to practice. All the sciences that deal with the study of a human or a society have to some extent been touched by this phenomenon.

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In educational sciences the connection between education and leisure time is studied as very important contemporary problem. It is because leisure time can be used for nurturing interests, building habits and developing personality, while we also need education to help children develop a proper relation toward free time, to teach them to value their free time and cleverly choose the activities they will commit their time. Moreover, the lack of education for leisure time, does not leave empty gap in children's time, but makes space for various forms of unproductive, even harmful and deviant behaviors. It was proven by numerous studies that there is a correlation between leisure time activities and the ability of adaptation and academic success and, on the other hand, depression and the emergence of risky behaviors (Petrović, Cenić, & Dimitrijević, 2018: 422).

It is necessary to create conditions and opportunities for children and young people to spend their leisure time culturally and purposefully. In order to achieve the basic functions of leisure time, it is necessary not to undermine the basic features of free time such as: freedom of choice, voluntariness, spontaneity, self-activity, creativity and individuality. Also, it is important to include all the activities that contribute to fulfilling the basic functions of leisure time: rest, entertainment and personal development (Trnavac & Đorđević, 2005).

This paper aims to make a review of theoretical approaches to content, structure and organization of children's leisure time, because in building leisure time programs or adapting curricula to support education for leisure time, we have to rely on main recommendations. It will try to answer the question: What is the influence of structured and unstructured activities in leisure time? And what are the main factors we need to consider when influencing organization of children's leisure time activities?

1. Leisure time – definition and function

Božović (1975: 67) points out that it is difficult to construct a universal definition of free time, because it is always connected with the understanding of society and the values that determine it. This author supports a philosophical and psychological attitude towards free time: free time as the type of existence, and the time to fulfill human needs for self-realization. Considering sociological views on this phenomenon can attribute to better understanding of its interconnectedness with society. This approach provides a wider understanding of leisure time and comprehension of the differences that exist between people of different classes and social statuses, the way they organize and how they spend it. Krivokapić (2007: 90), comparing different sociological theories of the free time in the late 20th century, points out that all sociological theories can be classified into three basic orientations. According to the first orientation, leisure time is considered in terms of contrast to productive work and it is defined as the time free of organized work, but not free from other obligations. In the second orientation, leisure time is a quality time basically

characterized by freedom and independence, and the free choice of activities that the individual will be engaged in. It is the time free of all obligations and coercion. According to the third orientation, free time is the non-productive time and it does not have its own quality but, it is determined by different factors, especially the way and content of its use.

In pedagogical literature, definitions of free time can also be differentiated depending on the source. In the Pedagogical Dictionary (Pedagoški rečnik, 1967), leisure time is the time a person spends in not performing any tasks, whether workplace or domestic, and he/she uses it as the time for leisure, recreation and creation. In the Pedagogical Encyclopedia (Pedagoška enciklopedija, 1989), leisure time is defined as the time that an individual fulfills and shapes according to his own wishes, without coercion or obligation. Leisure is the part of everyday human activities existing beyond professional, family and social obligations. Activities chosen usually fulfill the purpose of rest, leisure or creativity, and forms, contents and type of activities are randomly chosen. After analyzing various definitions of leisure time, Mikanović and Jevtić (2015: 277) described different theoretical approaches to this phenomenon: approaches that observe leisure time as the time that comes after fulfilling all of professional, family and social obligations and roles; approaches that emphasize the freedom of the individual in exercising of his free time; approaches that represent leisure time as the time used for leisure, recreation, personality development or for cultural purposes.

Investigating definition of free time, we often come across the concepts of idleness and leisure. Idleness is unequivocally identified as the time that is freed from work, while leisure is distinguished as the time free to spend creatively and in the ways that help self-determination and confirmation of a human as a free being. On the basis of difference between these concepts, leisure time is defined as the time that is first freed from work, and then fulfilled with free self-confirming and self-realizing activities (Polić & Polić, 2009: 259). This definition is widely used in education. For educators, the viewpoint taken by Vidulin – Orbančić (2008) is also very important. It notices that the concepts of free time differ among the social groups, so young people and adolescents have different views of and interests in free time than other social groups. The freely designed time makes the lives of young people meaningful, organized and creative, which contributes to the development of their individuality and positive characteristics of personality. When talking about the free time of children and young people, it is important to note that this is above all a pedagogical problem (Vidulin – Orbančić, 2008: 21). Most of the above mentioned authors and sources, irrespectively of the time of production, defined leisure time activities through its three main functions: rest, entertainment or fun and personality development (Mikanović & Jevtić, 2015; Pedagogical Dictionary, 1967; Pedagogical Encyclopedia, 1989; Trnavac & Đorđević, 2005).

2. The contents and structure of leisure time activities in children

The amount of leisure time that children and young people have, varies with age, school, and number of activities they are involved in, or the environment they come from. Today children have less free time, usually about two hours or less during the day, which implies the need to focus on quality and content that will be realized during this time (Ilišin, 2003). Starting point to this problem often shows the negative picture because it is increasingly common for young people to spend their time in non-creative and unproductive activities. Also, the frequency of non-recreational and unproductive leisure activities usually does not leave enough time and space for children to devote to more productive or more organized activities. The problem grew particularly big with the development of media and their high availability to the children of all ages. All of this implies the importance of education for the proper selection of the content that children will realize in their free time.

This indicates the need for control and organization of leisure time. Preferred and acceptable activities are always planned, truly motivated and organized, even when they represent only rest and recreation (Mlinarević, 2004). Many studies (Eccles et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fletcher et al., 2003) investigated the relationship between participation in various leisure activities and the achievement of psychological and physical wellbeing, better school performance, or behavioral changes. In most cases, research has confirmed the connection of involvement in certain highly structured activities, with the advancement, progress and success in different areas of life.

All activities that can be realized in free time can be classified on the basis of three criteria: the type and level of engagement of young people, the goal or functions that are achieved and the degree of structure (Mohoney & Stattin, 2010). Within the first criterion, activities can be passive or active activities, those that mentally or physically engage young. Activities in relation to their goal and function are usually divided into those that encourage fun, enjoyment, and development of interests or personality (Pešić et al., 2012: 155). In relation to the degree of structuredness, structured and unstructured activities differ (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Bartko & Eccles, 2003; Mohoney & Stattin, 2010). For the purposes of this paper we will examine the classification of activities according to the degree of structuredness, because we consider both equally important, and their understanding can contribute to better education for the free time.

Structured leisure time activities

Structured leisure time activities are activities which are organized by adults with the aim to achieve same social or behavioral goals. The difference between structured and unstructured activities is in their realization during free time and not in the type of activities. Structured activities request regular participation, have

engagement rules and are managed by at least one adult leader. The emphasis of these activities is on developing skills or competences during time by increasing challenges and complexity of activities. As the participant becomes more skilled, the requirements increase in parallel (Mohoney & Stattin, 2010). This means that the child can practice sports from time to time with his friends, but it is involved in structured activity only if it is enrolled in some sports club and attends classes regularly. These two activities are same by the type, and different in structure.

Data from different studies (Eccles & Barber, 1999: 14; Fletcher et al., 2003:641) have shown that most common structured activities are music lessons, sports or scout club activities. Examples of highly structured activities in Sweden include activities promoted by schools and communities such as athletics, music organizations and church groups (Mohoney & Stattin, 2010). Organized activities can include three different types and modes of organization, such as school clubs, school sports teams and out-of-school recreational activities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008: 1030).

It is desirable that children and young people spend large part of their free time in structured and organized activities because they have impact on the development of skills and abilities of children, social relationships with peers and adults. Encouraging and motivating children to choose those activities and to reconcile them with their own needs and possibilities is very important task of education for the leisure time. In the society in which social media promote and offer passive activities, parents and school have the task to target their educational influences toward structured activities because they achieve the best positive effects on the development and socialization of children. It is important to note that structured and highly organized activities can also be those that are not socially acceptable, such as gangs, organized crime or drug trafficking (Mohoney & Stattin, 2010: 115). Their spreading is, in part, supported by psychological need of young people to belong and involve in some group activity. This can mean that we need to offer structured and organized activities that are socially acceptable, so as not to leave the gap for the unwanted ones. The data from Bartco and Eccles (2003: 238) research showed that the inclusion of children and young people in structured, prosocial activities contributes to the positive development of the personality, with the lowest functionality among young people least involved in structured activities.

There are statistically significant differences between the amount of structured and unstructured leisure time activities. The data from Hofferth and Sandberg (2001) research show that children spend nearly double their time unstructured, and note the established difference in relation to the age of children: older children leisure time was noticeably more structured and organized. Research from our country (Petrović et al., 2018) has shown that the first choice of 70% of children were unstructured, passive activities, and it was true for children in urban and rural area equally. The difference was noted only between urban and rural areas, in favor of urban areas where structured physical activities were more accessible.

Following the desire to provide students the opportunity to spend their leisure time in a useful and organized way, school has developed a system of extracurricular

activities, with a special emphasis on cultural activities (Mikanović & Panzalović, 2014). In addition to cultural activities, there are other groups of extracurricular activities that, in different ways, contribute to the achievement of positive development of personality of students and fulfill their needs for engagement. There are different approaches to extracurricular activities in the literature. One approach considers extracurricular activities as a whole of different types of activities in the school that include free activities, additional educational work, special or corrective pedagogical work and socially useful work. In addition to these groups of activities, student's cooperative societies, sports societies and other children's organizations are also very important (Janković & Rodić, 2007). According to the purpose of extracurricular activities, they can be divided on the basis of influence of students' personality, and according to the place where they are realized they are divided on in-school and out-of-school activities (Bucknavage & Worrell, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Janković & Rodić, 2007).

Foreign authors (Eccles et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; 2008) emphasize the importance of extracurricular activities, and present them as highly structured activities whose implementation provides short-term and long-term effects on positive development of students' personality. They encourage achievement and support educational goals. Some of the extracurricular activities that can be carried out at school are school clubs, school sports teams and out-of-school recreational activities (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008: 1030). School clubs give the opportunity to develop academic and leadership skills, contribute to the development of personality, ability to resolve problems and emotional development. In addition to these activities, research carried out by Eccles and associates (Eccles et al., 2003) included 16 sports and 30 activities within school clubs and communities. The obtained data especially highlighted the importance of activities such as sports, school leadership, spiritual activities and academic clubs for achieving academic success and increasing enrollment at the faculty.

Free activities enable the school to open up to the individualities and interests of its students that can't be met in regular classes. The groups of free activities that exist in our country are subject oriented, cultural, artistic, technical, and sports activities (Janković & Rodić, 2007; Trnavac & Đorđević, 2005). The list of extracurricular activities which are available to our children include: different sections such as young biologists, physicists, mathematicians, historians, chemists, geographers; entrepreneur activities, photo sections, astronomical, constructor sections; sections for athletics, handball, basketball, football, volleyball. Curatorial and artistic free activities are very popular among students and enable all students to satisfy their individual needs for music, literature, theater, art; organized visits of cultural events (Trnavac & Đorđević, 2005). To develop a culture of leisure time, the significance of this group of leisure activities that are organized and structured is especially emphasized. On the other hand, it is important to consider the potential of unstructured activities and to explore the place they take within the children's leisure time.

Unstructured leisure time activities

Unstructured activities are defined as relaxing and relatively spontaneous activities, which take place without some strict rules or guidance by adults. These activities have several goals that are related to skills development, but this is not their primary goal. Their most important functions are in promoting active rest, socializing, generating good mood and happiness. Some of the activities that can be classified into this group are watching TV, hanging out with friends, going to clubs and discos, playing sports for fun and so on. We need to emphasize that these activities also have the potential to engage children and young people in some forms of unacceptable and asocial behaviors, but as in structured activities, educational influences and constant awareness can protect children from involving in them.

Different studies researched frequency of various unstructured activities among children and young people. The most frequently practiced unstructured activities included video games, watching TV, going to the pool, ping-pong, engaging in music, recreational sports such as playing basketball or football with friends, night outings, visiting cafes (Mahoney & Stattin, 2010), socializing with friends, reading for pleasure, watching television (Bartko & Eccles, 2003: 236). There is no clear division inside the group of unstructured activities, but they can be divided on active and passive leisure activities. Visit of sports events; watching movies; listening to music or sitting; playing games such as cards, puzzles, social games, playing with toys are considered passive, because they do not ask for physical engagement and planning and preparation in advance. Active unstructured activities encompass numerous games outdoors with friends; hiking, camping, running (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). All of these activities show difference in frequency across the regions and age of children, and often depend of some cultural pattern that imposes the dominance of particular activities.

Studies in our country rarely include the division of activities into structured and unstructured, but several studies on the representation of various activities during the leisure time of children and young people (Badrić et al., 2011; Brdar & Lončarević, 2004; Videnović et al., 2010; Ilišin, 2003; Pešić et al., 2012; Petrović et al., 2018) found that the most common activities were watching TV, internet browsing, going to cafes, discotheques, and reading for relaxation. As we have already mentioned, all these activities do not have a clear structure, duration, and are not managed by adults, so we can conclude that those studies show that among children in our country, unstructured activities are also represented. This conclusion is supported by research done by Petrović and associates (Petrović et al., 2018) that showed that the unstructured sports activities were the first choice among various structured and unstructured leisure time activities of elementary school children.

The results of several surveys (Brdar & Lončarević, 2012; Ilišin, 2003; 2007), showed that some of the most common non-structured activities that involve the use of media, such as television, reading books, computer use and Internet browsing had a positive impact on children. Unstructured activities provide students with

the opportunity to satisfy their needs for relaxation and fun, which is often very limited within structured activities. Also, the characteristic of unstructured activities, no control by adults, makes them very attractive to children and gives them space to socialize and spend time with friends the way they want it. On the basis of all this, we emphasize that unstructured activities are important for the manifestation of the freedom of children, so children are more motivated for their realization, which contributes to achieving better peer relationships and socialization, as well as the development of creativity, openness and creativity.

Despite the fact that this group of activities is very frequent, there is little data on their pedagogical significance and educational value. Still, we can argue that these activities have many positive aspects. Unstructured activities should be part of the children's leisure time, but it is important to offer children those that contribute to the positive development, and they should be monitored so as not to occupy too much of free time.

3. Factors influencing organization of leisure time

Choosing content and activities that will fill children's leisure time depends on factors, such as age, surroundings, family members, peers, school influences. All of them can be indicators of the way children will spend their time. It is known that children of the younger age are greatly influenced by the family and school, while in the period of adolescence peers and peer groups have the greatest influence on the choice of leisure activities. Subjective factors that influence the choice of content are attendance, education, habits, and abilities. Objective factors include social environment, supply and availability of some activities. Also economic factors are becoming more important as one of the most important prerequisites for choosing content and activities. Today, there are many activities and contents that are not available to most social groups for economic reasons (Petrović & Zotović, 2010).

The organization of leisure time of children and young people can be viewed on through several studies on the representation of different types of activities. The way American children organize their time was investigated by Hofferth and Sandberg (2001), whose data indicate that only one-fifth of the time is used for structured activities, about half of children's free time consumes unstructured play and watching television, while about five hours a week children spend in activities with their family. Another study (Posner & Vandall, 1999), which was carried out in the United States, confirmed the presence of unstructured activity in free time, with the most common activity watching television, which took up about 20% of children's time after school. Structured and organized activities such as extracurricular activities and community trainings were represented in a significantly lower percentage. The research carried out in our areas (Mijatović, 2014) showed that self-organized and passive activities prevail in relation to organized activities, which implies the need to encourage children and young people to spend their leisure time better and more organized.

On the basis of a survey on the structure and organization of one day, young people spend about 77% of the time in non-free time activities related to schooling, sleeping and hygiene, while only about 23% of the time can be organized according to their needs and interests. It was found that the most frequent activity in children's free time was watching television (Badrić et al., 2011: 60). The fact that reading from satisfaction and other literary activities were not popular with children of elementary school age, while the dominant activities were listening to music and watching television, indicated the need for greater guidance for children (Nippold et al., 2005: 97).

In organization of children's leisure time, it is important to keep in mind the gender and age of children, as confirmed by different surveys. Research of Badrić (Badrić et al., 2015) found that boys are involved in activities with aim to play games or entertainment, especially in the IT sector, while girls are usually involved in fun, relaxing, or educational activities. Boys engage in activities such as playing football, basketball, handball, while girls usually walk, dance, play volleyball, ride rollers.

Videnović and her associates (2010) conducted a survey on how high school students spend their free time, with a special focus on gender. The results showed that there is a difference between the activities that students do in their free time during the week and the afternoon. During the week, the activities of learning and watching television are approximately equally represented, while students spend the most time traveling from home to school. As for the weekend, in this case, Saturday activities such as going to cafes, discotheques, clubs dominate, but there was also a great deal of learning and realization of school-related activities, as well as socialization at the home and with the family. The difference in gender showed the following: boys had more sport activities and activities realized outside the home, while girls were more likely to realize school and curricular activities, stay at home and make phone calls with friends.

The other authors also confirmed the need to consider age of students in organizing their leisure time (Bucknavage & Worrell, 2005; Posner & Vandall, 1999; Petrović et al., 2018). The existence of different interests of children, depending on the class they attend, resulted in difference in representation structured and unstructured activities. It is important to point out that the research (Posner & Vandall, 1999: 873) confirmed that the amount of time children spent in unstructured activities significantly decreased from the third to the fifth grade.

The schools, as well as families, usually encourage young people to engage in various activities within the school or other structured activities that contribute to the development of their personality. Motives for encouraging children to engage in some activities may be different, but it is important to respect the principle of freedom of choice and compliance with the child's interests and needs for productive use of leisure time, and also with the gender, age and factors concerning child's personality.

Conclusion

From a pedagogical point of view, free time represents a significant but insufficiently explored field of action. This implies the need for more attention to its organization and efforts to motivate children for more constructive activities. Due to the over-focus of young people on entertainment and socializing activities when they have the opportunity to independently select the activities they want to deal with, we consider it important to analyze the factors that can influence the organization of leisure time for young people, as well as the importance that some of these factors may have on involvement in different types of activities.

Bearing in mind all the results of the research we have studied and where it has been established that some of the most common activities are usually non-productive activities, such as use of media (television, mobile phones or computers), going to cafes and clubs and other, that are realized without supervision and control, we believe that more attention should be paid to organizing the leisure time of children and young people in order to make their time more constructive. This data indicates the need to raise children's awareness of all the opportunities they have and the ways in which they can spend their free time while contributing to their own education and development. Also, is very important to educate and make influences on parents and teachers about all possibilities and negative effects of inappropriate organization leisure time.

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SLOBODNO VREME DECE – POGLED NA STRUKTURU I ORGANIZACIJU

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Apstrakt: Način na koji deca provode svoje slobodno vreme, individualno ili sa prijateljima i porodicom, može pozitivno uticati na razvoj njihove ličnosti, ili sa druge strane, može voditi ka razvijanju nepoželjnih oblika ponašanja. Pedagozi bi, stoga, trebalo da pomognu deci da nauče da koriste svoje slobodno vreme konstruktivno i produktivno, i u skladu sa svojim uzrastom i potrebama. Ovaj rad analizira pedagošku literaturu koja se bavi različitim pristupima slobodnom vremenu dece, proučava njegova određenja i rezultate prethodnih istraživanja koja upućuju na njegovu strukturu i organizaciju. Na kraju, on naglašava značaj promovisanja strukturiranih aktivnosti u slobodnom vremenu i neutralizaciju negativnih efekata pasivnih aktivnosti.

Ključne reči: *slobodno vreme, strukturirane i nestruktuirane aktivnosti, organizacija slobodnog vremena*

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