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Folk-Based Outdoor Games as Means to Improve the Physical Activity and Emotional Well-Being of Pre-School Children

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Abstract

In this chapter, we will discuss outdoor games and explain the value they can have for 2–7-year-old children. An outdoor game means performing a wide range of movements, such as running, jumping, throwing a ball, etc. while following a certain set of predefined rules. It often includes some kind of spoken verse, nursery rhymes, and reference to folklore. These components define the game's story and help the children become more engaged within the game. In Russia, kindergartens conduct specially organised classes with children, to help them develop communicative skills, memory, and creativity. These classes (games) can have a positive effect on the child in a whole range of areas: physical, intellectual, emotional and communicative. They provide a benefit to the children's health, improve their cardiovascular/respiratory systems, strengthen the muscles and bones. In our research, we asked the teachers to observe the children's progress when taking part in outdoor games. Changes were evaluated on the basis of the so-called "play activity organisation". Play activity not only promotes the child's comprehensive development but is also a good indicator of the child's developmental age. In this chapter, we also provide examples of actual play exercises that involve phrases from folklore.

Keywords: pre-school children, outdoor games, folklore, physical activity, emotional well-being

1. Introduction

Pre-school age children (2–6 years old) enjoy play. They play on their own, with their parents or older siblings and with their teachers.

This is due to the fact that for pre-school age children, play is the main type of activity. Through play, the child discovers the world, develops vital faculties and skills, including motor skills, and learns the rules and norms of social behaviour.

Today in Russia, play is a significant part of daily routine in kindergartens, taking place both indoors and outside. The games children learn with their teacher can then also be played at home and when going on trips.

Teachers employ a vast number of different types of games when working with pre-school children [1, 2].

The special significance of folk-based outdoor games is that they are easily accessible to kids starting from the youngest age. Outdoor games can be very diverse. They reflect national traditions, help develop adaptation and decision-making skills, improve motor activity and enhance communicative and creative abilities. From a methodological viewpoint, an outdoor game should be considered as a multifaceted, comprehensive pedagogical means for balanced education. It is all encompassing because it helps to develop motor skills and refine essential physical, mental and emotional-volitional qualities [3–5].

When motion activities contain a competitive element, folk-based games can also be used as preparation for participating in sports games.

Proper selection and guidance in games are crucial for assisting pre-school children in growing a sense of collectivism, assertiveness, initiative, perseverance in achieving their goals, confidence and good command over their emotions.

Due to the range of the educational effect achieved by folk-based outdoor games, there are certain requirements toward the methods of their organisation. The most common requirements are the following: the games should reflect people's lifestyle, psychology, traditions and culture; the difficulty of the games' story and content should be appropriate for the participants' age, intelligence, skill and physical ability level. The selection of games and play tasks needs to align with the objectives of pre-school children's education [2, 6, 7].

In the following section of this chapter, we will look at what exactly outdoor games are. We refer to the opinion of the famous nineteenth century Russian educator and physiologist, Peter Lesgaft, regarding the value of outdoor games which is needed for children's comprehensive development. We will also define the value of outdoor games for kids in today's world.

Further, in Section 3, we describe the organisation of play activities with children in kindergartens and the amount of time dedicated to outdoor games during a day and give examples of outdoor games with rhymes that help children properly perform the movements involved.

That section will also provide the results of our research on how outdoor games can affect the child's physical and psychological development. We describe the sets of games that teachers and parents can use, e.g. during everyday walks or family trips.

2. What are outdoor games, and why teach them to children?

An outdoor game is a specially organised motion-based activity that allows the child to learn essential life skills and abilities, as well as to interact with other participants. These games can become much more exciting for children if they include phrases and rhymes taken from folklore. The games are made up of tasks that should be executed by following certain preset rules, and by combining motion with speech (rhymes) in these tasks, children can better learn the movements as well as interact with other kids and adults who are participating in play. The famous Russian doctor, physiologist and teacher Peter Lesgaft emphasised the significant role of outdoor play in the child's physical and psychological development [1]. He viewed play as an aid in the kids' comprehensive personality growth that can teach the child honesty, integrity, discipline, self-control and a sense of camaraderie. Lesgaft recommended using games so that children could learn to control their own behaviour. Through motion-based play, children can strengthen their musculoskeletal, respiratory and cardiovascular systems and develop movement coordination, agility and force.

Today's teachers, psychologists and parents take interest in how outdoor games can have a positive effect on the children's development. This becomes especially relevant in an era when kids do not get as much movement during the day, spending more time in front of television or electronic devices. Therefore, it is essential that outdoor games, with their high amount of motion activity, be included in the child's daily routine.

Researchers define the so-called "play activity organisation" as one of the indicators of the children's developmental age, specifically their intellectual, emotional and physical development level. To evaluate these, we have conducted a research based in Russia that involved 300 children aged 2–7 years old. These children attended kindergartens, where teachers organised dedicated classes involving outdoor play with elements of folklore. The researchers analysed the kids' developmental age indicators and composed specialised sets of outdoor games that can be used both in kindergartens and at home, during regular walks and family trips [4, 5, 8].

3. Psychological and physiological effects of folklore-based outdoor games for 2–6-year-old children

Outdoor games can have a significant role in health, discipline and education and can be successfully used when working with children in kindergartens. They are proven to facilitate children's physical development and have a positive effect on the nervous system and overall health. They can also be a very engaging sports activity that puts out a lot of physical stress on the child's body, which should certainly be taken into account when organising classes and games with pre-school age children [1, 4, 6, 9].

Nearly each game involves running, jumping, throwing, balance exercise, et cetera. Games help develop the child's primary physical qualities, such as strength, dexterity and endurance while enhancing numerous motor abilities and skills that the child will require later in life.

Participating in play contributes to the child's physical, intellectual, ethical and artistic development. Under proper guidance, a wide variety of movements and actions during play can positively affect cardiovascular and respiratory systems, help strengthen the nervous system and the motor apparatus, boost general metabolism as well as all human organs and systems, increase the appetite and improve sleep. Through outdoor games, we can ensure the child's comprehensive development [5, 6, 8, 9].

During play, pre-school children develop and master various primary movement skills (running, jumping, throwing, climbing, etc.) In games, situation changes quickly, and that teaches the child to use the learned movements in accordance with what is happening at any given moment. All of this has a positive effect on improving motor skills and abilities. Outdoor games also have a physiological effect on the child's body. Children demonstrate better movement coordination, agility and muscle force. These factors are most notably increased at 5–7-year-old age.

Outdoor play can also be of great importance for a pre-school child's personality growth. In games, children can use their own experience, while deepening and solidifying their view of the events being imitated in play, and their outlook on life. Much like an adult, the child learns of the world through experience. Game participants acquire new sensations, concepts and ideas. Games expand their range of ideas; enhance attentiveness, ingenuity and the ability to analyse; compare and

generalise what they have seen; and help children learn how to come to one’s own conclusions based on observing the environment. In outdoor play, the child develops the aptitude to correctly evaluate spatial and time relations, as well as quickly and appropriately react to the rapidly changing situation within the game. Games conducted outdoors both in summer and winter can be of tremendous value for education.

Games can be organised outdoors at any season of the year. The duration of play with children aged 3 to 6 depends on the game’s intensity, the complexity of movement involved and the children’s physical development level and health condition. It can usually average from 10 to 20 minutes.

Table 1 presents the formats of work and the amount of time dedicated to play for pre-school age children during a routine day in kindergarten.

The results presented in **Table 1** show that the time specifically allocated for playing activities is sufficient to achieve the goals of discipline and education in kindergartens. Two- to three-year-old children have around 5 hours of playtime per week, i.e. about 1 hour per day. For children of 6–7 years old, special game classes and tasks amount to about 105 minutes a day, i.e. 1 hour 45 minutes. Each of the work formats described employs some elements of folklore.

Not all work formats are used daily. Dynamic games and outdoor physical exercise (morning and afternoon), as well as games, round dances and game exercise during the day, are compulsory and take place each day. Other types of work are scheduled one or two times a week.

Table 2 provides sample exercises that use verses, counting rhymes and nursery rhymes, to help children in performing the tasks. This verse-type accompaniment is based in folklore.

The above exercises can be used both in musical rhythmic classes and in gaming tasks.

Table 3 provides examples of folk-based outdoor games that can help develop various qualities and skills in pre-school age children.

The results of the experimental work have shown that the use of specifically selected games and exercises, especially folklore-based, can help develop physical and personal skills in kindergarten children, as well as correct any psychological and physiological development issues.

A well-organised play activity prevents children from “wasting” their energy, does not require additional motivation, is easily understood and implemented by the teachers, does not require creating special conditions and helps to “lessen the load on the left hemisphere”.

Formats of work	2–3 y.o.	3–4 y.o.	4–5 y.o.	5–6 y.o.	6–7 y.o.
Dynamic games and outdoor physical exercise (morning, afternoon)	125	150	175	200	200
Games, round dances, game exercise during the day	60	75	100	125	150
Music and rhythm classes	45	45	60	90	105
Game therapy	15	15	20	30	30
Supervised game room visits	20	25	30	40	40
Total	265	310	385	485	525

Table 1.
Time per week dedicated to play activities for kindergarten children (minutes).

#	Exercise	Text (translated from Russian)
1.	We are Growing!	<i>Higher, higher shall we grow; Stretch the hands to reach the top!</i> (Children stand on their toes, stretching the hands up.) <i>One and two, higher we go, three and four – now hands we drop!</i> (Going back down, feet firmly on the floor, hands drop.)
2.	Butterflies	<i>Exercise will go like that: put your hands behind your head;</i> (Children bend their arms and lock their hands behind their head.) <i>Like butterflies we fly and fly, wings together, spread them high.</i> <i>One, two, two, one, all the class shall move as one!</i> (Moving the bent arms together and apart.)
3.	Catch the Fly	<i>Time to put our hands up high; we shall try to catch the fly!</i> <i>After that, we bring them down, to the start and back around!</i> (Children rotate their body left and right, bring the arms up, clap their hands.)
4.	Airplane	<i>Spread our hands out left and right, plane is coming into flight, Swinging wings from side to side, One and then another time!</i> (Feet shoulder width apart, arms spread out, tilting the body left and right.)
5.	Maple Tree	<i>Quietly shaken by the wind, left and right the maple trees Bending one and two and three, making noises with the leaves.</i> (Feet shoulder width apart, hands behind the head, children tilt their body left and right).
6.	Weathercock	<i>Today we build a weathercock. Let us all turn around the clock!</i> <i>Wind is blowing right and left, wings are turning quick and deft.</i> (Hands behind the head, children turn their torso right and left.)
7.	Lumberjack	<i>Lumberjacks we are becoming, axes high – and here we coming, Swinging hands, our merry gang, log is splitting with a bang!</i> (Feet shoulder width apart, arms above, fingers locked together. Children bend forward, breathing out deeply, altogether saying ‘Bang!’)
8.	Roly-Poly	<i>Roly-poly! Squatting lowly! Naughty little child you are, cannot quite handle you so far!</i> (Children sit down; put their hands on their knees, nodding their head down.)
9.	Dwarfs and Giants	<i>Wonders right before our eyes: children shrinking down in size! Then they stand up, and from dwarfs into giants they shall morph!</i> (Children sit down, put their hands on their knees and lower their head. Then they stand up on their toes, stretch their hands up and bend their backs in.)
10.	The Ball	<i>Jumping, jumping, little ball, off and far away it goes! Hop and hop, and many more, we are landing on our toes!</i> (Children jumping up and down on two legs.)
11.	To the Parade!	<i>Strong and bold our great brigade, coming out to the parade! Raise your foot and keep eyes straight, little soldiers marching great!</i> (Children march in place raising their knees up high.)

#	Exercise	Text (translated from Russian)
12.	Little Sun	<i>Children, sun is above ground! Can you breathe in deep? Let us see. Then we bring our hands back down, breathing out and feeling free. One, two, breathing in; three, four, breathing out.</i> (Children rise on their toes, hands up, then bend and lower their hands down.)

Table 2.
Example of folklore-based exercises.

#	Name of the game	Qualities
1.	“Close Acquaintances”, “Remember the Movement”, “Forbidden Movement”	Attentiveness, discipline, quick reaction
2.	“Find your Spot”, “Guess who’s shouting and where”	Spatial orientation, sense of collectivism
3.	“Spindle”, “Return to your Place”, “Riding the Ball”, “Rotate Together”	Movement coordination, flexibility, attentiveness
4.	“Butterflies and Dragonflies”, “White Bears”, “Fight for the Ball”	Dexterity, attentiveness, willpower

Table 3.
Examples of outdoor games for pre-school children.

At the start of the experiment, we set a task of picking out the diagnostic materials for analysing the play activities of pre-school children. The methods of Kalinina [8] were chosen as the most accessible for the teaching staff to conduct systematic work at kindergartens. The pre-school children’s play activity was analysed by the following criteria: primary play content, role-play, actions during play, using props and mock-up tools, role-based speech and following the rules. Each of the criteria was evaluated using a five-point scale, from the lowest (1) to the highest (5) level of play activity organisation.

The analysis of the kids’ play activity is performed using the pedagogical observation method. The observation results are placed in a clearly laid out summary table. This table notes the last name of each child, the child’s age and their play skills according to each criterion. The work that followed was concerned with designing game sets (see **Tables 2** and **3**) that included games and play tasks aimed at developing self-regulating behaviour, reducing psychological and emotional stress, developing communicative and emotional-volitional skills, movement coordination, nervous system process training, teambuilding in children’s groups and promoting interaction within the teacher-kid pair.

A feature of these game sets is that they include games that can be used in various types of classes: physical education, music, game therapy, outdoor walks, group room classes and independent play, as well as at home and during family trips.

The class schedule includes special organisational moments when children learn the games, after which these games can be used by teachers in different types of classes.

Over the course of 3 years when these game sets were routinely used in kindergartens, we obtained positive results regarding the organisation of play activity for pre-school children. The results demonstrate that there were changes in play activity among the same children throughout the observation period. The kids’

approximate age was 3–6 years. Percentages indicate the number of children in a group who performed the game tasks at the level appropriate for their developmental age.

We saw that for the “primary play content” criterion, where the child has to use tools or interact with other players, the group indicators rose from 15 to 71%.

The “role-play” criterion refers to the child playing a certain role defined by the rules of the game. These indicators improved from 51 to 97%. The diversity, logical consistency and mastery of game actions were reflected by the “actions during play” criterion. The pre-school children group showed an increase from 22 to 98% [4, 5].

The game sets contain folklore-based games that include certain speech segments necessary to conduct the game. Some games involved reciting rhymes related to role-play. Such games are especially important for the development of speech in children. In terms of the “role-based speech” criterion, the group indicators have improved from 16 to 85% [4, 5].

Many games and play tasks involve using play tools, certain pieces of attire or sports equipment. The ability to use these tools appropriately, in accordance with the rules of the game, is another characteristic of pre-school children’s play activity organisation. The criterion “using props and mock-up tools” increased from 23 to 90% in the group.

Compliance with the rules of the game among children improved from 63% at the start of the observation to 98% by the end [4, 5].

4. Conclusion

The use of specially designed game sets, including various types of games and play tasks based in folklore, used properly in pre-school age children’s daily routine, can help children develop a high level of playing abilities and skills. Specially organised play classes in kindergartens improve the child’s emotional-volition sphere and promote intellectual growth, social contacts and mutual understanding among children as well as between kids and adults.

The following are some of the advantages:

- Game sets are easily accessible to teachers in children’s educational institutions and can be used for working with pre-school kids.
- Play activity can correct issues in pre-school children’s psychological, physiological and motor development. This process is especially effective when the games are included in various activities and compulsory or extracurricular classes conducted in kindergartens. Our observation of play activities among 2- to 7-year-old kindergarten children has indicated that properly selected games and play tasks can help ensure the child’s comprehensive development.
- The inclusion of outdoor games with elements of folklore can enhance the child’s motion abilities and have a positive effect on cardiovascular and respiratory systems.

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