

## COMMUNICATION THROUGH PLAY- DEVELOPER OF PRESCHOOLER'S DIALOGUE SPEECH

### *Komunikācija rotaļā – pirmsskolas vecuma bērnu dialogrunas sekmētāja*

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**Abstract:** *The aim of the nowadays education is the upbringing of a cultural person striving for mutual understanding, dialogue and communication. Along with being a speech form dialogue is also manifesting various behaviours of a person. Participation in a dialogue takes place with the help of the dialogue speech, the acquisition of which is a precondition for successful development of a child and his/her activity. Significant role in the children communication is fulfilled by both linguistic content of the communication (phrases, expressions) and ability to subject linguistic forms to the social background, as at the pre-school age dialogue serves for life and daily communication. Topicality of the problem lays in the fact that traditional teaching process in pre-school is organised mainly as expository monologue, insufficiently using main activity of the child – play. The results acquired within the framework of the research allow concluding that play during the communication with peers ensures speech activities, development of dialogue speech and cooperation with peers.*

**Keywords:** *communication, dialogue, dialogue speech, play*

### **Introduction**

#### *Ievads*

Communication is significant precondition for harmonic development of a child. Already from the birth moment infant is a social being. Child can not learn universal experience or about culture without communicating with other people. Psychologists E. Hoff (Hoff, 2009), L Vygotsky (Выготский, 1997), J Bruner (Брунер, 1987) believe that communication with peers is a foundation for successful child's development and socialisation that are furthered by the language as it is a communication mean. And vice versa – communication is the one that facilitates development of the child's speech.

Speech activity is one of the prerequisites for timely development of child's speech. Speech activity – it is not only speaking, but also listening, perceiving what has been said. Repeated use of language means under varying circumstances (plays, games) allows developing stable and flexible speech skills, acquiring generalisations that are furthering children interest and motivation to speak, establish dialogues.

Dialogue is a school for mother tongue acquisition and child socialisation. Participation in a dialogue takes place with the help of dialogue speech, the acquisition of which is a precondition for successful development of a child and his/her activity when communicating with surrounding people.

The main activity of a child in the pre-school is playing. Play is an integral part of the child's life through which he/she discovers world, expresses own feelings, acquires behaviours, roles, relationships. Play for a child is communication with himself/herself and world. Functions of the play ensure development of a child as a whole (Dodge, Koralek, Pizzolongo, 2002). Therefore it is difficult to overestimate significance of a play in facilitation of child's communication and dialogue speech. Play is the one trough which child acquires mother tongue in context with practical activities, and inaccuracies of his/her speech are not related to unpleasant consequences, as it tends to be in studies (Брунер, 1987).

The topicality of the problem lies in the fact that traditional teaching process in pre-school is organised mainly as expository monologue, insufficiently using play in the development of the dialogue speech. Gaps in the communication skills and speech inactivity obstruct free communication process of children, thus hindering development of speech, thinking and cognition, impeding acquisition of knowledge as well as leaving negative influence on the development of an individual and his/her behavioural habits.

**Aim of the research:** Study of the pre-schooler's dialogue speech development trough communicating in play.

Research is based on the analysis of theoretical literature, longitudinal observation, data processing with SPSS, analysis and interpretation of research results on communication in play in respect to the development of dialogue speech. The study was conducted in Riga pre-school education establishment X during the time period from 2010 till 2012. Investigation engaged 43 middle-age and older pre-schoolers (aged 4–6). Within the first stage of the research, children dialogue speech skills were found out with the help of findings experiment based on pre-developed criteria. Within the second stage of the study, a formative experiment covered complex of activities for the development of child dialogue speech. At the end of the investigation, children dialogue speech skills were evaluated repeatedly and conclusions made.

## **Results**

### ***Rezultāti***

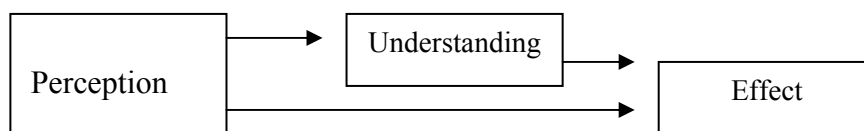
Communication is the exchange of information between or among sides engaged in the contact, by orienting towards partner, his/her behaviour. Information is exchanged verbally and with the help of body movements, gestures (verbal and non-verbal information).

Information exchange, communication process consists of following components:

- addressant (sender) – person that, when contacting with other person or group of persons, gives particular information by asking a question;

- information – facts, thoughts, feelings and beliefs expressed with the help of signs (sound, word, image) that include selection of content, formulation and coding thereof;
- communication channel – type of information exchange – type of contacting ensuring existence of social contacts;
- addressee (receiver) – person to which at the communication moment information is given and that is trying to interpret (decode) it;
- efficiency – effectiveness of the information given by the addressant (formulation of a question or answer) that facilitates mutual understanding, interaction and information exchange, quality of questions and answers by formulating them clearly and understandably so that they are perceived precisely (Kramiņš, 2005; Pļaveniece, Škuškovnika, 2002).

Thus dialogue has important role in the communication process. Dialogue is where speech skills of the child are developed as well as where his/her abilities to plan own communicative behaviour in contact is forming (Казакoвская, 2006: 199). Through the dialogue, with the help of the dialogue speech – when asking and answering – child is learning to express own thoughts aloud and to discuss them with others. It is process through which child is learning to think and judge, speak with other people, listen to others. When analysing mechanism of understanding in dialogue, the researcher N. Saprigina is breaking down the activities of the addressee into three phases: perception, understanding and effect (Сапрыгина, 2003) (see Fig. 1):



*Figure 1 Mechanism of understanding in dialogue (according to N. Saprigina)*

*1. attēls . Sapratnes mehānisms dialogā (pēc N. Sapriginas)*

In order to understand and get along, a person should be able to listen and hear. Ability to listen belongs to the most significant communication skills; sometimes it is even more important than ability to speak. Therefore, in order to listen and hear, understand and get along it is important to listen actively. Active listening externally is characterised by showing interest, participation, readiness to support and willingness to understand communication partner completely. All these features are ensured by the communication in play.

In order to be able to establish dialogue, child should learn all functional values of dialogue as well as rules how to establish dialogue – both speech and social (Бизикова, 2008, 8).

Researchers, when studying development of the pre-schooler dialogue speech within communication process, distinguish following components:

- E. Hoff (Hoff, 2001), when analysing development of child's speech, differentiates pragmatic and socially-linguistic component;
- R. Zimmer (Zimmer, 2010), when studying acquisition of speech through games having movements, devotes notable role to talks and cooperation, emphasizing the speech behaviour;
- O. Bizikova (Бизикова, 2008), when speaking about development of dialogue speech in play, highlights three mutually related tasks: ability to use various dialogues, acquire rules concerning their use and speech etiquette;
- D. Dzinter (Freiberger, Dzintere, Augstkalne, 2009), when researching child communication during play, underlines following components:
  - Discourse. Conversation component – language use; ability to maintain conversation, make word combinations and grammar forms with an aim to create verbal text.
  - Pragmatic component. Understanding of each other with the help of language, ability to listen, hear other, relate speech with particular situation.
  - Socially-linguistic component. Positive world perception, interest towards particular things, phenomena, values, speech culture.

Mentioned studies show that child is willing and able to participate in dialogue if he/she can verbally formulate own needs, thoughts, can speak with other persons, find contact with him/her by expressing own world views and attitudes. During the first years of life the main role is assigned to adult-child communication, whereas later, along with becoming more independent, child gradually distances from adult, and influence from peers is increasing. Child's dialogue with adults and child's dialogue with peers differ. Conversations with adults are more or less calm, adult is trying to speak correctly, is listening to what child is saying, is demonstrating positive example, is emphasizing right and wrong, whereas dialogue with peer often is more saturated, rules and norms are not always observed. Children are characteristic with differing levels of speech and communication skills that sometimes lead to conflicts. Pre-schooler does not understand own inner world, own emotional experiences, intentions, interests, therefore it is difficult for him/her to understand feeling and desires of others. Each child is waiting for positive assessment from peers, whereas he/she does not understand that also peer needs to be praised. At pre-school age it is very difficult to praise, cheer other with the help of encouragement replicas. Child can see only external behaviour of other person: jostles, screams, disturbs, takes away toys etc., and does not understand that each peer is personality with his/her own inner world, interests, desires. It should be mentioned that children are learning ability to concede, come to an agreement, negotiate, and solve conflict in socially acceptable way. The best way how children can acquire these skills is participation in play – the main activity of a child in pre-school.

When analysing children play, it should be noted that word 'play' has not been scientifically substantiated. In Latvian and English, unlike in Russian and German, there are two notions – 'play' and 'game'. Many authors are using the same term to describe various activities, thus some controversies arise (Cook, 2000: 109).

Explanation of the word 'play' is more emphasizing freedom of a child, entertaining character of this activity and creativity. Whereas explanation of the term 'game' underlines the rules used in this activity, spirit of competition and social interaction between the children.

Substantiated definition of a play and game has been developed by the American scientist H. Schwartzman. A free play of children, which is created and initiated by them, H. Schwartzman calls the 'child-structured play'. Team games, board games and other well-structured plays, which are shown to children by adults and which possibly need support from parents or teachers, regard plays (games) structured by adults (Schwartzman, 1985: 11).

The most popular plays at pre-school age are role plays. It is independent activity of a child in which he/she becomes a subject, owner of own activity. Those are plays on household themes (family, shopping), adult work (doctor, driver, farm worker), children life (kindergarten, school, dance coterie), various social life events (Dance and Song Festival, Eurovision Song Contest), TV broadcasts (characters from cartoons and TV series, shows).

Child, when performing a role in a play, gets into various situations that directly or indirectly exercise his/her dialogue speech – child has to be able to continue started dialogue, express clearly, coordinate own answer with the asked question or content of what has been said by the other role, invent new situations. Fulfilment of the role often determines also if child – performer of a role – is interesting play mate for peers, will other children want to let this child joint the common play.

In role plays and later also in dramatic plays dialogues between the children are longer, last longer, and they are more expanded because interest of children is attracted by the role in the play, play story and often also by materials used – toys. Role, story, and materials used are components of the role play structure.

Children communication during a play can be observed in the relationships of two kinds – role relationships and children relationships in reality. Child's behaviour, dialogues in role relationships are related with the behaviour of the particular role – example observed by child in family, society or TV. Child starts to understand that each role has its own rights and obligations. Child indirectly acquires various relationship models and behavioural norms that are furthered by both role relationships and real relationships among children.

Real relationships become apparent in the assignment of roles, conflicts, guidance etc. They are particularly evident at oldest pre-school age, as children are participating in common plays, because they are playing not only next to each other, but also together. Thus in role plays children not only stage imagined

relationships, but also are planning, discussing and coordinating common actions.

Child's ability of adequate communication, capability to express own opinion by asking and answering questions, exchanging ideas, persuading and influencing, giving advises and evaluations allows determining a quality of their communication and dialogue speech skills.

Analysis of the theoretical literature on the development of child's dialogue speech (Hoff, 2009; Казаковская, 2006; Бизикова, 2008) resulted in several criteria characterising the dialogue speech of a child:

1. Ability to use language and speech in various situations;
2. Ability to establish dialogue and react on reported adequately;
3. Ability to use variety of incentive replicas;
4. Communication in a play;

The first three criteria are characterised by features of child's language development – language expansion, ability to express logically and in related manner, speak at a normal pace, use dialogue intonation, to ask, answer, agree or disagree reasonably.

The 4th criterion is characterised by the child's attitude towards the play mate, ability to come to an agreement with the play partner on common activities, ability to solve conflicts, activity in play dialogues.

Evaluation of the child's dialogue speech skills was made with the help of qualitative and quantitative characterisations that meet numerical indicators in point system:

- 4 points – highly expressed indicator, mentioned criterion was observed in child's speech and behaviour always;
- 3 points – sufficiently expressed indicator, can be observed in child's speech and behaviour frequently;
- 2 points – moderately expressed indicator, can be observed in child's speech and behaviour rarely;
- 1 point – poorly expressed indicator, can not be observed in child's speech and behaviour.

Study engaged 43 children aged 4-6. Research data were acquired by observing children cooperation in play, recording dialogues arising between children during time, which in pre-school is devoted to playing. Observation results helped in qualitative and quantitative evaluation of each dialogue speech development indicator (see Table 1).

The mean characterises average points gained in group. In the 1<sup>st</sup> skill, out of maximally possible 4 points the group acquired on average 2.7, and it is criteria that got the highest evaluation in the group. Median is the value dividing the group into two similar parts, i.e., 50 % or half of the group in the 1<sup>st</sup> skill have 2.8 points or less and the other half (50 %) – 2.8 points and more. Mode – most common value in the group. The most common evaluation in the 1<sup>st</sup> skill is 3.0 points.

Table 1

**Statistical indicators of skills acquired by experimental group**  
*Eksperimentālās grupas iegūto prasmju statistiskie rādītāji*

Statistics	Ability to use language and speech in various situations	Ability to establish dialogue and react on reported adequately	Ability to use variety of incentive replicas	Communication in play
Valid	43	43	43	43
<b>Mean</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2.1</b>
Median	2.8	2.3	2.2	2.0
Mode	3	2.5	2.2	1.83

At the age 4-5 children are tended to start using simple and compound sentences that meet the rules of grammar. Still several children have difficulties to formulate their thoughts without repeating syllables and words (39.5 %). This feature is more characteristic for shy, self-conscious or agitated children. Observations show that for children it is easier to formulate the thought in a play, where he/she can feel free.

Research showed that almost 50% of children at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> year are not precisely pronouncing all sounds. Children that have pronunciation problems may have also difficulties with communication in play. Sometimes these children are not permitted to join the play, because other children find it difficult to understand him/her.

Analysis of the 2nd and 3rd criterion on pre-school children dialogue speech shows that children are able to establish small dialogues that are related to play activities and in the meantime are helping to develop story of the play. Still observations show that often children dialogues do not have thematic link between the replicas. Children do not express neither positive, nor negative attitude towards the conversation partner replicas. Research showed that children face the greatest difficulties in respect to the skill of dialogue speech covering not interruption of conversation partner, patience towards opinion of the other person. It is particularly characteristic among active, knowing and talkative children. Children yet cannot argumentatively refuse from the incentive of partner without offending play mate. Observations indicate that children are tended to react more tolerantly on the incentive of an adult, still often they ignore undesirable encouragements, by not answering them verbally and also adequate action does not follow.

Children at middle and older pre-school age navigate through greeting, parting and expression of gratitude sufficiently freely; still incentive replicas as request or apology are used unwillingly.

Statistical data show that 4th criterion (communication in play) received the lowest evaluation. 37% of respondents are rarely expressing their attitude towards the play partners. More detailed analysis of each respondent shows that

reasons behind the adverse treatment of play mate may vary – relationships in family, low self-esteem of a child, disbelief to himself/herself, inability to play together. 16% of children are characteristic with high activity when performing play activities. They can be typified as group leaders. 32% of respondents often form a group of two, thus creating stable union for playing.

When children start common play, communication skills are of a high significance, as it is ability to come to an agreement with a partner on common activities that may be a challenge for a child aged 4–5.

Observations of the children plays indicate that more durable and longer-lasting dialogue is established between two play mates. The more children participate in a play, the shorter dialogues are established.

During the allocation of roles and toys as well as in situations, when aims, motives, activities, and impulses differ, disagreements and conflicts will surely arise. Data of the study show that 14% of children can not solve conflicts. In such cases help of the teacher is necessary, because often communication character and specifics of mutual relationships are determined by the self-confidence of the conflicting child. Teachers should remember that he/she should not avoid the conflict, but solve it.

Formative experiment, conducted with an aim to further development of child's dialogue speech, included complex of various activities for support and stimulation of children plays. In parallel with games and exercises offered by adults, great attention was devoted to role plays and dramatic plays, during which children are exercising language and learning to encourage dialogues.

Process of dialogue speech acquisition was implemented within three stages:

1. child uses pre-developed and learned replicas (reproductive stage);
2. combination of reproductive and productive speech (constructive stage);
3. independent encouragement of dialogue, creative use of acquired skills in a play and daily life (creative stage).

At the end of formative experiment, repeated observation and evaluation of children (43 respondents) dialogue speech skills was carried out.

Evaluation of the dynamics of child's dialogue speech development was based on Student's t criteria for comparison of two independent groups. Results of the findings experiment (1<sup>st</sup> observation) were compared with the results of the formative experiment (2<sup>nd</sup> observation). Evaluation of the acquired results shows that respondent skills at the end of formative experiment were higher in all criteria. Results of the t tests indicate statistically significant differences ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ) in all criteria (see Table 2).

Acquired results led to the conclusion that in the criteria above there are statistically significant differences between the 1<sup>st</sup> observation and 2<sup>nd</sup> observation, generally there are statistically significant differences among all mentioned criteria (last column  $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ). Thus dynamics in the development of child dialogue speech may be characterised as statistically significant.



Table 2

**Comparative analysis of children dialogue speech development**  
*Bērnu dialogrunas attīstības salīdzinošā analīze*

Criterion	Mean		Std. Deviation	t test value	Sig (2-tailed)
	1 <sup>st</sup> observation	2 <sup>nd</sup> observation			
1 <sup>st</sup>	2.7	3.5	.47 .45	-17.3	0.00
2 <sup>nd</sup>	2.2	3.2	.41 .39	-15.9	0.00
3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.5	3.3	.52 .49	-15.3	0.00
4 <sup>th</sup>	2.0	3.1	.48 .46	-19.6	0.00

With an aim to find out if there is significant correlation between dialogue speech evaluation criteria a correlation analysis was performed. The chosen coefficient was *Pearson correlation* coefficient.

Analysis of the acquired results shows that there is statistically significant correlation almost among all criteria (see Table 3).

Table 3

**Correlation analysis**  
*Korelāciju analīze*

		Ability to use language and speech in various situations	Ability to establish dialogue and react on reported adequately	Ability to use variety of incentive replicas	Communication in play
Ability to use language and speech in various situations	Pearson Correlat Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.449 ,003	.696 ,000	.442 ,003
Ability to establish dialogue and react on reported adequately	Pearson Correlat Sig. (2-tailed)	.449 ,003	1	.601 ,000	.515 ,000
Ability to use variety of incentive replicas	Pearson Correlat Sig. (2-tailed)	.696 ,000	.601 ,000	1	.655 ,000
Communication in play	Pearson Correlat Sig. (2-tailed)	.442 ,003	.515 ,000	.655 ,000	1

As all coefficients are positive, all correlations are direct. i.e., when values of one characteristic grow also values of other characteristics are increasing and vice versa. Thus, there is a close correlation between the child's dialogue speech skills (ability to establish dialogue, react on reported adequately, ability to use variety of incentive replicas) and children communication in play.

## **Conclusions** *Secinājumi*

Play is the main activity of a pre-schooler. Communication in play ensures child's speech activity by observing natural logics of the speech skill development: starting from borrowing characters from perceptions and dialogue replicas to their use in combination with reproductive and productive speech and creative transition of discovered characters to independent dialogue speech.

Dialogue speech of a pre-schooler is a complex of dialogical skills that are necessary for wholesome participation in a dialogue. With the help of dialogue speech – by asking and answering – child is learning to think and judge, talk with other people and listen to others.

Evaluation of the acquired results indicates that respondent skills at the end of the formative experiment are higher in all criteria used for the assessment of the dialogue speech. Results of the t test show that there are statistically significant differences between the results of the findings experiment and the data of the formative experiment.

Analysis of correlations showed that there is a statistically significant correlation between the child's dialogue speech skills (ability to establish dialogue, react on reported adequately, ability to use variety of incentive replicas) and children communication in play. Thus, communication in play ensures opportunity for child's speech activity, development of dialogue speech and cooperation with peers.

## **Kopsavilkums** *Summary*

Komunikācija ir svarīgs priekšnosacījums bērna harmoniskai, veiksmīgai attīstībai un socializācijai. Komunikācijas procesā svarīga loma ir dialogam. Dialogā pilnveidojas bērna valodas prasmes, kā arī veidojas prasmes plānot savu komunikatīvo uzvedību saskarsmē (Казаковская, 2006,199). Dialogā ar dialogrunas palīdzību – jautājot un atbildot – bērns mācās izteikt savas domas skaļi un apspriest tās ar citiem. Tas ir process, kurā viņš mācās domāt un spriest, sarunāties ar līdzcilvēkiem, uzklaustīt citus. Visdabiskāk tas notiek bērnu rotaļās, ko H. Schwartzman dēvē par bērnustrukturēto rotaļu (Schwartzman, 1985).

Pētījumā izmantota teorētiskās literatūras analīze, longitūdiālais novērojums, veikta datu apstrāde ar SPSS, analizēti un interpretēti pētījumā iegūtie rezultāti par komunikāciju rotaļā bērnu dialogrunas attīstībai. Pētījumā piedalījās 43 vidējā un

vecākā pirmsskolas vecuma bērni (vecumā no 4-6 gadiem). Pētījuma pirmajā posmā – konstatējošā eksperimentā pēc izstrādātiem kritērijiem tika izzinātas bērnu dialogrunas prasmes. Pētījuma otrajā posmā – veidojošā eksperimentā tika veikts pasākumu komplekss bērnu dialogrunas attīstības veicināšanai. Pētījuma beigās tika veikts atkārtots bērnu dialogrunas prasmju izvērtējums. Iegūtie dati apliecināja, ka respondentu prasmes veidojošā eksperimenta beigās visos dialogrunas novērtēšanas kritērijos ir augstākas. Korelāciju analīze apliecināja, ka pastāv statistiski nozīmīga sakarība starp bērnu dialogrunas prasmēm (prasme veidot dialogu, adekvāti reaģēt uz ziņojumu, prasme izmanto pamudinājuma repliku dažādību) un bērnu komunikāciju rotaļā. Tātad komunikācija rotaļā nodrošina bērnam iespēju runas aktivitātei, dialogrunas attīstībai un sadarbībai ar vienaudžiem.

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