

Review article

IMPLEMENTATION POTENTIAL OF SPECIFIC REAL AIKIDO GAMES IN RECREATION OF EARLY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

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Abstract: Children at early school age spend multiple hours a day seated, and they need to be engaged physically. Even though almost everyone is familiar with the risks brought by lack of movement, the source of physical inactivity lies in the absence of habit to exercise regularly. Precisely these habits are acquired at the earliest age, childhood. And for physical activity to make a positive impact, familiarity with the developmental characteristics of the children engaged in the activity represents a significant element in the planning, programming and realization of recreational activities of early school age children. A major part of today's population of early school age children is not physically active, so it is essential to come up with recreational activities that children have not been engaged in before in order to trigger their interest. It has been long known that play leads to the intellectual, moral and physical development of a child. An important characteristic of play is that it is its own purpose. A child socializes through play, learns to respect others and follow rules. Play enables a child to become more constructive, active, liberated from fear of consequences, increasingly engaged and involved. Some of the potential recreational activities that can be implemented in work with early school age children through play include modified games taken over from real aikido: Kneeling Aikidokas, Semicircular Grab, Pushing, and Rolling Race. Their introduction into the recreational activities of early school age children enlarges the range of activities they can realize.

Keywords: *recreation, children, real aikido, early school age.*

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INTRODUCTION

Early school age is a very significant period in the development of children and there is social responsibility to dedicate major attention to this age group. Hypokinesia, obesity, hypertension, postural defects and other types of defects are increasingly found among early school age children. Human life in contemporary, urban conditions is static and remote from nature.

Children at this age also participate in such lifestyle, and they particularly feel the consequences of insufficient movement and decreasingly exercised physical activities. Every child feels the need to move and they should be enabled to satisfy the need through various physical activities. Early school age children spend multiple hours a day seated at classroom desks, and they should be engaged physically, while paying attention to the anatomical-physiological aspects of their development, as well as the psychological characteristics of that age.

These days, children spend more and more time in front of computer, they move less and less, which primarily leads to spinal deformity (Ivanović, 2013). It has been noticed long ago that physical activity impacts individual's health, that certain physical exercise has beneficial effect on the quality of life. Present day's lifestyle can be described as sedentary, because a majority of population is physically inactive. Insufficient level of active movement is labelled as hypokinesia, which is the main cause of what is known as hypokinetic diseases. It is precisely the physical inactivity that, combined with other unfavorable factors of modern life (such as stress, malnutrition, etc.), may lead to many ailments. A physically active person has longer average life span and lower disease rate than a physically inactive (sedentary) person, as well as lower risk from sudden death (Ostojić, 2006).

In order to prevent hypokinetic diseases, one should find an adequate physical activity for themselves. Heavy and overly exhausting activities are increasingly avoided, as well as those not adjusted to an individual and their personal needs, and whose exercise does not help them feel good. Therefore, people who exercise should aim for the activity which will help them improve the quality of daily activities, contribute to the realization of their individual physical potentials and what is particularly important in the period of early school age, is that the child enjoys it.

Even though almost everyone is familiar with the risks brought about by lack of movement, the source of physical inactivity lies in the absence of habit to exercise regularly. Precisely these habits are acquired at the earliest age, childhood. Sport and physical activity develop self-consciousness and decrease anxiety and stress. A child learns how to win, but also to accept defeat, adopt fair play in the game as well as in life, make friends... From educational aspect, it is essential to constantly direct children toward reali-

zing their moral development at all times, not only during play or exercise. (Ivanović, 2014).

A program implemented through sport also develops various skills in children. The habits acquired from an early age are maintained for life, and are hard to change. Pleasant fatigue after a physical activity enables a child to fall asleep quickly and easily, which further leads not only to better blood circulation in brain and increased oxygen inflow, but also to better and longer concentration, easier handling of given tasks, faster thinking and combining process, as well as easier acceptance of any kind of challenge. All this results in a positive attitude toward potential problems and life in general. Educational institutions' function and role makes them responsible for the provision of the best conditions for psychophysical development of children. Apart from children's daily activities, set by educational institutions' plan and program, which also include physical education activities, the program of physical education classes could also include specific games that are already used in martial arts sports clubs precisely at early school age. Specific real aikido games could find their place in these particular institutions, as well as in all others where this type of activity can be realized smoothly, systematically, and where it can be organized so as to satisfy the essential staff and spatial-technical conditions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EARLY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN AND IMPORTANCE OF PLAY AT THAT AGE

Familiarity with the developmental characteristics of the children engaged in the activity represents a significant element in the planning, programming and realization of recreational activities of early school age children, in order to allow the physical activity to have a positive impact on organ systems and organism as a whole. A particular attention should be dedicated to the fact that the developmental characteristics of certain systems should be known and respected, since individual potentials of every child are separately defined by their genetic code, so an activity can be performed solely within that scope.

At early school age, children shape their relation toward life and work activities, establish critical and objective relation toward oneself, others and the environment, and almost conclude the development of certain abilities, characteristics, bodily systems and organs.

When it comes to *physical development*, children at this age grow a few centimeters and gain a few kilos. Up until puberty, boys' height and weight exceed those of girls. In this period children become physically sturdier, their spine gets stronger, bones bigger, chest more developed, but the skeletal system

is still undergoing formation and it is very elastic. Their nervous system is less developed than in adults, but their brain weighs almost equally to adults'. At the age of 8 cerebrum's growth is concluded and it reaches its final size but its functions are still being developed. The total relative skin surface is greater than in adults, which implies additional heat, so it is extremely important for them to wear "lighter" clothes during physical activities and to exercise in a space with adequate temperature.

In terms of *motor development*, this age leads to noticeable motor development – the speed of reaction and movement, coordination, balance, the ability to throw, catch, jump and move in general. The moves are faster, more accurate, precise, confident and stronger. This period should be used to practice activities that will stimulate the development of the aforementioned abilities.

The *intellectual development* of children at early school age is characterized by progressive increase of their intellectual abilities: memory, thinking, logical reasoning, the ability to learn, etc. Exteroceptive and proprioceptive senses are developed which makes children readier to accept sports training and successfully develop sports motor skills.

In case of children at early school age it is important to underline the changes caused by emotional and social development. Children's emotional life becomes richer, their emotional states less changeable than at pre-school age. New emotional experiences emerge, related to school, their peers, and sports activity.

In this period children are rather cheerful, lighthearted, self-confident, optimistic, and they are particularly sensitive to their failures, injustice, humiliation and mockery. This is the time of intense social development, adaptation to peers and enlargement of the circle of friends. Learning, playing and sport become basic activities for a child. Interest in sport is increased, which leads to a mass inclusion of children into school and extracurricular sports activities. The basic reasons for children to get engaged in sport at this age are their needs to socialize, have fun, enjoy play, excitement, achievement, increase self-esteem, compete and compare to others. In this period, children enter the stage of intense social comparison, when they are directly focused on the comparison between their performance and ability and those of other children, and even adults, unlike preschool children who are solely focused on autonomous success standards, mastering environment and testing their own abilities regardless of others. Many children start doing sport precisely because they believe that sport will make them stronger, faster, sturdier, more skilful and courageous. It is very important for a child to get accepted, appreciated and loved by other children in the play. Children at this age love to explore their movement potentials, so they aspire toward new, non-stereotyped movements and motions.

It has been long known that play leads to the intellectual, moral and physical development of a child (Ivanović, 2014). An important characteristic of play is that it is its own purpose. Games have common characteristics: freedom (player cannot be forced), separation (limited by time and space constraints), suspense (one cannot predict their course and outcome), material unproductivity (they do not contribute to material prosperity), regulations (there are provisions which temporarily cancel standard rules and introduce new ones), fiction (accompanied by specific awareness of some other reality or total unreality in relation to current life). By playing games, children get to know themselves, and who they are in their surroundings. This directs them toward new activities which help them develop abilities, creativity, work habits, moral and aesthetic norms, express emotions. It needs to be underlined that one of the most prominent needs of early school age children is – the need to play.

Playing games speeds up children's decision-making, which then contributes to the development of thinking and the speed of motor reaction to visual and auditory stimuli (Ivanović, 2014).

A child socializes through play, learns to respect others and follow rules. Acceptance of rules also helps overcome egocentrism, because rules apply to everyone, including the individual. It is also appealing to play games because children can experiment in a way that is not possible in everyday life.

Play enables a child to become more constructive, active, liberated from fear of consequences, increasingly engaged and involved.

REAL AIKIDO AND SPECIFIC GAMES IN REAL AIKIDO

Real aikido is an authentic Serbian martial art derived from traditional aikido (Milosavljević, Matavulj and Trunić, 2013). The basic setup of real aikido is to efficiently overpower an attacker without causing them any physical injury. It is a defensive, extraordinarily flexible defense technique system, whose basic characteristics include: integration into opponent's attack, continuous performance of technique and full final control over the attacker (Milosavljević & Vračarević, 2011).

The founder of real aikido wanted to master defense techniques with such training, and see them applied in real life situations. Real aikido has found its place in the training processes within military, police and bodyguard special training. One of the most significant directions of real aikido's actions is work with the youngest generations, conducted through a special program titled „Gain Mastership Skills through Play“. The program is adapted to psychophysical abilities of children aged 5 to 12 (Vračarević, 2007).

In real aikido, or to be precise, in the aforementioned program „Gain Mastership Skills through Play“, games are an extremely important part of

the process of training. Above all, they develop basic motor and functional abilities crucial for real aikido, but they also fortify social relations between group members.

This paper aims at describing modified real aikido games, which could be used in the recreation of early school age children who do not train real aikido. These games affect not only specific motor and basic abilities, but also stimulate children's feistiness, self-confidence, resourcefulness, and enable them to get used to winning and losing. It should be underlined that these games make children cheerful, which is regularly noticed during training sessions. This paper presents certain games used in real aikido, i.e. their modified variations intended for the recreation of early school age children.

Kneeling aikidokasis a game which is always preformed on mats whose size depends on the number of participants and can be changed. One exerciser kneels in the center of a circle which can have different diameters. Other exercisers are distributed at the edge of the circle and their task is to move on their knees from their position toward the center of the circle without stopping. The one in the center of the circle disposes with very small space of around 1 m² to throw off balance and force one of the exercisers approaching him/her to touch the mat with a body part other than their knee, lower leg and foot. Only after that is done, the exerciser thrown off balance and the one in the center of the circle change places. It is important to underline that destabilization can be performed only by means of shoulder grab, whereby the person grabbed must not use their arms to defend themselves, but rather move on their knees away from the exerciser trying to throw them off balance. The winner is the person who was thrown off balance the least number of times during a previously set duration of the game. What this game primarily achieves is the improvement of balance, but it also teaches exercisers to move on their knees. Trunk muscles are particularly engaged, especially in the situation when an exerciser is trying to maintain balance while another exerciser is grabbing their shoulders in an attempt to throw them off balance.

Semicircular grabis a game whose rules make it resemble children's game "tag". One exerciser is tasked with chasing other exercisers, and the one who gets caught takes over the role of chaser and needs to tag one of the other exercisers. What is particularly characteristic for this game is not straight-line but semicircular movement, described in real aikido as "step, turn, small turn". Such movement from left posture is performed in the following way: the exerciser makes a semicircular move forward by 180 degrees with their right leg, setting it in front of their left leg, which represents the "step". Then, they make a semicircular move with their left leg by drawing the leg toward their back by 180 degrees, which corresponds to the part of the move called "turn". In the end, they rotate around their axis by 180 degrees, whereby the rotation axis is on the exerciser's heel, which corresponds to the part of the

move called “small turn”. From right posture, the moves are opposite. Both chaser and the exercisers who run away from him/her can only move like this. This game develops the ability to implement atypical semicircular movements of lower extremities, characteristic for real aikido. It also enhances agility as motor ability.

Pushing is a game in which two exercisers stand opposite each other in left posture at a distance sufficient to reach each other's extended arm elbow. Both exercisers keep their right hand on their right hip, while their left arm is in front of their trunk, slightly bent in elbow and turned to their partner with the edge of the palm (not fingers). During this game, exercisers must not move, but rather stay in place, trying to destabilize their partner with their left arm, without changing the angle in the elbow or grabbing the partner, but only pushing them with the left arm. The exercise is the same from right posture, whereby right arm is used to destabilize partner. This game strengthens shoulder and arm muscles, but also stimulates the development of balance.

Rolling Race is a game in which exercisers follow their own line on mats and try to reach the finish line as fast as possible, moving only by rolling forward. Exercisers are at a safe distance from each other, and roll forward toward the finish line after a sound signal is given. The one who reaches the finish line first wins the race. At first, the length of the section they need to cross should be shorter, and it can be increased later on. In order to reduce risk of injury to a minimum, this game must be preceded by well-rehearsed roll forward by all participants. And as several rolls forward in a row lead to temporary dizziness, it is essential for exercisers to remain seated for a while after reaching the finish line. This game strengthens arm and neck muscles.

CONCLUSION

Due to sedentary way of life, early school age children are increasingly exposed to modern day diseases. Therefore, it is crucial to come up with such recreational activities that will suit this age group in terms of need as well as the complexity of movement structures. When planning, programming and realizing programs of recreational activities for early school age children, it is essential to take into account the anatomical-physiological aspects of their development, as well as the psychological characteristics of that age. It has been noticed long ago that physical activity impacts individual's health. Even though one part of the population at this age trains some of the preferred sports regularly, a great deal of them is not physically active, so it is essential to come up with recreational activities that children have not been engaged in before in order to trigger their interest. A child socializes through play, learns to respect others and follow rules. Acceptance of rules also helps overcome egocentrism,

because rules apply to everyone, including the individual. It is also appealing to play games because children can experiment in a way that is not possible in everyday life. Play enables a child to become more constructive, active, liberated from fear of consequences, increasingly engaged and involved. Some of the potential recreational activities that can be implemented in work with early school age children include modified games taken over from real aikido. The description of modified real aikido games - Kneeling Aikidokas, Semicircular Grab, Pushing, and Rolling Raceenlarges the range of activities that can be realized with early school age children.

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