

Game as Educational Activity (With Special Reference to W. Saroyan's "Papa, You're Crazy")

*Seda Gabrielyan
Yerevan State University*

The ability to use language is a very important part of human cognition. This amazing human ability to communicate through language is both the result and the cause of our uniqueness as human beings. Language is a tool indeed; simple enough for a child to grasp effortlessly, yet so complex that we may never completely understand just how genetics and experience interact to produce this most integral human trait.

Language development is the process by which children come to understand and communicate language from early childhood. It is a process starting early in human life when a person begins to acquire language by learning it as spoken or by mimicry.

Language acquisition is enriched through various productive ways. For language acquisition to develop successfully, children must be in an environment that allows them to communicate socially in that language. The most productive way of enriching child's language is the verbal interactions with other children and adults. Parents have the most significant impact on the child's language development. In addition, language based interaction appears to increase a child's capacity to learn.

All the possible average stages of language development (phonological, semantic, grammatical and pragmatic) are covered through the most desirable activities, i.e. games. Teaching through games has always played an essential role in bringing up children, as it is through games that children can explore the world, develop new concepts, come up with new ideas and grow both physically and mentally, develop various creative skills and ability to face different situations and to seek a way out. It enables them to express themselves fully.

All the games roughly analyzed and classified are aimed at the development of:

- a. Perceptual (visual and auditory) interactions (recognition of sounds, images, colours);
- b. Creativity (fantasy, role-play, modeling up the patterns of social interaction);
- c. Motor and substance manipulation (construction, clay games).

Some of the recommendations that professionals give for encouraging language development in children are: talking to them as much as possible and giving them opportunities to respond; teaching the give-and-take of conversation; talking about on-going activities; asking questions; singing songs; commenting on sounds and forms and different phenomena in the environment; talking in a way to attract the child's attention; using correct pronunciation and playing with words and sounds; providing objects and experiences to talk about; careful verbal interaction with children; discipline or drills, etc.

Most of the recommendations mentioned above are vigorously illustrated in literary discourse. Thus, autobiographical in many aspects, W.Saroyan's novel "Papa, You're

Crazy” is primarily a piece of fiction with all its educational sides and should be perceived as such. This work can be considered the best legacy William Saroyan could have left, as it can help us understand better our ‘fathers’ and ourselves.

A father and a son - any father and any son - are very nearly the same man, one old and one young, but at the same time they are strangers, too. But with this particular father and son in the novel, it is very interesting to notice that when it comes to just doing any kind of activity together, they become just one. The way of choosing an activity to do together is really noteworthy. The father asks whether the son is done with his lessons, his daily duties, after making sure he is, they choose, listening to music, going out to walk on the beach and talk or the most important activity, playing games, or it can even be few at a time:

“What about your lessons? Everything in order for tomorrow?” asks the father.

“Sure”, responds the son.

“In that case more music? Or a game?”

“How about both?”

“O.K. What music would you like to hear?”

“The Dodger Song.”

(p. 18)

And they listen to the song and sing along with the song as well. And then comes the time for the game. As fostering a child’s language and communication skills at a young age is essential in preparing them for the life they will lead as an adult. The extent to which a child masters things like spelling, vocabulary, grammar and elocution, will be important factors in determining socialization, career paths, earning potential. In this the father, being a writer himself, is trying to foster his son’s rhyming abilities and thus he suggests a kind of a game with words that can greatly enlarge the child’s vocabulary as well, besides the fact that he will need to think and react quick with finding words that rhyme as well.

*“Now, then,” my father said, “the game. **Words.** I say one, you say one back that rhymes with it. And then you say one to me that I’ve got to match with a rhyming word before I can say one back to you. You want to start?”*

“O.K. Dodger.” (p. 19)

The first word that comes to the son’s head is the word Dodger, as before they were listening to music, to a song called The Dodger Song, so it shows that even the simple activity of listening to music can be so effective and still enrich the child’s word-stock.

“Lodger,” my father said. “Liar.”

“Fire,” I said, and then, “Ocean.”

“Motion. Lazy.”

“Crazy. Tide.”

“Ride. Time.”
 “Crime. School.”
 “Rule. Sleep.”
 “Deep. Dream.”
 “Good idea,” my father said. “Let’s go to bed, so we can get up before
 daybreak.”

One could easily notice that this Word play was not based only on simply rhyming the words with each other, but it was based on making associations as well; such as the father says ‘school’, and the son promptly associates it with ‘rule’, or ‘sleep’ and ‘deep’. It awakes the ability in the child to make associations which is undeniably a great asset to child’s mental and language development as well.

Rhyming also enables children to develop more refined listening skills, it also helps to develop sensory skills. Since the father is a writer and he expresses his wish for his son to become a writer as well, he tries to develop his son’s creative skills not only by rhyming simple words together but also creating sentences matching with those words. In this particular case they play a game with names. In this game the father uses a well-known technique that is recommended by professionals for encouraging language development in children, i.e. also using complete sentences and adding details to expand on what a child has just said. The game goes on as follows:

“Any ideas for a game while I clean up?”
 “Names.”
 “You start, then.”
 “Louise,” my father said.
 “**Louise has new knees and still climbs trees.**”
 “**Yew trees,**” my father said. “Yew is y-e-w. Look it up in the dictionary while I clean these dishes.” (pp. 42-43)

In fact this game not only contributes to practicing rhyming skills and building up creativity but it also helps to learn new words even by looking them up in the dictionary, which is also helpful as it teaches the kid how to use a dictionary in a correct way. So he gets the dictionary and turns it to Y and pretty soon finds the definition of Yew – “an evergreen tree ... valued for its wood.” And then they continue playing the game, but this time not only creating one line for the name, but with two matching lines:

“Alice,” I said.
 “**Alice lives in a palace,**” my father said, and stopped.
 “What else?”
 “Well, let me see. **Alice lives in a palace. Imaginary, alas.**”
 “Grace,” my father said.
 “**Grace washed her face.** Now the hard part. **Grace washed her face, and came in last.**”

“What?”
 “Hah, hah, hah. I mean in the race”
 “What race?”
 “The race she ran, that rhymes with face, like **Grace washed her face and ran a race.**”
 “What about the part that she comes in last?”
 “Well, **Grace washed her face and ran a race. She came in last and lives in a palace, too, alas.**”
 “How about, She came in last, but ran quite fast?”
 “I guess so.” (p. 44)

As professionals state, parents of children of this particular age should talk to their children, encourage conversation all the time by asking questions that require more than answering yes or no. It is very motivating to see how the father manages to do that perfectly in his own ways, the ways that certainly are not so widespread and usual. Once the son gathered shells and pieces of driftwood on the beach and when he got home and showed them to the father, this is what the latter told him:

“They’re great, everything you’ve found is great. Hold them under the faucet and look at each of them carefully. That’s the way you learn to write - by looking at everything carefully.”
 So while my father got breakfast I washed the rocks and shells and the piece of driftwood, and I looked at each of them very carefully, turning them around so I could see them from all sides, and I saw plenty. I saw stuff I never would have seen if I hadn’t looked carefully. I saw that every little thing in the world is a lot more than it seems to be. There was a pebble about half the size of a walnut that was black with a little red in it, a perfect line of white separating one part of the pebble from another, almost as if the little pebble was a whole world of some kind, the white line separating the land from the water. Looking at the pebble made me think about a lot of things and it made me feel glad about being able to see a thing so clearly, to see such a small thing so big, almost as big as anything anywhere.” (p. 23)

It is very vital for everyone, especially for a child to be able to notice and also think about a simple pebble the way he does, as he says – “the pebble made me think about a lot of things..”, it is also significant that the child is also able to describe what he sees apart from just seeing.

The father who is aware that his son has difficulty in spelling - which means not clearly visualizing the words, knows the best way of training him; he doesn’t keep the child concentrated on what he is going to learn; it is again done through a game they invented together, which is the best method in this case, both amusing and effective.

“After supper my father said, “Well now, it’s back to school tomorrow morning, so what are you doing poorly in?”

“Spelling. That’s my worst subject. One day I can spell a word right and the next day I can only spell it wrong.”

So we worked on spelling, but my father told me not to worry about it. He told me to learn how to use new words properly all the time, because that’s the important thing. We invented a little game to help me get the hand of words. Take a word like bat, for instance, and then run through the alphabet, and change the word as often as possible – from bat to cat, and then from cat to fat, and so on. Doing that teaches you a lot about words, and you get a few surprises now and then, too.” (p. 104)

It was already stated, in order to enhance language development in children, one of the essential things a parent should do, is to talk to them as much as possible and give them opportunity to respond and teach them the give-and-take of the conversation. And one of the ways is through creating such a comfort zone that would let the child be confident and ask questions about things that he doesn’t know the answers and the explanations to, but is willing to know. This is something special that we should particularly focus our attention on, as throughout the novel the son asks various questions to his father the answers to which he is curious to reveal; things that really interest him and things that will help him understand the world and the way it is.

The questions asked by the son to his father are various: “What is a church?”, “What is an art?”, “What is a novel?”, “What is a story?” The father’s explanations are philosophical but at the same time simple and understandable.

One day a long time ago I asked my father what he was writing, and he said a novel, so then I asked him to tell me what a novel is, and he said it’s a fire in the form of a long story written by a writer. I then asked him what the story was about, and he said a good story is always about everything. I told him I wanted to write a story some day, and he said, “You write one every day.”

*He said every man in the world **lives** a story every day. It’s a kind of letter to God, he said. They write it every day, but that doesn’t mean the people aren’t the ones who **really** write it.*

*I thought about the story I had lived that day. Well, it seemed to me that it was a story, and that I **had** been writing it all day. It began when I got up early in the morning... (and he recounts his all day). But the best thing in the story weren’t things like that at all. They were the things that were going on at the same time. I don’t mind writing like that, the way every man in the world does, but I want to write the way my father writes, too. Sit down at a table with a typewriter in front of me and write with **words**. I’m going to do it some day, too. I don’t know when, but I know I’m going to. I’ve got to wait awhile, I guess, because I don’t know how to type yet. I*

*can't spell most of the words I say and understand, either. I can't keep up with all the things I want to get into the story, either... But I'll **learn** how.*
(pp. 67-68)

Thus, the explanation the father gave had its positive effects on the son and not only one, but several at the same time; first the son got the answer to his question, second, that answer made him think that he already writes a novel and he does it every day like everyone else. He gained confidence in himself that he can learn to do it the way his father did it, as for a kid of that age it is always desirable to be able to learn to do what his parent, especially his father, does. Thirdly, it made him also recount his whole day activity, which means analyzing his day. But what is most important, being only ten years old he already realizes what he has to work on to be able to reach the goal he wants to, in this case it is to be able to learn to type like the father, to be able to spell the words correctly he knows. The greatest asset in this case is his will – "...but I'll learn how."

The process of fetching new information or training the brain can fully be expressed by asking questions and receiving not only yes or no questions and not only by encouraging the child to ask questions and seek new information. The father also knows how to find a way to get the son concentrated in just few minutes and the interaction does not consist only in asking questions. The father applies just a little warm-up task for the process of training the brain and promoting language skills at the same time more effective. This can be done, for example, in the morning before the child goes to school. The father himself asks simple questions and waits for response:

"Now," my father said, "before I take you to school, let's have a few basic, or kindergarten questions and answers. What's the beginning?"
"What do you mean, Pop?"
"Listen to the question, consider it, and then answer it any way you like. What's the beginning?" "I am."
"When is the beginning?"
"When I wake up in the morning?"
"What's the end?"
"When I don't wake up in the morning any more."
*"Very good," my father said. "What's **between** the beginning and the end?" "I am."*
"Who are you?"
"Damned if I know, Pop? You tell me."
"I can't do that."

The simple and hasty questions asked by the father one after another indeed made the kid think in a careful but quick way and promptly respond them. But the most important thing in this case is that the child does feel easy and can really be frank and answer the way he really wants to and his answers can be seen as a mirror to his mentality and way of thinking. He didn't answer the question "who are you?" and turned to his father for an

answer, who certainly did not do it instead of him. One can be sure that later on he will certainly look for the answer to that question as he already has his character formed being only ten years old.

While reading the novel we come across not only games connected with fostering certain mental or language skills, but also lots of activities organized for strengthening physical skills or both together; such as doing some kind of an outdoor activity, i.e. running, walking outside, breathing fresh sea air, riding or throwing football passes - any kind of activities, along with playing new games or thinking about how things are. It is really attracting to see that the son is taking the initiative sometimes and invents outdoor games:

“I invented a race and its rules. We run as fast as we can go, and the one who stands on the highest point of the rock first wins the race and is King of the Rock.” (p. 32)

So the game is ready, he invented a game, with rules, with a prize for the winner (“King of the Rock”), what else is needed? During the running race which the son invented, he does not even admit being tired and not being able to run anymore. Such as once when running together, he felt how tired he was and he kept trotting but he did not stop, but as he confessed later on, it was good that he didn’t stop, “because pretty soon I felt strong again”. Though the father strongly appreciates this in his son and even encourages him by saying how good it is to find out that one can do a lot more than he thinks he can; “We can always go farther than we think. And we can get along on a lot less than we think, too. And we need to be reminded of these things now and then.” But the father also knows that his son needs to learn about losing as well, as one cannot always win in his life; and as the father says, it is always better to learn how to lose in a game. The father is trying to make his son get used to this idea in a card game. It was really exciting for the son to win:

*I jumped up and laughed again, because it’s good to win, it’s the greatest thing in this life to win, even if it’s only a hand of rummy with your father, winning is the thing, it’s one of the great things. I love to play, but most of all I love to **hope** to win, and then to win.* (p. 126)

They continued to play, so the father took the cards again and shuffled and dealt:

“Do you get mad when you lose, Pop?”
*“Of course, not. To lose is the one thing a man must learn to do as quickly as possible. To lose with grace, I mean, and I don’t mean at cards. Now, you’ve won two games and you feel good, as you should, but you must know that it is possible to lose two games just as easily as you won two....If **that** happens, you have got to know it is in order for it to happen, and you have got to be ready for it. If you are willing to gamble, you must be prepared to lose...”* “Even so, Pop. I **hate** to lose. No matter what the

game is, I hate to lose. I feel cheated when I lose, and I feel good when I win. "Sure you do." (p. 126)

The parent's role in this game was to let his son know that if there is the concept of winning in this life, he must know that there exists also the opposite side of it - *losing*. The son was really worried and mad and he really hated the feeling, but the goal of the game was for him to get used to that feeling and better in a game, where it is easier to cope with certain feelings than in real life.

By tearing down the boundaries and defying convention, children are able to discover and learn more, thereby expanding their experiences via thought-provoking play, which can also be named as an imaginative play. Additionally, imaginative play can help with social skills, exposing a child to a variety of perspectives through simple activities. Those activities in this case include thinking, inventing new words, thinking of a name for the hero of his novel, creating names.

This idea of creating new words derives from a sentence that the father once told his son: "In the beginning was the word." But in fact the son thought about this phrase a lot, but couldn't figure out what it means. And when he asked his father the meaning of the phrase, the father answered;

*"It means everything **worth** anything, so find out about words, find out for yourself, and if possible invent a few."* (p. 54)

And here the son comes up with a new word, which he just invented without even realizing what he put in it:

"Clure." "What's that?"
 "I don't know, but I just invented it."
 "Let's just see if we can figure it out. Clure. Clear and sure?"
 "Clear and sure is O.K., but **clure** is the word I invented."
 "So it is. Sure and clear clure. Is that the value you had in mind?"
 "I had **no** value in mind."
 "You **must** have. You may **think** you had no value in mind and have invented it, too."

We come across another game which is associated with language, memory, logic and creativity. The concept of this game is also making new words, but this time by shifting the letters of the taken word, anagram, the son invents a name of the hero in his novel, as he is going to write a novel very soon, just as his father told him:

*"When we got home my father went to work getting supper, and I went to work at his desk inventing words and names. I sat down and took the first word that came into my head to see what I could do with it, the word **ocean**, but the only name I could get out of it was Caneo, and then the*

word canoe, and the name Ancoe, and then Ocane. But I couldn't get any word or name that I liked very much, so while my father talked and sang in the kitchen, just beyond the counter between the kitchen and the living room, I tried to invent a real good name. I heard my father once that the best inventor of names was Charles Dickens, so I tried to think of some of the names Charles Dickens invented, but all I could think of was Scrooge. I wrote Scrooge on a piece of paper, to see if I could invent a good name out of the letters in the name. Gorosec, Rosogec, and Secogor, but nothing I wanted, so I started all over again. (p. 122)

In this type of a game a very important factor is the son's individual play. Perhaps, just as important as fostering cooperation and collaborative skills, teaching a child the importance of independent play is beneficial in a variety of ways. In addition to aiding in concentration and memory skills, independent play teaches children the importance of their role as an individual, fostering self-esteem and confidence. It's also proved that self-sufficient children often grow to be self-starters in their adult life.

The independent play also fosters child's imagination and the ability to bring forward something new on his own. Particularly in this novel the expression of that idea is clearly indicated in the last chapter where the son appears with a new kind of a 'thinking game', which may be called a "Circle". This game suggested by the son is the result of his lively imagination. In his independent and new game he suggests that his father should switch with their roles:

"Let's pretend you're me and I'm you. You're ten years old and I'm forty-five." It's more likely that the son is very eager to see how it feels to be a grown-up; "I thought about being forty-five for a minute, and then all of a sudden I was forty-five, and, boy, I did feel old. But at the same time I felt real good, too. I thought about my father being me and then all of a sudden he was me. The first thing that came to my head, which was forty-five years old, now, was to take a piece of driftwood and draw a very big circle in the sand." "A circle, and I'm right at the center of it, and you're on the outside of it. But that's just the beginning. You see, this circle is where a man can really think. Everybody wants to get into it, because everybody wants to be able to think." (p. 160)

Thus, the rules of the game are the following; the one who is out of the "thinking circle" needs to guess what is the one, inside the circle thinking, and when doing it right, he will get the chance to enter the circle where he can *really* think.

"What are you thinking?" my father said.
"I am thinking how lucky I am to be in the circle at last. Now, you want to get in here, too, but the only way you can do it is to tell me what I'm thinking." (p. 161)

The thinking process is very important for the son, that is why he is coming up with a game like this. He wants to feel like a grown-up, like his father and in this way understand him. So in a game like this the father needs to act like his ten-year-old son, while the son needs to be able to play his dad's role and think the way he does.

“Wrong. I was thinking that, but now I’m thinking something else.”
“You’re thinking how unlucky you are to be in the circle, then.”
“Wrong.”
“You’re thinking I’ll never guess what you’re thinking.” “Wrong.”
“You’re thinking about the play,” my father said.
“Right. How did you guess?”
“I don’t know. I guess I guessed because I was thinking about it, too.
Do I get to come into the circle?” “You sure do.”
My father stepped into the circle and I stepped out. It was my turn
now to guess what he was thinking.
“You’re thinking about money.”
“Right,” my father said.
He stepped out and I stepped in and again he tried to guess what I
was thinking. He guessed wrong more than ten times and then I started to
laugh and he said,
“O.K. I give up. What are you thinking?”
“I’m thinking what a sad thing it must be not to be alive.”
“Now, why couldn’t I guess that that was what you were thinking?”
“Because you’re only ten years old,” I said, “and not as smart as me,
Pop.” (p. 162)

“Papa, You’re Crazy” is a story of the relationship between a caring forty-five-year-old father and a loving ten-year-old son, between any father and his son, a continuation of generations. Saroyan succeeded in creating the atmosphere of warmth and understanding between the father and the son, the key factor being the common language: language of play/game. The method of teaching through games has left its seed in fiction as well, which the readers can now plant themselves and develop their own “tree” of teaching methods through game, using William Saroyan’s novel “Papa, You’re Crazy” as a guide book.

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**Խաղը որպես դաստիարակության միջոց
(Վ. Սարոյանի «Հայրիկ, դու խենթ ես» վիպակի նյութի վրա)**

Հոդվածի նպատակն է ներկայացնել խաղի դերը երեխայի հոգեբանական կերպարի կերտման, նրա՝ որպես սոցիալական էակի կայացման գործում:

Ուսումնասիրության նյութը գեղարվեստական գրականությունն է, մասնավորապես Վ. Սարոյանի «Հայրիկ, դու խենթ ես» վիպակը, որտեղ հոր և որդու հարաբերությունները զարգանում են բազմաբնույթ խաղերի միջոցով, որոնք էլ իրենց հերթին նպաստում են երեխայի թե՛ լեզվական ունակությունների, թե՛ կյանքի հմտությունների ձևավորմանը:

Քննարկվող վիպակը մի յուրօրինակ ուղեցույց է ծնողների համար՝ երեխայի դաստիարակության հարցում: