

# PLAYFULNESS IN KINDERGARTENS IN LITHUANIA AND GREECE

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**Annotation.** Playfulness is an integral part of a pedagogy of play and includes elements such as humour, teasing, mimicry, riddles and rhymes, singing and chanting, shared activity in different contexts and with different resources (human and material), laughter, clowning, fooling around, inventing rules and rituals to begin, maintain and end play, wit, spontaneity, telling and laughing at jokes. Development of pre-school education in Lithuania and Greece has similarities and differences. The research was carried out in February/September, 2014 in pre-school education institutions of Lithuania and Greece. The chosen method of a research is a written survey. 186 teachers in Lithuania and 197 teachers in Greece filled in a questionnaire. When analyzing the data regarding the playful atmosphere teachers attempted to foster in kindergarten, the differences between the countries were statistically highly significant in all cases but one.

## Topicality of the theme and the problem

According to E. Wood (2010), playfulness includes elements such as “humour, teasing, mimicry, riddles and rhymes, singing and chanting, shared activity in different contexts and with different resources (human and material), sufficient choice [for children], freedom and control, laughter, clowning, fooling around, inventing rules and rituals to begin, maintain and end play, wit, spontaneity, telling and laughing at jokes”. To understand and support playful learning it is essential that teachers observe children especially when they play (Broadhead, Wood, Howard, 2010).

Playfulness is an integral part of a pedagogy of play which is discussed and recommended more and more since it facilitates children’s learning (Hakkarainen, 2009; Jones, Reynolds, 1992; Samuelsson, Asplund Carlsson, 2008; Samuelsson, Johansson, 2006; Wood, 2009) and respects their rights to play and having a say in their lives (United Nations 1989, articles 31 & 12 respectively). For the above reasons playfulness in kindergartens was selected to be researched.

Aim – to analyze playfulness in kindergartens in Lithuania and Greece.

### Objectives:

1. Theoretically ground the concept of playfulness and its meaning in the process of education/learning; the development of pre-school education in Lithuania and Greece.
2. To carry out the research of playfulness in kindergartens in Lithuania and Greece.
3. To present the results of a research.

**Methods:** analysis of scientific literature; written survey.

The article comprises of three parts. Theoretical aspects of a research are presented in the first part, methodology and organization of a research are presented in the second part and the third part of the article analyzes the results based on scientific literature.

## 1. Theoretical aspects of the research

According to E. Wood (2010), playfulness includes elements such as “humour, teasing, mimicry, riddles and rhymes, singing and chanting, shared activity in different contexts and with different resources (human and material), sufficient choice [for children], freedom and control, laughter, clowning, fooling around, inventing rules and rituals to begin, maintain and end play, wit, spontaneity, telling and laughing at jokes”. To understand and support playful learning it is essential that teachers observe children especially when they play (Broadhead, Wood, Howard, 2010).

Greece and Lithuania were selected for study because of their basic similarities and their basic differences which make the comparison more fruitful. Early childhood education initially was affected by F. Froebel in both countries (Haritos, 1996, Sadauskienė, Kochanskienė, 2004) but especially later different political systems (capitalism and socialism) until 1990 in both countries built different kindergarten traditions. Nowadays even though the kindergartens share the project approach, in Lithuania kindergartens Complex – creative, “Step by step”, M. Montessori, R. Steiner (Waldorf) and Reggio Emilia methods are applied (Sadauskienė, Kochanskienė, 2013) but not in Greece (there are some in the private sector).

In all kindergartens of the USSR, as well as in Lithuania, the children were brought up according to one general pre-school education program, despite the differences of nationality and traditions. In kindergartens dominated the lesson approach, play was treated just like a child's possibility to spend his/her leisure time in between trainings and play was devalued.

In 1990 after Lithuania regained its independence it returned to its traditional values. All the education system was reviewed, new state pre-school education programs were developed, various educational methods were applied and learning became an integral part of nation's culture. Play became a key method / approach in children's education / learning. In the years between 1992 - 2007, the pre-school education institutions of Lithuania optionally operated in accordance with the two state programs. But since September 2007, the kindergartens have started to work according to the developed programs in their educational institutions which reflect the individuality and the specifics of each institution. The present-day pre-school programs focus on the specific value of play for child's development and the education (The Concept of Pre-school Education of Lithuania, 1998).

In Greece, the kindergarten education situation was similar to the Lithuanian to a large extent until 1962. Although the main first influences on kindergartens were F. Froebel and M. Montessori (Haritos, 1996), there was no provision for the curriculum of the state run kindergartens until 1962, which made the Greek kindergarten have many features of a primary school class. Play was organized by the teacher and always aimed strictly to a specific teaching goal and free play was allowed only during the breaks between lessons (Royal Decree 30/1986). Since 1962 the reforms introduced managed to reduce some of the teacher-centredness of the kindergarten. However, time for children's free play was increased by reducing the time for the teacher organized activities very recently, in the 1980s. During that decade the classroom organization also changed and instead of rows of desks, play / learning areas and circle time were introduced as well as furniture and materials suited to children's physical development. Such changes made it possible for teachers and children to develop an atmosphere of playfulness, which was not achievable before.

## 2. Methodology and organization of the research

The research was carried out in February/September, 2014 in pre-school education institutions of Lithuania and Greece. One hundred and eighty-six teachers in Lithuania and one hundred and ninety-seven teachers in Greece filled in a questionnaire, which included among other elements a question about playfulness in kindergarten, which is discussed in this paper. All choices teachers were given in the questionnaire were in accordance with playfulness as discussed in the topicality of this paper.

A set of Likert scale questions were used to assess the playfulness, with 1 meaning "Never" and 5 meaning "Always". Two independent samples t-tests (with Levene's test for the equality of variances) were used to test if the mean values of several questions differ significantly between Lithuania and Greece. All the differences on the mean values, except for the question element "joking", allowance were statistically significant at  $\alpha=5\%$ .

## 3. Results of the research

When analyzing the data regarding the playful atmosphere teachers attempted to foster in kindergarten, the differences between the countries were statistically highly significant in all cases but one.

During the activities / play teachers in Greece more than usually / almost always (mean 4,12) allowed scope for laughing.

They usually (value 4) attempted to establish and allow humour (3,95 versus 3,49 in Lithuania), songs (3,83 versus 3,28 in Lithuania), spontaneity (3,83 versus 3,26 in Lithuania), mimicry (3,73 versus 2,23 in Lithuania), teasing (3,59 versus 1,08 in Lithuania) and riddles and rhymes (3,58 versus 3,34 in Lithuania) more than teachers in Lithuania.

They also often (value 3) attempted to allow and encourage wit (3,44 versus 3,22 in Lithuania), allow children and themselves to invent new rules and routines to begin, maintain and end activity (3,36 versus 3 in Lithuania) and almost often fooling around (2,67 versus 1,69 in Lithuania) more than teachers in Lithuania.

On the contrary, Lithuanian teachers always (value 5) allowed other adults in the class (4,83 versus 2,32 in Greece) compared to rarely in Greece.

Lithuanian teachers usually (value 4) did things with excitement and without controlling or checking things and children all the time (4,08 versus 3,53 in Greece); observed and documented children's play (3,94 versus 3,76 in Greece).

Lithuanian teachers allowed activities but they also prepared activities in all play / learning areas indoors and outdoors (3,92 versus 3,39 in Greece).

They also allowed children to have not timed, self-chosen activities (3,88 versus 2,81 in Greece) more than Greek teachers.

Teachers in both countries usually (value 4) allowed joking (3,73 in Lithuania versus 3,87 in Greece).

Teachers in Greece almost always attempted to establish laughter whereas in Lithuania they allowed other adults into their classrooms. Teachers in Lithuania seemed to pay more attention and appreciate more their own behavior and their role as adults in ensuring the establishment of playfulness and a playful atmosphere whereas Greek teachers paid more attention to being models of playfulness themselves.

*Table 2.1. Kindergarten teachers' replies to the question "How often do you try to establish any of the following in your class and for your class?"*

<b>How often do you try to establish any of the following in your class and for your class?</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Laughing	Lithuania	186	3,20	,714
	Greece	197	4,12	,770
Humour	Lithuania	186	3,49	,827
	Greece	198	3,95	,776
Singing	Lithuania	186	3,28	,578
	Greece	198	3,83	,772
Spontaneity	Lithuania	184	3,26	,722
	Greece	198	3,83	,752
Mimicry	Lithuania	186	2,63	,726
	Greece	198	3,73	,802
Teasing	Lithuania	186	1,08	,273
	Greece	198	3,59	,873
Riddles and rhymes	Lithuania	186	3,34	,844
	Greece	198	3,58	,813
Wit	Lithuania	186	3,22	,695
	Greece	197	3,44	,882
Invent new rules and routines to begin, maintain and end play	Lithuania	186	3,00	,624
	Greece	196	3,36	,813
Fooling around	Lithuania	186	1,69	,755
	Greece	197	2,67	1,087
Other adults in class	Lithuania	186	4,83	,378
	Greece	198	2,32	,840
Doing things with excitement and without controlling them	Lithuania	186	4,08	,498
	Greece	198	3,53	,894
Observe children's play to document achievements	Lithuania	186	3,94	,683
	Greece	198	3,76	,812
Activities in all areas indoors and outdoors	Lithuania	186	3,92	1,103
	Greece	197	3,39	,933
Self-chosen, not timed activities for children	Lithuania	186	3,88	,484
	Greece	198	2,81	,863
Joking	Lithuania	186	3,73	,654
	Greece	198	3,87	,799

## Conclusions

1. Playfulness is an integral part of a pedagogy of play and includes elements such as humour, teasing, mimicry, riddles and rhymes, singing and chanting, shared activity in different contexts and with different resources (human and material), laughter, clowning, fooling around, inventing rules and rituals to begin, maintain and end play, wit, spontaneity, telling and laughing at jokes. Development of pre-school education in Lithuania and Greece has similarities and differences.
2. The research was carried out in February/September, 2014 in pre-school education institutions of Lithuania and Greece. The chosen method of a research is written survey. 186 teachers in Lithuania and 197 teachers in Greece filled in a questionnaire.
3. Results of a research revealed:
  - during the activities / play teachers in both countries allowed and encouraged wit and joking.
  - during the activities / play teachers in Greece more than usually / almost always allowed scope for laughing, humour, songs, spontaneity, mimicry, teasing, fooling around more than teachers in Lithuania.
  - Lithuanian teachers always allowed other adults in the class compared to rarely in Greece.
  - Teachers in Lithuania seemed to pay more attention and appreciate more their own behavior and their role as adults in ensuring the establishment of playfulness and a playful atmosphere whereas Greek teachers paid more attention to being models of playfulness themselves.

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## **ŽAISMINGUMO RAIŠKA LIETUVOS IR GRAIKIJOS IKIMOKYKLINIO UGDYMO ĮSTAIGOSE**

### **Santrauka**

Viena esminių dabarties ikimokyklinės pedagogikos tendencijų – skatinti ir palaikyti vaiko žaidimą, kurio pagrindinis komponentas yra žaismingumas. Daugelio mokslininkų teigimu žaismingumas vaiko veikloje atsiskleidžia per spontaniškumą, juokavimus, laisvus judesius veikiant, mimikas, gestus, ir pan. Straipsnyje analizuojama kaip žaismingumą vaikų veiklose supranta ir vertina ikimokyklinio ugdymo randa panašių ir skirtingų šalių (Lietuvos ir Graikijos) ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogai. 2014 metų vasario – rugsėjo mėnesiais atlikto tyrimo metu dalyvavusių per 380 pedagogų iš Lietuvos ir Graikijos ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigų atsakymai parodė ryškius skirtumus vertinamuoju aspektu. Vienas pagrindinių skirtumų – Lietuvos pedagogai vaikų žaismingumą