

The benefits of educational games in developing speech and vocabulary in early ages

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Abstract

Since ancient times, the game has been the basic and most beloved activity for preschoolers, as it allows them to express their ideas, thoughts, feelings, desires, and joy. In kindergarten, the child's knowledge sphere expands, supporting the learning process by branching out various types of activities and intertwining play with learning, thus combining the useful with the enjoyable. Through the method of educational games, vocabulary enrichment is achieved, focusing on acquiring new words and consolidating and activating them. Through the entire educational process in kindergarten and through specific vocabulary development activities, children's speech is perfected phonetically, the sphere of active and passive vocabulary expands, and grammatically correct forms are consolidated. Vocabulary enrichment should be a constant objective in preparing children for continuous learning. The child will not be able to understand the content unit transmitted if they do not know the meanings of the words. The importance of the games lies in the fact that it directly involves the preschooler in their own development, in all aspects.

Keywords: *play, child, phenomenon, vocabulary, language*

At preschool age, the game is the fundamental activity, providing the optimal framework in which children learn and develop. Game is the child's work, thus drawing attention to the effort the child puts into play (M. Montessori, 1966).

The game is a means through which the child acts and expresses inner feelings and ideas. Thus, by resolving certain traumatic or pleasant experiences, the child gains new understandings of the surrounding world through play. „Through game, the child sets in motion all his capacity to master and influence reality” (Piaget, 1973: 14).

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The game is an „activity through which the child develops, but this is dependent on free choice, intrinsic motivation, orientation towards the process, and active participation” (Vrășmaș, 1999: 89).

Specialized literature fully confirms the formative values of game and recommends it in various forms as a common, representative educational medium and method. In an effort to understand the nature of the game as the main activity of humans, certain ideologists have recognized fundamental characteristics of play, peculiarities that support the typicality of these activities and distinguish play from non-play activities.

Johan Huizinga, through a comprehensive description of important characteristics of game, lists 26 qualities, including: the power to captivate the individual, freedom, gratuitousness, and the tension established by uncertainty. The game can also be defined as: „free action, felt as fictitious, situated outside of current life, capable no less of totally absorbing the player, devoid of any material interest and utility; expressly limited in time and space; unfolding in an orderly manner, according to pre-established rules and giving rise, in actual life, to group relationships surrounded by mystery or accentuating, through disguise, a certain oddity in relation to the ordinary world” (Marcus, 2011: 385).

Leaving from Johan Huizinga's interpretation of the game, Solomon Marcus also adds some characteristics of game such as „the pleasant nature, the unpredictable aspect, the problematic aspect, and the strategic specificity,” highlighting the possibility of the game to activate a diverse series of valuable categories of thinking: logic, inductive, strategic, combinatorial.

Cristian Cheșuț believes that the characteristics of the game come from the inherent traits of the ludic context elements: the name of the game, the scenario, the multitude of participants, the established indications, the space for play, its duration and purpose, and characterizes the ludic state as necessary for each situation of play, an experience that can be „provoked by a momentary reverie, a happy inspiration, a good mood generating creativity...” (2005: 6). The adult or educator can accentuate, maintain, and direct the qualities of the game, its role in forming skills and habits, by creating favorable conditions, by possessing various materials for children.

Vygotsky, Makarenko, Leontiev, and many others consider the game to be a valuable factor in intellectual and moral education, shaping individuality, and preparing for society.

In W. Wundt's conception, the game represents the fruit of labor: „There is no game that does not have its prototype in one of the forms of true labor, which always precedes it in time as well as in essence. Play, by



its nature, removes the useful purpose of work, proposing as its goal the pleasant result that accompanies work.”

Didactic game represents „the fundamental type of activity, the form of activity that supports the highest degree of mental development, through psychomotor, sensory, intellectual, and affective training” (Ezechil, Păiși-Lăzărescu, 2015: 121).

Through didactic game, vocabulary is activated, enriched, and nuanced. For example, in order to enrich children's vocabulary with proper nouns, such as their names, those of siblings, parents, names of important localities in the country, or well-known geographical features known to children, various didactic games can be organized and carried out. „Language development is linked to the evolution of the child's thinking, and vice versa, thinking can rise to a higher level of generalization and abstraction only by relying on a corresponding development of language.” (Graur, 1972: 22).

Most didactic games are intended to enrich and nuance children's vocabulary with common nouns that denote: objects and phenomena directly perceived in the surrounding nature and in social life, names of objects necessary in life, rooms in a house, parts of the body, personal hygiene items, clothing, footwear, food, means of transportation, seasons and their specific phenomena, domestic and wild animals.

In assimilating the grammatical structure of the language, a central role is played by the activities carried out by children in kindergarten under the guidance of the educator. The accumulation of verbal experience gradually leads to the formation of empirical linguistic generalizations, to the acquisition of a „sense of language” (Lovinescu, 1979: 79). The development of the vocabulary of preschool-age children occurs gradually, simultaneously with learning the meanings of words and their correct use in speech. Also, „the development of vocabulary represents a general objective of the entire instructional-educational activity carried out in kindergarten.” (Taiban, 1976: 69).

Didactic games represent „the favorite activity of preschoolers, an apparently gratuitous activity without a material goal, whose motivation is intrinsic” (Voiculescu, 2003: 83), contributing to enriching the vocabulary of preschool children with various adjectives: qualities regarding color (red, yellow, green, blue), dimensional relationships (large, small), taste qualities (sweet, sour), olfactory, thermal. The didactic games are especially efficient when aiming at enriching vocabulary with cardinal and ordinal numbers, distributive numerals, words denoting actions (verbs). The didactic games that contribute to enriching children's vocabulary with words, adverbs referring to the place where the action



takes place, the time when it occurs, and the manner in which it is carried out should not be neglected.

Didactic games contribute to enriching the lexicon, in terms of acquiring new words, consolidating, and activating them. Various games can be organized that operate with different antonyms, homonyms, synonyms. Particularly effective are didactic games aimed at enriching vocabulary with cardinal and ordinal numerals, distributive numerals, words denoting actions (verbs).

Do not neglect didactic games that contribute to enriching children's vocabulary with adverbs referring to the place where the action takes place, the time when it occurs, and the manner in which they are carried out.

Didactic games contribute both to enriching vocabulary, activating and practicing it, and to mastering clear, coherent, grammatically correct expression.

Didactic games represent „a form of activity accessible to the child, through which a part of the instructive-educational tasks of mandatory activities, as well as those chosen, are carried out in a fun, engaging, motivating atmosphere” (Glava, Glava, 2002: 211). The specificity of these games lies in the harmonious combination of instructional elements with those of play, entertainment. Didactic games take place in common activities, with the entire group, but can also be carried out in optional activities. They are part of games with rules and influence the structuring of the intellectual and moral profile of the preschooler, preparing them for school.

The role and importance of didactic games consist in the fact that they facilitate the process of assimilation, fixation, and consolidation of knowledge, and due to their formative nature, they influence the development of the preschooler's personality (Cristea, S., 2000, p. 241). Didactic games are an important means of intellectual education, which values and trains the child's creative abilities: „The game is work, it is good, it is the ideal of life. The game is the only atmosphere in its psychological consciousness, it can breathe and, consequently, can act, because it engages latent functions” (Claparède, 1975: 11).

Due to their content and way of conduct, „didactic games are efficient means of activating the entire group of children, develop team spirit, mutual assistance, and form and develop some elementary practical and organized work skills” (Șchiopu, 1967: 128). As a result, the game helps the child to understand reality more easily and to enrich attitudes and feelings that arise when in contact with reality.

The effectiveness of didactic games depends on how well the educator ensures a correspondence between the theme of the game and



the existing didactic material, as well as how well they provide guidance to the children through questions, answers, instructions, explanations, and feedback. The distinction between didactic games and other types of games is also made by their structure. Through freedom of thought and action, confidence in one's abilities, initiative, and competition, didactic games contribute to the development of courage, perseverance, correctness, and discipline through adherence to the rules of the game, as well as fostering cooperation, communal living, and civilized behavior (Sima, Petruțiu, 1998: 73). In specialized literature, didactic games are designated as the most effective means of instruction and education, used to form or consolidate certain skills, habits, and knowledge (Bădica, Marinescu, Duțu, 1979: 4). Starting from the small group, to activate, to enrich, and to nuance the vocabulary of preschoolers, the educator plans didactic games aimed at naming objects, parts of the human body, toys in the classroom, furniture etc. The development of children's active vocabulary with nouns is achieved through didactic games such as: Where did the wheel stop?, Who received the ball?, What shall we play with?, Guess who it is, What shall we wear?, Find the toy!, Guess what we've hidden etc.

For the activation, enrichment, and nuancing of children's vocabulary with nouns, in the small group, those that denote objects and phenomena directly experienced by the child at home and in kindergarten are recommended. In the middle group, nouns denoting environmental phenomena are indicated, while in the large group, nouns with a higher degree of generalization and abstraction are recommended. For example, in the large group, didactic games can be organized such as: Guess what changed? (children are asked to name geometric shapes); What do we need? (naming professions, tools, products); When does it happen? (naming seasons and their characteristics, natural phenomena, vegetables, fruits, plant and animal life during those periods).

As a general aspect, it can be affirmed that, in the small group, initially, didactic games are used as exercises for knowledge and activation of speech. In the small group, didactic games have the highest weight in enriching and activating vocabulary, being closely linked to the expansion of the cognitive sphere. Through didactic games, the educator can correct children's speech, stimulate them to pronounce all the sounds of the mother tongue, activate, enrich, and nuance their vocabulary, familiarizing them with grammatically correct speech. Thus, at the end of the year, children should be able to express their thoughts in simple words, correctly name different objects, and make small descriptions.

Through the entire instructional-educational process in kindergarten and through specific vocabulary development activities,



children's speech is perfected phonetically, the scope of active and passive vocabulary is expanded, and correct grammatical forms are consolidated. Enriching vocabulary should be a constant objective in preparing children for continuous learning. The child will not be able to understand the content transmitted if they do not know the meanings of the words.

Consequently, educational effectiveness depends on how well the correspondence is ensured between the theme, the subject of the action, and the level of psychological development, age and internal structure of the personality. As a result, activities carried out in kindergarten with children aged 3-5 years are designed and organized with a focus on socialization, whereas for the 5-6 year age group, the focus is on preparation for school, with both categories of activities aimed at preparing the child for future social life.

The game, the process of learning and development are interdependent, as game supports learning and development, learning occurs within the context of play, and development is an important support for play. Through play activities, preschoolers are provided with the opportunity to practice the acquisitions gained in formal, non-formal, and informal learning contexts (Albulescu, Catalano, 2019: 284).

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