

Perspectives of using the didactic game for teaching Romanian language and literature

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Abstract:

This paper presents the possibilities of implementing the game in the teaching-learning process. In this way, the game acquires a new dimension, that of didactic game. The presented theoretical aspects support the use of the game in this process. Didactic games offer advantages to both the teacher and the students. The information transmitted through this method is easily assimilated by students who can develop behaviours, attitudes or beliefs. However, all this can be done under the careful coordination of the teacher, in order to avoid possible deviations leading to failure.

Keywords: *game, playing activity, didactic game, functions, teaching method.*

Introduction

Game is the first and fundamental source of development of the human personality. The playing activity is a complex set of acts, operations and actions centred on a main theme and that is flowing sequentially; it is a state of complete captivation and abandonment of external pressures, of real joy and pleasure, of engagement in an imaginary world of our own energies and tensions. For the child, playing is a form of activity with multiple psychological and pedagogical implications that contribute to his/her information and formation as a human being; the game triggers the entire being of the child, activating his/her thinking, revealing his/her will, inspiring his/her fantasy and sharpening his/her intelligence.

Literature provides an important place for game playing, highlighting its sources, its component elements, but also the purpose of these playing activities. Research on this activity dates back to the earliest times, but it has become consistent since the late nineteenth century.

In this respect, this paper aims at providing the game the image of human activity, but especially its usefulness as teaching-learning method, through didactic game variants with applicability to the Romanian language and literature subject. The paper is structured in three chapters, starting from the presentation of the general framework of the game as a human-ludic activity, followed by the theory of the didactic game, and finally the chapter highlighting the perspectives of using the

didactic game within specialized subjects. We mention that this last chapter refers to the Romanian language and literature classes in middle schools.

The study of the perspectives of the didactic game is particularly important, because the trend of modernity of the education is centred on the student and his/her preparation for life. The implementation of the game in the teaching-learning process enables the student to experience and accumulate concrete experiences, helping him/her to overcome future obstacles. Therefore, the main goal of the paper is to provide practical solutions for using this teaching method.

1. The game – human ludic activity

1.1 What is the game?

The playing activity is found in all people, being a symbolic, imitative activity that helps us relive events or situations in real life, having the possibility to freely change them. The whole activity is in fact a conglomerate of actions, states and soul experiences that lead to the production of satisfaction, necessary for each individual.

The concept of "game playing" as human activity has been studied over the years by researchers in psychology and pedagogy such as the German psychologist and philosopher Karl Groos, the Swiss specialist in child psychology Édouard Claparède, the Swiss psychologist and biologist Jean Piaget as well as by the Russian psychologist Daniil Borisswitsch Elkonin, who developed various theories that seek to define the concept of "game playing".

For Karl Groos, game playing is a useful exercise for body development, which aims at preparing adult life for growing up. In support of this biologising position towards game playing, Groos argues: "The playing child develops his/her perceptions, intelligence, tendency to experience, his/her social instincts"(Piaget, 1972, p. 138). Édouard Claparède's theory of game playing continues the Groos's theory of preparatory exercise, and states that the game is determined, on the one hand, by the needs of the child and, on the other hand, by the level of his/her organic development. Thus the game becomes an expansion factor of his/her becoming personality.

For Jean Piaget, the game is a method by which the activities of the surrounding reality are assimilated at the level of every person. This assimilation is accomplished on two levels: biologically, assimilation is functional and contributes to the effective development of organs and behaviours, and psychologically, assimilation incorporates the reality into his/her own activity. The psychologist Piaget also captures the importance of the game in the educational space as follows: "That is why all active methods for the children's education require that they be provided with appropriate material for them to succeed in assimilating intellectual realities that, without it, remain outside the child's intelligence."(p. 139).

Daniil Borisswitsch Elkonin sees the game as a broad range of human actions through which man re-creates human activity, detaching himself/herself from the social essence. Through this concept

of the game playing, Elkonin builds a bridge between game and art. For the researcher, art aims precisely at interpreting human norms and activities by the means specific to art. Thus, in the modern adult society, various forms of game are replaced by various forms of art or sport.

By studying the concept of game playing, in the context of child education, the French psychologist Jean Chateau captures the importance of game playing in every man's life. Chateau sees in the game a free physical activity or mental activity, due to the pleasure it provokes: "We cannot imagine childhood without its laughter and games [...] Because the soul and the intelligence become great through game playing. It is precisely this connotation that this silence-which parents wrongly enjoy at times - often announces serious mental deficiencies in the child. A child who does not know how to play, a "little old man," is an adult who will not know how to think."(Chateau, 1970, pp. 8-9).

1.2 Classifications of the game

The criteria for classifying games are diverse, varied and involve a lot of subjectivism not working with logical criteria. Thus, games can be divided by form, by content, by main teaching task, by their degree of evolution, etc.

Literature provides various classifications of the game, but for this paper we consider Claparède's opinion, which makes this scheme of game types, taking into account the general processes of human life, such as: perception, motion, idea, but also the special functions of the game: fight, hunt, love, sociability or imitation.

Games with general functions: a) *Sensory games* often encountered in small children who like to amuse themselves by producing sounds, examining colours or touching objects; b) *Motion games* that help to develop skill, strength, or even speech by playing hard-to-pronounce phrases; c) *Psychic games* that also have two components: *intellectual games*, based on comparison, recognition, association or reasoning, and *emotional games* aimed at producing emotions.

Games with special functions a) *fighting games* that can be physical or spiritual, through contests in discussions, debates; b) *hunting games* that can be preceded by tracking games (example: hide-and-seek) and real hunting game such as picking fruits, flowers or running butterflies; c) *social games* such as organized camps or collective sports; d) *family games* based on the maternal or family instincts; e) *imitation games* that involve an explicit gesture by creating characters.

Analysing these game categories, we see that Claparède's perspective on the game is based on the formative function of the game. In this sense, each game follows either a psychological or a physiological function.

By playing, the child shows imitative power that varies depending on the individual's age and the momentary needs he/she feels. The child chooses the game that meets his /her needs and the main catalyst for the game is his/her own interest.

That is why the game can link the educational interest with the child's needs, so that the child evolves without being constrained by various methods. The following chapter presents the game as an element of the educational process, an element that makes the educational interest become the interest of the child.

2. The game – teaching method

2.1 Definition of the concept of game playing as teaching method

The explanation of the concept of "didactic game" may have several methods. Taking into account the definitions found in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language for the two words that make up this "didactic" and "game" title, we could say that the didactic game is that human, fun activity, especially encountered in children, which is meant to train.

Sorin Cristea (1998) defines the didactic game as follows: "Didactic game is a method of education in which the simulated didactic activity prevails. This action exploits at the training level the recreational adaptive aims of the human activity in general at certain moments of its ontogenetic evolution"(255).

Even in ancient times, this concept has also been researched under its pedagogical aspect. The idea of using the game for educational purposes is found in Plato, Rabelais up to the modern age at Montessori or Decroly. However, the 20th century is the one in which the didactic game acquires the consistency of a real educational and didactic instrument. Thus, the game overcomes its fun activity status, becoming a serious action by which didactic goals can be achieved "when the logic is integrated in the educational-educational system"(Cerghit, 2006, p. 263; Eși, 2010)

There have been theories that game playing and education are mutually exclusive. Indeed, the abundant use of this method poses the risk of transforming the training process into play and alienating the student from the reality of the educational activity. However, the didactic game combines ludic elements of pleasure, with the knowledge-didactic and psychosomatic-balancing - therapeutic ones, and depriving children of this method would be a deviation from the pedagogical principles.

2.2 Types of games in the didactic activity

Literature offers an important place to game playing among the teaching methods increasingly used in the didactic activity. (Eși, 2010, 140-146). The ludic method or learning through playing involves two major classes of games: didactic or educational games and simulation or role-playing games.

At its turn, the class of didactic games can be divided according to several criteria, which is why we intend to follow, the classification made by Ioan Cerghit in the paper "Methods of education".

Didactic games are classified as follows:

- a) *according to the priority objectives*: sensory (auditory, motor, tactile, visual), observation, language development and interactive knowledge stimulation games.
- b) *according to the content of training*: mathematical, musical, literary, linguistic games, etc.
- c) *according to the form of expression*: symbolic, orientation, riddle games, crosswords games.
- d) *according to the resources used*: materials, oral, questionnaire based, individual cards-based, computer-based.
- e) *according to established rules*: with rules passed by tradition, with invented rules, with spontaneous or formal rules.

- f) *according to stimulated psychological skills:* motion, observation, attention, memory, thinking, language, creation games.

As their name suggests, simulation games reside in the creation of unrealistic, often conflictual situations that lead the participants to play certain roles, a role play that helps them achieve the objectives proposed by the teacher. To better understand, we can think of the acting game that consists in building a network of interdependent relationships, reciprocity relations among actors, because each actor's play depends on the play of the other actors.

The role play method has obvious advantages for students, advantages that follow the psychological side of students, such as: understanding the personality of others and also respecting it, developing creativity, taking decisions, as well as advantages of oral communication skills (at phonetic, lexical, syntactic level), para-verbal and nonverbal (volume, quality, gestures, mimics, clothing).

2.3 The role and advantages of using the didactic game

The purpose of integrating the game into the didactic activity is to bring variety, entertainment, relaxation, thus preventing monotony and boredom. But all these advantages are not the only ones. The method of didactic games uses the advantages of group dynamics, implicitly developing the spirit of cooperation. Research has highlighted the fact that students love competition, teamwork, so games on groups of students will make them engage effectively and totally in the game, engaging both shy and even weak students. Students' co-ordination and collaboration at the group level will increase the degree of cohesion in the classroom. (Dulamă, 2008, p. 188).

In addition to these aspects of group development, didactic games help increase moral qualities, provided that the game is conducted in accordance with organizational rules. Patience, tenacity, respect for other participants, self-control are only a few moral aspects that can be improved by implementing game playing in the didactic activity. But there are also situations in which participants do not respect the organization of the game, or seek alternative methods of assertion while performing the didactic activity. Even these situations lead to increased socio-professional accountability. In other words, students can develop their critical spirit and attitude to deal with conflicting situations.

Integrating the game into the didactic activity is beneficial for students because they:

- ✓ involve their entire personality at the intellectual and emotional level;
- ✓ subordinate individual interests to the group ones;
- ✓ learn or consolidate their knowledge through a fun and relaxing situation;
- ✓ Shy students acquire confidence in their capabilities, and expansive learners learn to control themselves.

All these effects of using the didactic game can only be generated if the teacher demonstrates a great deal of ability to manage this activity. The coordinator role of the teacher is very important. Thus, the organization of the game rests between the attributions of the teacher-coordinator.

2.4. Organisation of the didactic game

Each game involves setting up a regulatory framework to provide students with the set of rules required to conduct the didactic activity. In order to respect this principle, the coordinating teacher has the role of establishing a concordance between the subject of the game and the knowledge

acquired by the students up to that point. Using the word, the teacher will guide the students through questions, answers, explanations and appreciations.

The choice or conception of the didactic game must be carefully realized. Both the entertaining element and the physical or intellectual effort must be in equal proportions, otherwise the didactic objectives will not be achieved. In the situation where the entertaining element dominates the activity, then the educational goal and the learning elements will not be achieved, and if the physical or intellectual effort dominates the game, then we risk that the students cannot finish the activity, which would develop frustration and aversion to such activities. The success of the didactic game is ensured only by a balance between the two aspects.

The efficiency of the game as a learning method is quite obvious, although most of the times the fun, the pleasure and the relaxation are on the first place, which leads to the disadvantage of this method, that the game is not taken seriously. Also, the teacher may encounter difficulties in getting involved in the organization and evaluation of the game. The disadvantages of the method also refer to the students who may be unable to work in a team or cooperate with group members.

2.5 Structural elements of the didactic game

As a teaching method, the didactic game presents at its turn several structural elements, which help on one hand to the understanding of the method and, on the other hand, to its correct application, in order to achieve the highest possible return. These are:

- ✓ The title of the game: depending on the content and age of the participants.
- ✓ The didactic goal: it represents the general educational goal of the game. This is established in close connection with the specifics of the game.
- ✓ The operational objectives: they represent specific, educational, concrete, observable and measurable objectives.
- ✓ The didactic task (the game instructions): represents the training element according to which the thinking operations are triggered (recognition, comparison, naming, etc.).
- ✓ The content of the didactic game (the deployment): represented by the sphere of knowledge, the way of playing the game, the succession of the playing stages. There can be games that aim at fixing, enriching or synthesizing knowledge, others aimed at acquiring new knowledge, as others aim at verifying, or determining the degree of functionality of knowledge previously assimilated.
- ✓ The didactic game rules: they are clear, concise, predefined and mandatory for all participants.
- ✓ The playing elements: they represent the ways in which the game becomes a pleasant activity, continuously training the participants to solve a learning problem.
- ✓ The didactic material: it must be attractive and well-chosen, show variety and be appropriate to the content, age, and individual peculiarities of children (examples: tokens, cards, boards, miscellaneous items).

The components of the didactic game are of great importance, by the amount of information they bring to students. The transparency of the didactic game generated by this information creates a comfortable and stable environment for students, which helps them to make themselves available to the coordinating teacher and thus to go together towards the educational goal of the didactic

game. The following chapter presents the method of didactic game applied during the Romanian language and literature class, in all aspects: organization of the game, its application, its advantages and disadvantages.

3. The didactic game during the Romanian language and literature class

The aim of studying Romanian language and literature during compulsory education is to form a young man with a basic communicative and literary culture able to understand the world, to communicate and to interact with the peers, to efficiently and creatively use his/her own abilities to solve concrete problems in everyday life, to be able to continue at any stage of its existence the learning process, to be sensitive to the beauty of nature and to the one created by man.

3.1 The didactic game during the Romanian language classes

The Romanian language and literature classes have the general objectives to learn how to express correctly, clearly and coherently in Romanian. The didactic games used during the Romanian language classes focus on the components of the Romanian language department, namely: phonetics, spelling, orthoepy, lexicology, morphology and syntax.

The phonetic notions are learned from primary grades, but they are deepened in the 5th grade and recapitulated each year. They are complemented, during language classes, by exercises of orthography and orthoepy, which are closely related. Phonetic games consist of exercises, performed individually or in groups, related to the sounds of the Romanian language, the rules of word division into syllables, pronunciation exercises, etc. (Eși, 2010, 140-146).

Example: *The syllable game* aims at correctly dividing words into syllables, but also at discovering the rules and exceptions of dividing the word into syllables. The resources are minimal: cards containing words and minimum workloads. The task solving can be done in pairs, but the answer analysis will be frontal because the discovery of these rules addresses the attention and focus of all students. In order to induce the idea of competition, points can be awarded for each task and the highest point pair will be appreciated in front of the classroom, and the other groups will be encouraged for future activities.

In terms of teaching of the adjective you can use *Find the intruder* games in which students have to find out which word in the series is not compatible with others, the differentiating element being chosen so that it is known by the students.

Example:

Find the intruder and motivate its choice:

a) *blue, green, brown, black, yellow* (the adjective *brown* is invariable)

b) *sweet, Romanian, grey, greenish* (the adjective *sweet* is not formed by derivation)

We mention that these games can be organized as competition, on groups, using the workbooks. In this way the group that will perform all tasks correctly can be rewarded, and the other groups encouraged.

3.2 The didactic game during the Romanian literature classes

The importance of studying literature in school is born through the specificity of the subject. Literature is a branch of art, so it helps students cultivate aesthetic taste. In addition to this goal, Constantin Parfene identifies other goals such as "development of thinking, formation of the

intellectual-cultural horizon, of the conception about world and life, cultivation of love for homeland, for national culture” (Parfene, 1977, p. 22).

Given the generous applicability of the game playing method during the literature classes, we propose to present the most frequently used didactic games as presented by Emanuela Ilie in the paper ”Didactics of Romanian Literature. Methods and procedures used in the study of literature”. (Ilie, 2008, pp. 158-164; Eși, 2010, pp. 24-34)

In order to understand the literary text, the teacher can propose the *Bingo* game. Each group of students (4-5 students) receives a 6-box worksheet, each one including the required task. The group that resolves the game correctly and quickly wins.

Example: When studying the last part of the Eminescu’s poem "Calin (File de poveste)" students are asked correct answers to the following questions:

1. *Characteristic of nature suggested in the first part;*
2. *Prevailing images;*
3. *The dominant feature of the described forest;*
4. *The suggested feeling of the viewer;*
5. *The name of the style figure from the phrase "cuibar rotind"*
6. *The meaning of the term "harnici"*

In the order in which each group has announced that they have completed the square, one representative of each group will read the resolutions and explanations provided, and the teacher will count the correct answers and will announce the winning group.

Personally, I think this type of game can also be used in an assessment session, the requirements being able to be adapted to any text at first glance, or to another literary text studied.

Simulation games are also commonly found in literature classes. The most used variant of simulation games is the *role playing*. Several students are allowed to play the role of literary characters in key situations, after a time when they set their plan, verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal communication elements to help them get the best of their characters. Any character or couple of characters can be played by students. For example, in the 5th grade, the characters of Caragiale's sketches, which often make them laugh, make students be careful about the text itself, can be successfully played by students. In upper grades, in the 8th grade, Caragiale's plays can also become the sources of role-playing. The performance of *Tipătescu* and *Pristanda* characters in the Caragiale comedy play "O scrisoare pierduta" makes students understand the sources of the comic: language, morals and situation.

As it can be seen, the use of didactic game during literature classes is quite limited. Among the advantages of the method we mention that students understand better the literature, putting them in the skin of the studied characters, but all these games assume a fairly long duration for the game, and this leads to the teacher's risk of not fitting in the hours allocated to the literary text set by the didactic project.

3.3 The didactic game during the communication classes

The communication skills represent the third element of the Romanian Language and Literature subject. The subject does not present a certain typology of communication classes because they are developed in close connection with the language or literature classes. In this respect, the

development of communication skills involves "an ensemble of linguistic, linguistic, cultural and pragmatic skills" (Pavelescu, 2010, p. 296).

In order to build communication situations that can be materialized through role-playing, Marilena Pavelescu proposes the following tasks:

1. *You're Goe, the controller saw you pulling the alarm signal. What do you say to avoid the fine?*
2. *Imagine that you are an animal / bird. Tell us how you feel, what is going on right now.*
3. *You are about to go on a mission in space. I am your son / daughter. Explain what you are about to do.*

Along with these few examples of communication situations, many examples can be added, taking into account the class, the level of communication, the aspirations and interests of the students. These situations imply the necessary time to explain tasks, prepare the role, interpret and analyse it. From my point of view, these role games are an excellent way of shaping desirable beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and sanctioning the undesirable ones. Also, through this method, students see how easily misunderstandings can occur, but also how they can be clarified.

Games that have as a learning objective the development of communication skills are often role-playing games that simulate the social reality for which students prepare themselves in school. By assuming these roles, students learn to cope with the rigor that life itself entails.

Conclusions and suggestions

Taking into account the aspects presented in the three chapters, the method of didactic play is increasingly used in the teaching-learning process.

Didactic games must be used with some reserve in the teaching-learning process. The development of competition between students or their relaxation are aspects of didactic games that can easily move away the participants from the proposed finality. Therefore, the coordinating teacher should master the rules and ensure that all information related to the development of the didactic game is understood by the students.

The didactic game is an active-participative method, because it presents a high degree of activation of children. Children do not passively participate in activities, as is the case with traditional methods. The use of this method leads to the participation of students in their own training.

Through didactic games new information can be acquired, knowledge and skills can be assessed and consolidated, and cognitive, affective and willing skills can be developed. And through the practice of the didactic game strategy, it is possible to assimilate models of speech and models of interpersonal relationships, attitudes and convictions can be formed much easier and more understandable for children.

As we have seen, the didactic game is a method that offers quite generous applicability in Romanian Language and Literature classes. The didactic game can be used as an attractive technique for exploring, exerting and consolidating the contents of any Romanian language and literature class, and for its performance teacher should consider the observance of the previously detailed methodological steps.

The three components of the Romanian language and literature class - language, literature and communication - are suitable for applying the didactic game method. Most didactic games can be applied at the Romanian language class, but games applied in literature provide real guarantees for students to understand the literary text. Games applied to the communication class develop the critical thinking of students who can be put into different situations.

All these aspects outline the importance of the didactic game as a method used in Romanian Language and Literature subject.

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