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USING EDUCATIONAL GAMES IN PREPARING CHILDREN FOR SCHOOL

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The didactic game has become an essential component in the early education process, representing an interactive and effective method for preparing children for school. A game is not only an enjoyable and fun activity for children, but also a powerful means by which they can develop the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in school and in life. Through playing, children can explore their curiosity, make independent discoveries, and actively learn without feeling pressured or obligated. This approach to learning helps children develop a sense of pleasure and satisfaction associated with learning, which can help maintain motivation and interest in school in the future. This article explores the crucial role that didactic games play in developing children's cognitive, social and emotional skills, preparing them for academic success and integration into the school environment. Through the diversity of didactic games, children are exposed to pleasant and stimulating educational experiences that encourage them to explore, learn and develop in a holistic way.

Keywords: *didactic game, early education, skills, learning, teacher.*

UTILIZAREA JOCURILOR EDUCATIVE ÎN PREGĂTIREA COPIILOR PENTRU SCOALĂ

Jocul didactic a devenit o componentă esențială în procesul de educație timpurie, reprezentând o metodă interactivă și eficientă de pregătire a copiilor pentru școală. Joaca nu este doar o activitate plăcută și distractivă pentru copii, ci și un mijloc puternic prin care aceștia își pot dezvolta abilitățile și cunoștințele necesare pentru a avea succes la școală și în viață. Prin joc, copiii își pot explora curiozitatea, pot face descoperiri independente și pot învăța în mod activ fără a se simți presați sau obligați. Această abordare a învățării îi ajută pe copii să dezvolte un sentiment de plăcere și satisfacție asociate învățării, ceea ce poate ajuta la menținerea motivației și a interesului pentru școală în viitor. Acest articol explorează rolul crucial pe care jocurile didactice îl joacă în dezvoltarea abilităților cognitive, sociale și emoționale ale copiilor, pregătindu-i pentru succesul școlar și integrarea în mediul școlar. Prin diversitatea jocurilor didactice, copiii sunt expuși unor experiențe educaționale plăcute și stimulatoare care îi încurajează să exploreze, să învețe și să se dezvolte într-un mod holistic.

Cuvinte-cheie: *joc didactic, educație timpurie, abilități, învățare, profesor.*

Introduction

The process of preparing for school is crucial in every child's life and can significantly influence their subsequent success within the education system. In this regard, the use of the didactic game has become an increasingly popular and effective method in early childhood education. Didactic games provide opportunities for learning through interactive and playful experiences, which are essential for the harmonious development of children before entering the formal school environment.

Preparing a child for entry into the formal education system is a complex process, involving a variety of cognitive, social, and emotional aspects. Approaching this process from a scientific perspective involves identifying and applying effective strategies to optimize the child's adaptation to the school environment and facilitate their academic and social success.

According to Georgeta Diac, preparing the child for school is „a desideratum of early education, due to multiple personal and social valences, involving an extensive effort, determined by the characteristics of early development, not only on the part of the educated, but also on the part of the educators" (Diac, 2016, p. 65).

Early childhood development is crucial for preparing a child for school and for their subsequent success in life. This sensitive period of life is marked by rapid growth and the formation of cognitive, social, and

emotional foundations. In this sense, school readiness must take into account the individual needs of each child and provide a stimulating and supportive environment that encourages their holistic development.

Preparation for school requires the integral development of the child, in order to ensure his or her success at the beginning of primary education and to be prepared to successfully fulfil the tasks and responsibilities specific to this level of education. It „must target the child in its entirety, on all levels of development, respecting its pace of development, the differences that make it unique, special” (Diac, 2016, p. 64).

Preparation for school covers several aspects, including school skills, the maturity required and the ability to adapt to the school environment.

Didactic games are an interactive and effective method to train and educate students. In Schaub and Zenke (2001, p. 161) didactic games are defined as „methods of learning and work, used with didactic intentions, which resemble board games in form, but that have a learning purpose in terms of thematic content”.

Educational games are designed to provide a pleasant and efficient learning experience, and by resembling board games, they become accessible and attractive to children. However, what sets them apart is the thematic content, which is structured around specific learning objectives and areas.

Through educational games, children can explore and practice skills such as mathematics, language, science, problem-solving, creativity, and social and emotional skills. These games can be adapted to meet the needs and developmental level of each child, offering differentiated and personalized learning opportunities. Moreover, educational games have the ability to stimulate imagination, curiosity, and exploration, which encourages engagement and motivation in learning. They can be used in various educational contexts, including schools, kindergartens, early development centers, and at home, to reinforce learning and enhance children’s educational experience.

Educational games represent a valuable tool in educators’ arsenal, providing an efficient and enjoyable way to encourage learning and development in children. Through them, children can develop skills and consolidate knowledge in an interactive and captivating manner.

The structural elements of the didactic game are: educational goals, content, didactic task, game rules, game elements, didactic material. For a playful activity to be effective, preschool children must follow the rules established for play, which represent „those internal or external regulations by which children’s actions are organized and correlated with each other” (Şchiopu and Verza, 1997, p. 106).

The Role of the Didactic Game in Preparing Children for School:

Development of Cognitive Skills: Didactic games are designed to stimulate various aspects of cognition, such as critical thinking, problem solving, memory, attention, language and math skills, fine motor skills, and social skills.

Here are some examples of didactic games and how they contribute to the development of cognitive skills:

- **Puzzles**: Puzzles help develop spatial thinking, problem-solving, and perseverance. They require planning, analysis, and strategy to fit the pieces in a proper way.

- **Logic games**: Logic games, such as Sudoku or chess, are great for improving critical thinking, problem solving, and concentration.

- **Word games and language puzzles**: Word crosses, riddles, and other games that involve word and language manipulation help develop language skills such as expanded vocabulary, grammar, and the ability to think creatively.

- **Mathematical games**: Games involving calculations, mathematical logic, and geometric models, such as Tangram or number games, help develop mathematical skills and logical thinking. By engaging in these games, preschoolers not only have fun but also develop their mathematical skills and logical thinking in an interactive and engaging way.

- **Building and creativity games**: LEGO and other building games stimulate imagination, problem solving and fine motor skills.

- **Memory games**: Games that involve memorizing sequences, such as Memory or Simon, help develop memory and attention.

- **Team games**: Games that require cooperation and communication between team members develop social and collaborative skills.

When used properly, didactic games can be powerful tools to increase motivation and engagement in learning while simultaneously improving participants' cognitive abilities. It is important that these games are adapted to the level of development of each individual and integrated into a balanced educational environment, including other learning methods and practical activities.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an essential aspect of children's and adults' development, helping them understand and manage their own emotions, develop healthy relationships, and navigate the social world in a positive and empathetic way. Didactic games can play a significant role in facilitating social and emotional learning, providing practical opportunities to practice social, communication and conflict resolution skills in a safe and fun environment.

Educational games encourage social interaction and collaboration among children. By participating in group games, children learn to work together, share, cooperate, and encourage each other. These experiences allow them to develop social skills and learn to interact positively with others. Through these games, children learn to express their thoughts, communicate their ideas, and listen to their peers. These communication skills are essential for building interpersonal relationships and for success in subsequent social interactions.

Some educational games are designed to promote empathy and emotional understanding. Through roles and played scenarios, children can learn to recognize and understand different emotions and perspectives of others. This helps them develop empathy and become more sensitive to the needs and feelings of those around them.

Educational games provide children with opportunities to practice peaceful conflict resolution and manage tense situations or disputes. By participating in games that involve collaboration or competition, children learn to negotiate, find creative solutions, and reach a consensus, thus contributing to the development of their conflict resolution skills.

Here are some examples of didactic games that contribute to the development of social and emotional learning:

- **Role-playing**: Role-playing games allow participants to assume different roles and interact in a simulated scenario. They provide opportunities to learn empathy, different perspectives and conflict resolution through hands-on experience.
- **Co-op gaming**: Co-op gaming involves players collaborating to achieve a common goal. They encourage teamwork, effective communication, and developing skills to consider the feelings and perspectives of others.
- **Problem-solving games**: Games that require problem-solving and decision-making provide opportunities to practice critical thinking and emotion management skills in complex and uncertain situations.
- **Communication games**: Games that focus on communication, such as question and answer games or improv games, can help participants develop active listening, clear expression and misunderstanding solving skills.
- **Stress and anxiety management games**: Games involving relaxation techniques, such as mindfulness or deep breathing, can help participants learn effective stress and anxiety management strategies in an interactive and enjoyable way.
- **Trust games**: Games that involve partnerships and trust exercises, such as trusting your eyes closed or trusting team games, can strengthen bonds and relationships between participants while developing confidence in oneself and others.

In general, didactic games can be adapted to encourage the development of social and emotional skills in a variety of contexts and can be integrated into educational programs or extracurricular activities to enhance the holistic learning and development of the individual.

Increasing Motivation and Curiosity through didactic games is essential to maintain engagement and involvement in the learning process. Didactic games can be used strategically to stimulate the desire to learn and explore, both in educational and informal settings.

These games not only delight and engage children but also stimulate them to explore, discover, and learn in a pleasant and captivating way. By integrating educational games into the preschool environment and

creating a stimulating and supportive environment, educators can encourage motivation and curiosity in children, thus promoting a positive attitude towards learning and discovery.

Here are some ways that didactic games can help increase motivation and curiosity:

- **Clear and relevant goals**: Didactic games should provide clear and relevant goals to arouse interest and motivation of participants. When objectives are well defined and linked to participants' interests and needs, they are more motivated to engage and continue their efforts.

- **Challenges and progressive difficulty**: Games should offer challenges adapted to the proficiency level of participants, giving them opportunities to develop their skills in a gradual way. The progressive increase in difficulty can maintain interest and stimulate curiosity to explore more.

- **Constructive feedback and rewards**: Positive feedback and rewards in the form of points, medals or other forms of recognition can be used to motivate and encourage participants to continue their efforts and improve performance.

- **Exploration and discovery**: Games should encourage exploration and discovery, giving participants the freedom to experiment with their ideas and solutions. This approach encourages curiosity and motivates participants to discover new information and improve their skills.

- **Competition or collaboration**: Depending on group preferences and needs, games can be designed to promote healthy competition or collaboration. Both competition and collaboration can stimulate motivation and curiosity, giving participants opportunities to demonstrate their skills and learn from each other.

- **Diversity and adaptability**: Offering a variety of games and activities tailored to individual interests and preferences can maintain participants' interest and curiosity over time. Flexibility and adaptability in approaching games can help increase motivation and willingness to learn.

It is important to highlight that increasing motivation and curiosity through didactic games requires attention to the individual needs and preferences of participants, as well as a creative and flexible approach to designing and implementing learning activities.

Preparing for School Structure through didactic games is an effective and enjoyable way to help children adapt to the school environment and develop the skills necessary for their success in this environment. Through games, children can learn social rules, develop basic academic skills and learn to work in a structured environment. Here are some examples of didactic games that can be used for this purpose:

- **Role plays**: These involve playing different roles, such as teacher, student or classmate. Through these games, children can learn to behave in a school environment, interact with other peers and develop their social and emotional skills.

- **Rules and routines games**: Games that involve establishing and following rules or routines can be used to help children understand the importance of structure and organization in the school environment. These games may include activities such as organizing a toy "class" or group games that require following clear rules.

- **Problem-solving games**: Games involving problem-solving can help children develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, essential skills in the school environment. These games can include puzzles, enigma or logic games.

- **Cooperative games**: Games that require collaboration and teamwork can help children learn to work together and develop communication and group work skills, which are important for success in the school environment. These games may include activities such as building a team puzzle or completing a common task in a limited amount of time.

- **Literacy and numeracy games**: Games that involve letter and number recognition, as well as learning sounds and basic mathematical operations, can help prepare children for academic learning in school. These games may include memory games with letters or numbers, games to associate sounds with letters, or activities that involve learning numbers and basic mathematical operations in an interactive and fun way.

Through these didactic games and other interactive activities, children can learn to adapt to the structure and requirements of the school environment in an enjoyable and stimulating way, preparing for their success in school and beyond.

Conclusion

The use of didactic play in preparing children for school is an interactive and effective approach that promotes their holistic development before entering the formal school environment. Through the diversity of didactic games, children are exposed to enjoyable and stimulating educational experiences that prepare them for academic success and integration into the school community. It is essential that early childhood education recognises and harnesses the power of didactic play in supporting children's development in an integrated and harmonious way.

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