



The Role, Educational Dimensions and the Range of Ludic Learning forms at the Crossroads of Preschool and School Cycles

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Abstract

The synthetic presentation of theories about games will emphasise the importance of knowing their functions and roles in the optimization of the projecting and development of the array of playful learning forms at the intersection of the preschool and school cycles.

The content of this study is structured around the interpretation of the theories referring to the classification of the functions of games. We take into consideration the following approaches: J. Piaget's in conjunction with the theories of Lev Vygotsky, D. B. Elkonin and Ursula Şchiopu. If from a theoretical point of view the knowledge of the functions of games is important, then from an applicative point of view, it is essential to classify them, to describe and to practice them. J. Piaget, Elvira Creţu, A. N. Leontiev have made different classifications considering the functions, the content and the form of different games.

The game is the educational process common to children involved in early education, which contributes decisively so that the transition from kindergarten to school is not being perceived as a shock, but as a normal and ongoing educational process. In addition to activities at the nursery, training and educational activities carried out in the early years of school have a higher degree of difficulty. Games contribute to the psychological development of young children. A psychologically well-developed preschooler or a young pupil will play much better and more beautiful than a less evolved child.

As a complement we can identify the electronic game type and the description of its forms that sends to the discovery of the pleasure to read from the iPad, eBook or any other support, compulsory joint with the pleasure of going to the theater or watching a film. The electronic gaming process can be understood as a characteristic of the actual evolutions based on the whole technologic and informational potential to offer young children other ways to play, to learn and to interact. Unlike the classic game, the ludic electronic process can take place beyond the limits of time and space. It occurs according to the orientation regarding the child personality development, and implicitly according to the permanent learning, enlarging the flexibility of thinking by children, their individualization and the complementary role of non-formal learning. The associated electronic games could lead, on one hand, to the decrease of the traditional status quo and, on the other one, to the increasement of the flexibility and efficiency of the educational process conducted in the third millenium.

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Based on content, the ludic activities during preschool learning are classified as follows:

- *Imitation games of actions specific to adults (ironing, getting dressed)*
- *Simple subject games (playing with dolls)*
- *Complex subject games (imitation of the family background)*

At the age of 5-6 we come across *the game with subject* or *alternation game* developed especially when pre-schoolers do not have playing partners, the child assuming several successive roles. Then, as a consequence of the frequent playful activities is *the game with rules* that create the child the



opportunity to display his/her acumen in compliance with the rules imposed, giving the game a complex character and creating the field for collective emulation whose effects pre-schoolers begin to live. Mental development and enabling pre-schoolers to think in their own way the impressions gained in the environment is achieved through *creative games*, which are classified as follows:

- *creative games based on the imitation of subjects of everyday life* (play the mother, the doctor)
- *creative games with subjects derived from stories and fairy tales, dramatization*
- *building games: a) linked to other creative games; b) independent; c) of technical nature*

The diversity of building games is influenced by the variety of the material used (small material, recovered, joining, etc.).

Having a special attraction for pre-schoolers are *fun or funny content games*. They have many in common with *movement games*, although movement is present little in their course. Except games with rules, all other games have an obvious recreational function, including *fun or funny*, function obtained through the attractive elements: surprise, riddle, race (*Fly, fly!*, *Who rescued Little Red Riding Hood?*, *Find and be quiet!*)

The interweaving between instructive tasks and the entertaining aspect of the game is accomplished by means of didactic games. In practice, they contribute to achieving the goal through the game as finality of some activities specifically organized by teachers. After content diversity, didactic games are classified as follows:

- *Didactic games for speech development*
- *Didactic games for developing logical thinking*
- *Didactic games for understanding the environment*
- *Didactic games for the acquisition of civilized norms of behaviour*

The coordination of psychomotor skills, as well as of rhythmical skills is consolidated through the diversity of *musical games*:

- *Singing*
- *Exercise game*
- *Rhythmical game*

Certain types of games require outdoor space where children can carry their games with more creativity and imagination than in enclosed spaces. The children find the materials necessary for the game: sand, water, toys, etc.

As a complement to the classifications made by the pedagogues mentioned above we can identify the *electronic game type* and the description of its forms that sends to the discovery of the pleasure to read from the iPad, eBook or any other support, compulsory joint with the pleasure of going to the theatre or watching a film. Unlike the classic game, the ludic electronic process can take place beyond the limits of time and space. It occurs according to the orientation regarding the child personality development, and implicitly according to the permanent learning, enlarging the flexibility of thinking by children, their individualization and the complementary role of non-formal learning.

A.N. Leontiev (1948) claims that the game becomes the essential activity of the child, as child's development triggers the most important changes in the child's mind, based on which reasoning processes may develop. The Russian psychologist states that a classification of game types is difficult to do, since games are mobile and convert one into another. He makes a game classification, establishing the following types:

1. *Role games*, in which the child takes a representative role for a social adult function
2. *Role and subject games*
3. *Games with rules*
4. *Games that make the transition towards the learning activity*, comprising of entertaining and sport games, didactic games and acting. These games initiate the child in the learning process, by gradually replacing the game for learning.

J. Piaget's classification aimed at understanding the functions of games:

1. *The exercise game* – the basic form of the game
2. *The symbolic game (imagination)* – shapes the adaptation function
3. *The rule game* occurs during preoperational thinking stage (2-7 years), when the child socializes and manages to have a reciprocal comprehension, by word and discipline
4. *The construction game* is accomplished in light of the symbolic game after the age of 5-6 years



Elvira Crețu makes the following classification, the core of her research being the psychophysiological functions:

1. *games that shape the psychophysiological functions*, namely sensorial, movement, intellectual
2. *technical games* which favour the sum of representations, memory, movement, along with those that enable the knowledge of certain life environments, namely school, agriculture, crafts, industries
3. *games that involve social relations* (family or school)

As the complexity of games increases in the preparatory grade, one may speak of the *ludic process*, which defines a chain of several ludic units (games) of the same type, complementary or distinct, which are carried out over a considerable period of time, namely during a school year or school cycle.

According to the greatest theoretician of the XXth century, J. Piaget, the functions of the game are:

1. *the adaptation function*, built on two directions: the assimilation of reality to the self and the adjustment, metamorphosis of the self, according to external models;
2. *the cathartic function*, materialized through energetic relief and resolution of the internal or external conflicts of the self;
3. *the socializing function*, accomplished through the child's adjustment to other children, assuming the self's relationship to others ;
4. *the function of extending the self*, expressed through the satisfaction of the child's multiple needs, starting with the cognitive needs to research the environment to those of harnessing the potential in each child, stemming from perceptive and movement needs to those of self-expression in behavioural plan.

Vygotsky (1972) noticed that Piaget employed his theory to state for the existence of a dichotomy between children's world, namely the world of games and adults' world, that is the objective world. The Russian psychologist challenges this idea and claims that the essence of game in children is tantamount to creating an imaginary world, more precisely of a field of meanings that behaviourally change the child, forcing him to adapt all actions towards the situation in mind.

A particular contribution in shaping the functions of the game is made by the Romanian psychologist Ursula Șchiopu, who groups them into *essential, secondary and marginal functions*. *The essential functions of the game* are further classified as follows:

1. *The knowledge function*, indicated through the practical and mental assimilation of the world and life features;
2. *The formative-educative function*, resulting from the fact that the game represents a school of effective use of energy, of consolidation of education, of building the behaviour, of managing gestures and development of imagination;
3. *The complex exercise function, stimulating movements* (as indicated in the studies by Gross and Carr) and accomplished mainly in the contribution that the ludic activity brings in the complex growth and development of children. As a *secondary function*, it is encountered within simple games that are specific to small children.

Ursula Șchiopu's paper mentions the following *secondary functions*:

1. *The balance and toning function*, visible in the active and compensating character that games have as compared to the other tensional activities
2. *The cathartic and projective function*
3. *The entertaining function*

As a *marginal function* of the ludic activity it is mentioned the *therapeutic function* that is successfully encountered in ailing situations.

Contemporary didactics suggests respecting the learning principle regarding age particularities in educated children. The ludic process occurs among the fundamental human activities, next to learning, work and creativity. Researchers have noticed that the effort that children make while playing is identical to that of the adults while working.

According to Elvira Crețu, *the psychophysiological functions that are emphasised while playing*, namely the sensorial, movement or intellectual functions indicate the relevance and functions of the game, such as the building, development and reshaping of the entire psychic child structure. The ludic process contributes to the building of child personality, by developing the creative capacity and the capacity to progressively solve distinct situations.

The educative instructors may observe that a pre-schooler or a young pupil that appears to be an authentic creator while playing will be an initiator of interesting actions, with multiple meanings for



his/her further social evolution. This is made possible, according to the classification made by Elvira Crețu, during *technical games*, which develop the ensemble of representations, memory, and movement, in distinct life-mimicked environments that children envisage either school-related ones, crafts or industries.

During *transition games*, learning promotes both education by discovery and reflection upon things, as well as education based on the five senses. Based on intuition, children will identify the geometrical or spatial forms. Moreover, the logical-mathematical games and the suggested didactic games will guide children's orientation in a certain area, directing then later on towards the external environment.

Seen as built-in experience, the ludic process that is integrated in instructive-educative processes leads to pre-schoolers' and pupils' optimism, to their wanting to accomplish goals, roles, to occupy positions and to find leading roles within a group.

The wide variety of *electronic ludic processes* may befriend students both with the English language and with the content of different domains that are necessary for early training, children literature, basic mathematics or applications in the field of music or drawing.

The variety of *creativity studio* type games send to a diversity of didactic functions: stimulate creativity and develop children's imagination, simultaneously with the building of a great aesthetic sense or the identification of story particularities. *Puzzle games* are of utmost interest for children, being a valid alternative for the classical fairy-tale. Hence, one may avoid the stockpiling of children material, which eventually leads to the loss of composing elements.

Musical game applications are extremely attractive, as the touch screen may imitate the piano keyboard, drums, etc. Furthermore, musical games develop children's musical sensitivity and teach them songs in the direction of the required application.

Basic mathematical acquisitions, addition and subtraction, may also be extracted from electronic games. With the help of mobile phone touchscreen, tablets, PC and even big screens one may develop certain game applications: formation of sets made by correlation between same type elements or between sets and numbers.

To sum up, by practising electronic games, even more than the traditional game, school approaches more effectively the new world in which digital technologies, centred on processing and sending information have conquered our daily life for good.

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