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Adapting Didactic Game in Swimming Teaching at an Early Age

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Abstract

Starting from the definition of the didactic game, one can observe how this harmoniously combines the instructive and educational aspect of children teaching with its fun part.

From this perspective, the incidence of this type of game in swimming teaching at an early age is beneficial, especially because of the involvement in the teaching process of the physiological resources of children as well as the pedagogical ones of the teachers/trainers, focused on the transformation of the extrinsic motivations of both the parts involved in the teaching/learning process into intrinsic ones. Here arises a favorable situation in which the quality, the efficiency and the learning speed of swimming will know a notable increase. Thus, children who are encouraged to learn to swim through methods in which games and racing prevail, in association with the specific tasks of the didactical game, learn to swim in a pleasant manner, avoiding monotony and stereotyping. Trainers / teachers who are appreciated by children and by the other members of the staff, who are respected by colleagues and children, who use their experience in a constructive manner and take into account the particularities of each child will obtain notable results in the initiation activity, achieving faster and better results than expected.

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1. Paper Rationale

Early education provides equal opportunities for growth, development, health, education, without discriminating children from unstable families, with parents with poor health, with deficiencies or low financial-material possibilities.

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Swimming offers to the children a fun way to burn calories, improve cardiovascular activity and increase the overall level of physical activity.

Water itself is a kind of exercise. Its resistance is 12 times greater than air, making any movement in the water to become effective exercise. In addition, water provides buoyancy as well as support for the body. As the body sinks deeper into the water, the less it weights. Consequently, aquatic exercises have, by far, a much smaller impact on joints, bones and muscles. This makes the water game ideal for kids.

Water game also brings social benefits. Learning new games develops the ability to listen to children and their cognitive behavior. Games also develop a supportive environment which helps even shy children to interact better. The contact with others can be beneficial for them, helping them to gain confidence. In addition, the games that require imagination encourage participants to express their ideas and their share their creativity with others.

Using the didactical game within the swimming training completes the acquisition of skills specific to swimming initiation movements with the educational side of this type of game, where children are challenged to perform a series of didactical tasks, such as recognition, designation, restoration, comparison, divination. The transformation of the extrinsic motivations into intrinsic motivations makes both child and trainer/teacher aware participants in the educational act, whose quality becomes obvious.

2. Theoretical foundation of the paper and related literature

The game is the most important means of manifestation of the child. In this regard, such activity is a way to put their energy to use, to relax, born from the need of movement and of action and represents a pleasant way to spend time. But on the other hand, the game is an assembly of actions and operations that completes the objectives of physical, intellectual, moral and tactical training of the child.

The origin of the game can be traced back to the Primitive Community, expressed in paintings, engravings, as an expression of serious activities related to the work process: hunting, fishing, war. Among the first toys there were bows, slings, rods, that children used to imitate the activities of the adults. In ancient Greece, the physician Galen (130-200 AD), advocated the ball game as a promoter of the symmetry of the limbs and health and of the virtue of the soul. The pink of the Greek culture was reached during the period when the Olympic Games were held for 1172 years without interruption from 776 BC - 394 C.E. All the competitions were called **games**. In the Middle Ages, the game was a means of education which rests the body, relaxes the spirit and develops skill. Professor Guts - Muts considered as game features: the important nothings, the knowledge of the body, the attainment of the soul, the closeness.

The idea of using the games for educational purposes was expressed by Plato since antiquity, and later, during the Renaissance, by Feltre, Bacon and Fénelon. In modern times, the promoters of this type of education through play ware Froebel, Montessori, Decroly etc.

The 5 lines of development that can be capitalized through the game are as follows, according to author D.B. Elkonin [1]:

- From small groups to more numerous groups;
- From unstable groups to more stable groups;
- From games with no theme to thematic games;
- From distinct game episodes with no connection between them to the thematic game with systematic development;
- From the reflection of the personal life and close environment to the reflection of the events taking place in the social life.

This method aims to stimulate the didactical action through playful motivations. They are subordinated, under the formative perspective, to the learning-assessment activity.

Considering the pedagogical criteria used educational games can be classified as follows:

Following priority objectives: sensorial games (auditory, visual, motor and tactile), observation games, language development games, games to stimulate interactive knowledge;

- After the content of the training: math games, music games, sports games, literary / linguistic games;
- After the form of expression: symbolic games, orientation games, awareness games, conceptual games, riddles, puns, puzzle;
- After the used resources: material games, oral games, games based on questions, games based on individual cards games, computer games;
- According to the set of rules: games with rules set through tradition, games with invented rules, spontaneous games, formal games;
- After the stimulated psychological skills: movement games, games of observation, imagination games, games of attention, memory games, mind games, language games and creative games.

The games played by children acquire training meanings when they are organized and succeed in the order implied by the logic of knowledge and learning. In this case, the game playing prepares the children for life and work, becoming more than a means of entertainment. Therefore, the game reinforces knowledge, making the instructive - educational process a more efficient one.

Each educational game includes the following components:

- Content - children's prior knowledge acquired in joint activities with the whole group;
- Teaching task - appears as a problem of thinking, recognition, designation, restoration, comparison, divination;
- The rules of the game - the rules are designed to show children how to play, how to solve the problem; at the same time, the rules have a regulating function in the relations among the children;
- The action of the game: it contains moments of waiting, surprise, guess and racing and makes the task to be solved pleasant and attractive to children.

3. Author's contribution on the existing theory and practice in educational field

In the indigenous pedagogy, early education in is a new concept. Traditionally, the pedagogical issues of children of ages 0 - 6/7 years is considered early education. However, the period of 0-3 years is not treated as a specific section of the early education. This belongs exclusively to the family. Therefore, the approach of this concept from the perspective of contemporary society is welcomed. Both national and international priorities stringently require the elaboration of a policy and a system of early education through the Early Childhood Development program. It is also important that the national early education system to be developed in the context set by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, considering the objectives of the Millennium Development which must to be achieved by year 2015 and the manifestation of Romania as a full member of the European Union.

Generally speaking, the early childhood learning activity involves the following elements: learning through play, children's participation at the selection of the activities, games, toys, the proper organization of the environment, the educational partnership (kindergarten - family - community) and the flexibility of the teaching – learning – assessment strategies.

Swimming is considered a physical activity with a very favorable influence on the development of the body, starting with the general process of growth, hardening and strengthening of the body resistance and increase the of the overall capacity of effort. Also, by practicing this sportive activity at an early age, the sedentary lifestyle is

avoided and, not least, obesity at infantile age, which, unfortunately, makes its presence, felt in our country in the case of more and more younger children.

In the current stage of socio - economic development of our country, mass sport is on a declining path, due to the lack of interest from the authorities and precarious financial resources. We can say that at the early age this phenomenon is almost nonexistent. It is desirable for a number of children, as larger as possible, to practice swimming at least as an entertaining activity, if not in the form of physical education in schools or even at the level of continuous sportive education in sports clubs.

Using the learning through play method (accommodation with water, floating and forward positions, forward movements with the arms and legs, underwater exhalation and breathing, techniques for different procedures etc.) and the racing exercises, the training process becomes more pleasant and more thorough and, above all, better and faster results are expected.

The playful behavior and the spirit of competition is a driving factor for the teaching - learning – assessment activities. At the same time, such traits of hereditary origin meet a number of needs of the children, such as: the need for action, the need for movement, a way to consume the energy, to entertain, etc..

4. Author's contribution on the topic

The personality of the trainer/teacher can be characterized by the fusion of the following components of his/her competencies: professional capacity (the teacher uses well the teaching - learning – assessment activities), the capacity of empathy: the teacher is calm, quiet, caring, understanding, proves to have discernment and pedagogical tact with each one of the students, the ability to manage the child's behavior, innovation, awareness, the adjustment of the teaching or training to the particularities of children, the experience and skills previously acquired, ensuring the training conditions, the emotional state and personal motivation, enthusiasm (the teacher loves the taught teaching line by the teaching manner), self control (does not panic at difficult times).

The personality of the child is manifested by the following components: motivation, needs, aspirations, the learning ability, perseverance, spirit of competition, individual particularities, the availability favorable to swimming, the attitude and behavior towards the training process, autotelic concerns, capacity of self-evaluation [2].

Each of the two participants in the educational act has resources for its improvement. We refer to the training resources in the case of the trainer/teacher (the subject of education), and to the psychological resources in the case of the child (the object of education). The awareness of each participant to the education act of owning these resources leads to the transformation of personal extrinsic motivation into intrinsic ones, and from this point on, the learning efficiency registers a notable increase, the idea of the restraints in the activity of the trainer or the child disappears, and arises a cooperation set to achieve an educational act assumed by both parties out of personal conviction and willingness.

Considering the general playful dispositions (speed of action, anticipation of situations, coordination, operational thinking, activation, concentration, increased focus, attention distribution, etc..), which receive at an early stage a manifest state before undergoing a systematic training process, we can observe that in a group that is trained to swim through activating strategies, the learning to swim process is accelerated.

These activating strategies consist of materials, methods, means or a combination of the 3 M. The auxiliary materials used in the initiation activity state-of-the-art, being attractive and pleasant to children and also diversified: sticks of different colors, sets of aquatic animals, floating mats under the form of seahorses, whales, seals, etc... The methods used during swimming training classes are the playful method Popescu-Neveanu, *Dictionary of Psychology*, page 131, p 421) [3] and the method of preparation through competition. The most useful means used were the exercises as games and competitions.

In the case of the playful method for training, as a method of training that best meets the needs and necessities of the children in the experimental group, we introduced games that stimulate children's ability to acquire quickly

and easily the specific skills for swimming, for example: a imagination game - *What do I, you all do*, where each participant performs a swimming motion and the other perform the same motion until all of them are performing the motion correctly.

Water games can be of many kinds. In the opinion of Kim Rodomista, they can be divided into: games of imagination ("What do I, you all do", "What am I?"), tag games ("the jellyfish bite", "underwater tag", "Marco Polo "), individual games (" limbo ", " underwater bowling", " ducks and sharks "), team games ("water-filled balloon volleyball ", " to catch the thief ", " octopus race"), games near water ("cat and mouse", "cemetery", "wash-and-run"), racing games ("hunt the ball", "crossing the river", "stinky feet" [4].

In the case of the method of training through competition, the competitive spirit that most children of this age prominently manifest is being fruitfully exploited. It was used a game thought to be eloquent in this regard: The best friends - two children with similar swimming abilities have to swim as one against the opposing team which is also made up of two children. Obviously, the winning team is the one formed of the children with the better level in the swimming technique, but in this game, besides the competitive spirit, the team spirit is developed as well [5].

5. Conclusions

If at an early age (4-5 years) in order to teach swimming is chosen a strategy (methods, materials, resources, principles, rules, style, forms of organization) able to fully exploit the underlying motivations and personality of children (the pleasure of play, playful behavior, the spirit of competition, the need for movement, the need to socialize, etc.) then the quality, efficiency and speed of swimming learning are notably increasing.

The use of educational games in this type of activity leads, in addition to learning the skills specific to swimming, to perceptions that prepare children for work and life. The children involved in such activities engage their full mental potential; grow their initiative, resourcefulness, flexibility of thinking, cooperation and team spirit. Through play, children can discover truths and train their ability to act creatively, because the game strategies are essentially heuristic strategies, which require manifestations of wit, spontaneity, resourcefulness, initiative, patience, courage.

The early interaction with the aquatic environment means addressing the teaching process from a playful perspective, where the game is the key to progress in the aquatic environment. The swimming initiation at an early age is considered by most trainers to be appropriate and very appropriate; this should concern each and every of us, as citizens of this country, and especially, should represent a concern of those in the field of specialty, in order to develop movement among very young children to avoid the sedentary lifestyle and, least but not last, infantile obesity, which, unfortunately, becomes more and more present at early ages.

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