

Ewa Jagiełło (reviewer)

University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce, Poland

Mária Podhájecka

Cognition of the World through Didactic Games

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The book by Doc. PhD. Mária Podhájecka, CSc entitled “Cognition of the World through Didactic Games” is a trial that emphasizes the importance of games in shaping a child’s personality at a pre-school age.

A child from the very beginning of his or her life is put into the educational-didactic process. The first institution undertaking this duty is the family and the close environment around the child. However, it is not always the case that loving people who possess suitable pedagogical knowledge have children. Thus the next important institution is kindergarten. Here, under direction of well-qualified pedagogical staff, a child is able to extend its knowledge extensively and systematically. A professional teacher’s work, which shapes the active and creative attitude of a small child, is connected with searching for didactic methods and tools. This problematic is undertaken in the reviewed monograph; the author describes 169 didactic games through which a teacher is able to achieve the planned goals.

As the author writes in the introduction: “An essential part of the educational process in kindergarten is the game: everything depends on it; it is the base of various activities which influence the development of a child in different educational areas.”

A rich catalogue of various didactic games, which are published in this book, can be an excellent addition to the large collection of those that already exist in the educational field. The author insinuates that this list is not closed, and she offers a chance to complete it. According to her, a professional teacher should create different kinds of suggested games

and introduce new ones. This kind of work ought to encourage teachers to create an inspiring and creative educational space.

This monograph consists of ten chapters. The first one refers to introductory games and their appliance in the area of didactic activities. Mária Podhájecka within the first few sentences mentions the positive virtues of games and their function in the proper preparation of children for life. According to the author, a game is the most important activity in a child's life; it enables the child to acquire vast amounts of knowledge in a natural way. She compares games to an information gate through which a vast amount of feelings, experiences or impulses go; then, in a further stage, they are transformed into knowledge. Moreover, the author emphasizes that through playing games a child can in a clear and understandable way (for the child) express their needs. Of greatest importance is the fact that it is a good means of communication, both externally and internally.

In the introduction to the second part the author reminds us of the basic classification of games, which is divided into two kinds: games with rules (educational and skills-based) and those without rules. She emphasizes that the second kind dominates in kindergarten education. Children create rules on their own; sometimes during games they assign compulsory rules in a certain place, time and area. Of greater importance when using these tools in an educational and didactic process is to achieve educational goals. Mária Podhájecka, using her experience, believes that every game has educational potential; the difference lies in its quality and sphere of activity. Games invented by children, through good management and advice, can be transformed into educational games.

To continue, the author describes in some detail the expression "educational games". She quotes the definition, mentions elements of the educational structure, and arranges realized problems that have resulted from the educational essence. As the first person, she introduces educational competence to the structure of the educational game. She answers the question: When is it possible to use educational games in the educational process? She mentions the skills which educational games can develop because of their dynamic character. As a means of estimating the

effectiveness in applying educational games, she presents an assessment of various authors, including, among others, Bloom. She strongly emphasizes the necessity of applying educational games systematically to achieve planned educational effects.

The third chapter entitled "The Pedagogical tendency of educational games" refers to a process of managing an educational game which involves: planning, organizing, motivating, carrying on reversible information. Mária Podhájecka concentrates her studies on teachers, their professionalism in preparing games and the professional management of participants. The author emphasizes that it is not an easy task, because small children lose motivation easily and become bored, which requires a sudden intervention by the teacher. The author goes on to mention over twenty questions directed to a teacher, to which he or she should know the answer, and be able to choose correctly the tools of work.

In the introduction to the fourth chapter, the author continues her studies on the educational process, evoking the expression of the teaching process. She describes it as a planned and conscious goal of a teacher's activity which enables the development of cognitive processes and it is directed to the pupil in order to acquire new knowledge systematically.

Mária Podhájecka emphasizes that an educated person cannot exist without teaching. Thus, there is a close connection between goals, contests, education, subject, as well as theory and practice. The complexity of the discussed problem assures a higher position to the teacher's job. Only a well-planned educational strategy guarantees success and the further development of pupils.

The fifth chapter was devoted to an exact presentation of the Alternative program entitled Child and World which is supportive for the comprehensive development of a small child. After a penetrating analysis of its contests, one can state that the author relies on the rule of connecting science with playing methods. She takes into consideration the important role of games in the development of key competences, as well as diagnostic tools. The contents included in the program are resilient and can be applied in such a way as to respond to children's creative possibilities at different age groups. It is essential that every teacher establishes

a relationship between the educational program and pedagogical diagnostics. In kindergarten conditions the diagnostics can be used for everyday educational and didactic situations, and therefore of the child's individual 'look'.

The next part of the discussed book involves a catalogue of games for the whole didactic year of education (10 months). One hundred and sixty-nine games were grouped according to the realization of educational tasks. Each of them plays an educational role; a child who participates within it acquires or develops certain key competences. Due to an extensive catalogue of games, the teacher is able to adjust them to the subject and sub-subject, follow the rule of transforming them from the simple to the complex. The proposed games have a complex character. This means that they are not concentrated only with the acquisition and development of knowledge within one educational area, but simultaneously allow the achievement of social, perceptive-motorist, personal communicative, cognitive and informative competences.

The author highlights the important role of the ideas of Komeński from the sixteenth century; they continue to be alive and well in contemporary pedagogy. One of them is the idea of a school game. Assuming that the game is a part of every activity undertaken in organizational form frames, the author emphasizes the important role of the teacher. The teacher should be occupied with complex knowledge, skills, abilities and efficiency connected with competences in a game sphere. This should be understood as a perfect means of acquiring numerous activities which reflect the positive effects within pre-school education. The means for a teacher to achieve perfectionism is complex and difficult. The selection of games for the development of applied knowledge and skills requires perfectionism and continuous study.