

Playing – A Key Tool in the Process of Teaching / Learning Foreign Languages at Pre-School Level

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Abstract: More than ever, education has as a fundamental goal to prepare the child for life, for concrete, real, existing world challenges and future work-related, social and cultural life. The Romanian educational ideal aims to form an autonomous and creative personality able to anticipate the future, to transform it towards its previously anticipated direction, to discover and resolve situations together with others. Creativity continues to be an issue of research not because the efforts of the concerned academic community have been sterile, but because the creative potential is one of the most complex processes of the human mind, and educating it in order to trigger creative behaviors is one of the most daring and highest objectives. Using it in the very process of teaching might lead to reaching two important goals of education: teaching creativity itself and teaching other staff efficiently and effectively. Our paper uses as a case study the use of creativity within the foreign languages class for pre-school children, for which the process of speaking competences formation develops in parallel with foreign languages learning.

Keywords: creativity, foreign language learning, creative teaching, speaking competence, speaking competence formation.

1. Introduction

Whereas the contemporary world, and even more the world of tomorrow, is characterized by complexity, globalization, acceleration and generalization of changes, education endows the future adult for the complexity and change and develops abilities to discover and eliminate malfunctions, the ability to master them, to demonstrate liability for personal acts and independence for interaction and changes of ideas. All of these converging traits can be merged into what we call creativity. The educational ideal of Romanian school is aimed at the formation of the autonomous and creative personality, which is able to anticipate the future, to

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transform present into its previously anticipated direction, to discover and resolve situations together with others.

2. Analysing creativity as an attribute of thinking.

There is a growing number of recent psycho-pedagogical investigations calling upon *creativity*, based on the following arguments: the creative potential is one of the most complex and mysterious assets of the human being, and educating it in order to obtain manifestations of creative behaviours is one of the most daring and highest objectives; the creative potential differs from one individual to another, being higher or lower; the tasks facing the man during his life multiply, are amplified and diversified, requiring creativity, acting directly upon determining factors of creativity; everyone is requested to contribute to his/ her workplace in a creative manner; creativity can be assessed and educated at each human subject (for this purpose the process of instruction from kindergarten and school education can contribute in particular); the company, which will invest more in children's creativity, will win, in time, the world competition with other countries (on condition that such a country shall preserve inside the creative values available).

In these circumstances it is obvious that the investigation of creativity is not triggered by scientific, but by theoretical rationale, especially by needs of practical application.

Analysing creativity J. Dewey (1921) starts from its significance of attribute of thinking; G.W. Allport and P.E. Vernon (1933, 1937) highlights that the act of creation involves skills and even mental processes. Thus, these scientists use interpretations which go beyond unilateral images that reduce creativity to "endowment", "skill", "talent". For a long time it was considered that the possibility to produce the new, the exceptional is a quality and a precious gift possessed only by a small number of "chosen individuals" of providence. It was considered that this quality has the force of self-development that is achieved by itself. There was a widespread opinion that the creative potential can be developed, but only within the limits of a given genetic endowment; education can only refine latent forces determined by hereditary endowment.

On this background, J. Dewey and G.W. Allport suggested another vision of creativity - the human being has a certain potential, and the duty of education is to discover and develop it.

More than ever, education has as a fundamental goal to prepare the child for life, for concrete, real, existing world challenges and future work-related, social and cultural life. The Romanian educational ideal aims to form an autonomous and creative personality able to anticipate the future, to transform it towards its previously anticipated direction, to discover and resolve situations together with others. The issue has preoccupied many researchers in the field of creativity, psychologists, practitioners in the field of education, impressed by the amount of capacity that envelops the person and the behaviour of some individuals' creators. Creativity continues to be an issue of research not because the efforts of the concerned academic community have been sterile, but because the creative potential is one of the most

complex processes of the human mind, and educating it in order to trigger creative behaviours is one of the most daring and highest objectives. Thus, the vast majority of specialists consider creativity as a defining feature for individual existence and for the evolution of society. Each human being has, among other potentials, a creative potential. The issue of turning it into a personality trait is still controversial. There are some theorists who see the creative potential as a self-contained force, while others considered that the level of creativity depends only on the quality of creative actions.

Starting from the bi-factorial model of creativity developed by P. P. Neveanu (1996), who interprets creativity as „creative interaction of vectors (motivation, emotional experiences, creative attitude) with operational systems (logical, heuristic, imaginative creative processes, attitudes)”, researchers in the field of education have come to reveal the fact that the duty of the educator is to endow a child with the adequate tool storage starting as early as possible, with generative operations, but also to stimulate development needs, cognitive motivation, aspirations, and, why not, the practical non-conformism. However, the creative forces of pre-school children are formed and developed only in the ludic climate, hence the importance of play in preschool child creativity development.

3. The game as the fundamental activity of the child

The game is the main activity during which children manifest and exercise their creative potential, it is also the most favourable psychological climate of the preschool child to form harmonious abilities and competences. Through the game, the child has the opportunity to enhance the knowledge of the self, to fully establish the relationship between him / herself and the environment. The game is the fundamental activity of the child, an expression of the activity carried out spontaneously, for fun, loaded with rewards.

Our documentation, experimental and reflection efforts had the following objectives:

- Revealing the role of the development needs (present at the pre-school age) in enabling and stimulating creative potential;
- Stimulating the creative potential of children through various activities and educational games ever since kindergarten level;
- Highlighting the role of the adult in stimulating or hindering original behaviour in pre-school children;
- Developing a training program for creative development for preschool age children.

4. Reviewing the specialized literature on games and creativity

"What is the game and why do children play?"-are questions that scientists started asking themselves more than a century ago. In this respect, the Romanian psycho-pedagogical literature (Nicola 1981, Roşca 1981, Stoica 1983, Oprescu 1991,

Petru 1995, Popescu-Neveanu 1996) features numerous works dedicated to the concept and activity of playing.

According to the Romanian Encyclopaedic Dictionary, the concept of "playing" has multiple meanings. The word "playing / play" may have meanings related to fun, amusement, a figurative sense such as "playing with fire" can signify one thing out of the ordinary, "the game", or something casual, random such as "game of destiny". The term "play / playing" has certain peculiarities for each nation. Thus, for the ancient Greeks, the word "playing" refers to children's specific activities, to the characteristics of their activities. In Hebrew, the word "playing" corresponds to the concept of joke and fun, while for the Romans, "ludo" denotes the joy, enjoyment. In Sanskrit "kleada" means game, glee, while for the Germans, the old "spilän" denotes an easy, smooth, wave-like movement causing a great satisfaction. In the contemporary era, the word "playing" began to spread over a wide sphere of human action, which on the one hand, does not involve a lot of hard work, and on the other hand gives people joy and satisfaction. "The activity of playing as free and as ongoing individual pleasure, constitutes one of the essential ways of manifestation of the human spirit.

Maria Montessori believed that the game is child labour, attracting attention to the great effort that the child makes in the activity of playing. J. Piaget has done a thorough and extensive analysis with rich comments on the activity of playing. He believed that when a child is playing, he/ she sets in motion all his / her ability to rule and influence reality. E. Erikson considered the game as a tool through which children act out hidden feelings and ideas. Certain unpleasant or traumatic experiences, felt by children can be thus overcome.

The theoretical approaches regarding the activity of playing, are presented by Edouard Claparede's theories in child psychology and experimental pedagogy, meant to explain the essence and causality of what formed the basis of the game.

The activity of playing is supposed to generate within the child not instincts – as in animals - but movement or mental functions; child activity is expressed through the game. What is of interest (in relation to theory) is the way children manage to exercise movement and mental functions through activities similar to those of an adult, although they are still unable to know, to be conscious of the nature of the needs of adults. How and from where do children copy / imitate forms of playing games when no pre-forms or in-born instinct, no current necessity generates them? Claparede tries to answer considering that the type of game is determined on the one hand by the needs of the child, on the other hand, by the degree of his / her organic development and considers the activity of playing as an agent of development, expansion of the personality in the making.

5. Teaching foreign languages to pre-school children

Teaching foreign languages to pre-school children is one of the most challenging tasks of a foreign languages teacher. On the one hand, there are obvious

difficulties, as such young children are not able to read or write, therefore the only approach is the oral one. On the other hand, at this age the acquisition of pronunciation is characterized by a high level of accuracy.

As the world of the young learner aged 4-6 years is self centred (Peter & Chirimbu 2015: 28), the teaching-learning process can start from four fundamental structures related to the self, around which an imaginative teacher can build rich vocabulary clusters. The four main grammar structures that can be used in the teaching of foreign languages to young children are *I am*, *I have*, *I can*, *I like*, which, approached in a creative manner can lead to the acquisition of a rich vocabulary and high capacity of generating new content.

The first structure traces a delimitation between the child's self and the rest of the world around him / her. Sub-structures such as *I am* + *noun* (predicative expression), *I am* + adjective (predicative expression), *I am* + place adverbial can be taught at this age by means of images, drawings, cards, at an older age (over 6) the capacity of reproducing being doubled by the capacity of building one's own models.

I can is the other structure developing the idea of self-description. At very young ages the total physical response can successfully be used to teach vocabulary collocating with this modal structure (*I can run / I can jump / I can draw / I can swim / I can climb / I can write / I can speak English*, etc.).

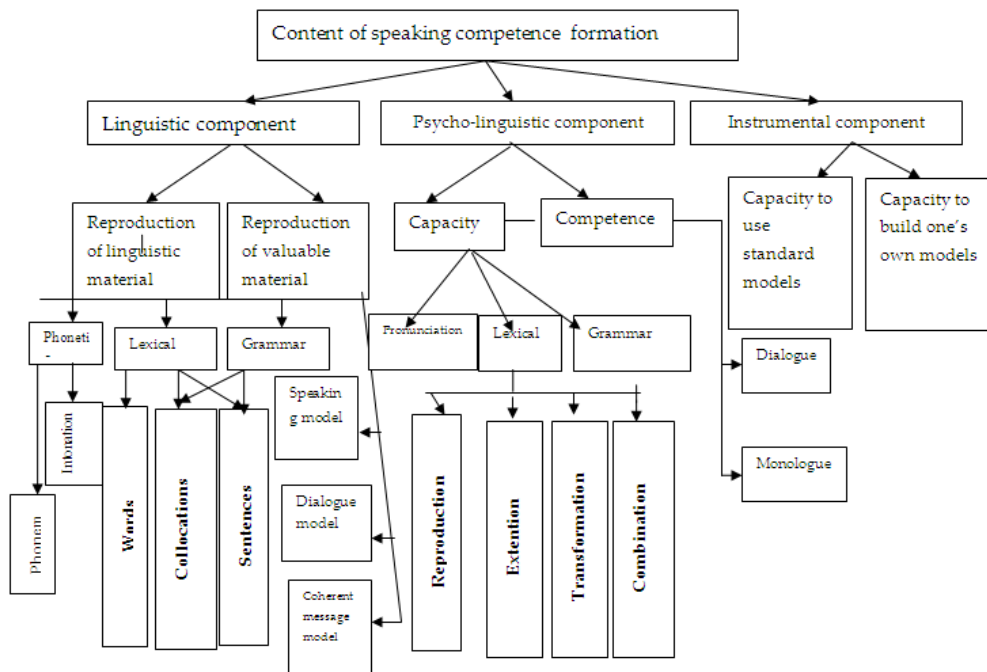


Figure 1. Content of speaking competence formation

As early as BE structures are taught, *HAVE* structures can be introduced as well, to which the vocabulary related to toys, objects related to the child's close universe (his / her house and room), animals is attached.

The fourth structure is recommended to be the last to be taught as the speaking competences of the child need to be fully developed in order not only to reproduce correct positive and negative statements of the *I LIKE* type but also to generate new content.

We strongly believe that in its early stages, the teaching a foreign languages should closely follow the formation of the child's speaking competences and more than that, act as a catalyst, an instrument enriching the child communicative experiences from the classes taught in his / her mother tongue.

6. Conclusion

The foreign languages teacher can integrate the speaking competences formation methodology among the most valuable tools to be used during the foreign languages class for young children in order to enhance creative teaching.

The use of speaking formation strategies are fundamental in the process of teaching foreign languages to young children in a creative manner and one of the main goals set by the instructor should be the enrichment and improvement of creative capacities in learners as a life-long learning process, from pre-school to tertiary levels (Dejica-Cartis, A. & D. Dejica-Cartis, 2013).

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