

The Role of Playing Games in the Professional Training of Teachers

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ABSTRACT: To correctly form and build one's personality, science has established a definitive contribution of three leading activities- role-playing games, study and labor. Can the positive aspects which playing games includes be utilized in the process of education? This manuscript delves into how games are used to professionally prepare pedagogy students for a successful teaching career. More specifically, it focuses on stages, motivation, positive aspects and polyvalency of role-playing in education. We studied students in a Master's course of pedagogy based on using the Studying Pyramid model. We used carefully selected tools to obtain results from examining an educational model that incorporates role-playing games during practical classes. Our results show that to avoid student-made mistakes and enhance student performance in a real educational environment, it is appropriate and necessary to provide educational training that involves role-playing games. We show that students' obtained knowledge gets reinforced and lasts longer when role-playing games are a part of their training. Finally, role-playing games during studying provide an enriched experience for pedagogy professionals, which ultimately leads to a more emotionally positive and fulfilling experience in their career.

KEYWORDS: игра, метод, студенти, педагогика, квалификация, компетентности

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I. INTRODUCTION

Life and science, related to it, have long ago uncovered the great importance of play in humans' life. There are games for kids, students, youths, adults. Irrespective of age, people are attracted to games, with its essence, specifics and psychology. Why are people never bored with playing? Why the punishment for the children in a family is always connected to anything else but playing?

For the correct formation and establishment of personality, science has found the decisive importance of three major activities – playing, studying and work. Each of them is essential to the respective age – childhood, school years and adulthood. If one of these activities does not correspond to the respective age, then the person will not develop into the direction, the purpose of education or values of the society this person lives in. This in no case means that each of these three major activities may not be present in people from the other age groups, but then they won't be leading.

The subject matter is playing. Can the positive aspects, specific for it, be used in the education/ learning process? Yes, of course.

The playing game in the professional training of teachers

Using play for the purpose of teaching is a matter discussed by the classical names in pedagogy. In contemporary times, there is almost no author who can resist the temptation to deal with this topic. Among them are: M. Demin (Demin, M.V. 1998), S. Shmakov (Shamkov, S.A. 1994), D. Elkonin (Elkonin D.B. 1978), S. Freitas and P. Mahard (Freitas S., P. Mahard. 2011) and more.

Play with its various types as a method of education and training of specialists in different areas, starts with promoting the business role-playing game for active learning in the higher education institutions in economics and engineering. Its use passes through a couple of stages and in the 90-ties of the 20th century, it is established as a method to form the reflexive and value management (De Freitas, S. 2006).

Nowadays, ever more spread are its varieties – role-play, didactic, planned, as a method implemented within the educational process in the universities. The great importance of play in children's life, but also in the vocational training of various professionals has been long established. For the purpose of the latter, there are specifically applied role-playing and/or business role-playing in the form of educational games or training for

professional skills development, e.g. managing, decision-making for increase of the professional qualification, and etc. The motivation, interest and emotional status of the participants determine the vast possibilities of the game and the achievement of goals in the different areas (Dickey M. 2011; Freitas S., P. Mahard. 2011).

Why role-playing? Because role-playing, since its inception from D. Moreno to date, has been implemented as a specific type of simulation game (Moreno, D, 2013). Although initially it was a method for psychotherapy, its value was quickly noticed, and these methods were adopted by the Harvard Institute for professional training of managers. There the students perform a specific part, through real activity in situations and conditions very close to the actual ones.

For the due and gradual formation of the professional and pedagogic qualities in students, they are required to take an active part in each of the following stages.

Stages:

1. Preparation stage of role play: the organization and its terms are determined, the duration is set; group and individual tasks are assigned; the students are allocated as players by roles (teacher and students, teachers and parents at a school parental meeting, teacher and colleagues at a pedagogical meeting, and etc.). Preparation connected to the specific role.
2. Role play performance stage: real play – assuming the role.
3. Conclusive stage: Analysis of role play – for the group as whole by the assistant, each student performs their own self-analysis and evaluation of their performance – individually, the assistant analyses each student's performance, highlighting the most frequent mistakes made; encourages the ingenuity and the acts of pedagogical mastery of students; other options are discussed for the behaviour/ approach demonstrated during the game.

Motivation

The students' motivation in the realization of each role play is emphasized by the fact, that they will perform learning activities in simulated school environment, close to the actual one. The more active they are in the game, and *consumed* they become in the role, the more experience they will acquire. It is desirable that each student assumes different roles, thus forming their skills and accumulating experience for variational situation. The use of role play in the pedagogical preparation of the students has a number of advantages for them.

Positive aspects of role-playing

Students are relieved of the tension associated with learning a new activity; students *rehearse* activities from the teaching profession; they interact with other participants in the game and gain experience, which they later transfer to school in educational work with students; learn to listen to other opinions, answer questions, keeping their composure and concentration; not to give in to emotional provocations; to express their own opinion, to assert a point of view, which they will have to do in a pedagogical council as future teachers; acquire the ability to organize and conduct a parent meeting as a pedagogical communication on a different level; manage their own behaviour by listening to their own voice and by allocating their attention to activities accompanying the learning and teaching process; while playing the student develops, and later demonstrates, the skill to motivate the *pupils* to take part in the lesson, explain in understandable terms, teach considering the significant pedagogical, psychological and methodical requirements, make analysis, partial summary and conclusions, take into account the students' behaviour in class without correcting the didactic goals and tasks of the lesson, and realizes that the topic might be one, but the lessons are as many as the classes they teach in.

Polyvalence of the game

1. Role play can be used in different subjects like age and pedagogical psychology, special pedagogy, inclusive education, psychology of family relationships, and etc. The correct organization and distribution of *roles* is crucial. Prior to the start of each game, it is necessary to define the organization and mode of conduction, the duration, distribution of roles, the individual and group tasks.
2. Playing enables the students to prepare for the performance of all necessary functions, required from the teacher while performing their school-educational activities, that is: educational, instructive, developing, stimulating, evaluation and diagnostics, all of which refer to the educational function of the teacher.
3. The educational is connected to the second aspect of their pedagogical activity. Through development function the individual cognitive psychic processes, their properties and the intellect of the students are stimulated.
4. The stimulating one means invoking a positive motivation and aspiration to master new knowledge and improve their pedagogical skills. And final, but not least, playing is a method of evaluation of knowledge, skills and habits of students.

Pyramid Model

E. Dail, expresses his ideas about learning in the so-called *Cone of Experience* (Molenda, M. 2004). This was in the far 1946. On this basis, later on, the Pyramid Model was created by a group of specialists working in National Training Laboratories (Lalley, J. P. & Miller, R.H. 2007). It includes seven components: Listening to – 5%; learning through independent reading – 10%; watching audiovisually presented educational content – 20%; watching a demonstration – 30%; participation in group discussion – 50%; practicing what you have learned – 75%; teach someone else – 90% (Table-1). Since its creation to date the Pyramid Model has been used by pedagogists from all over the world (Valley, JP & Miller, RH 2007, 64-79).

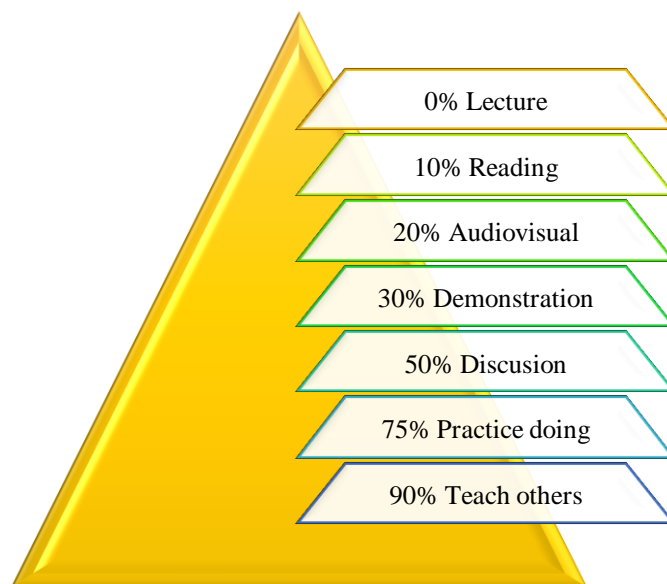


Table-1: Average student retention rates (Lalley, J. P. & Miller, R.H. 2007)

II. METHODOLOGY

Coming from the Pyramid Model, our idea is that all theoretical knowledge acquired by the student may have to be implemented in their current practical training during the internship, based on preliminary professional skills through the use of role play. Formulated as a goal, a small research was performed using as methodology the educational experiment with students, sophomores in master's program *Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy* at the Faculty of Engineering and Pedagogy - Sliven, Technical University of Sofia. The instruments included: a diary reflecting the main aspects of it (kept by the assistants implementing the study); a set of role-plays approved by the lead teacher and the assistants who implement it; a portfolio developed by each student. It was performed during the school year 2021/2022. The students were divided into two groups with 38 participants per group – experimental (first and third group by list) and control (second and fourth).

With the students in the experimental group, in the practical pedagogical training along with the other methods of academic teaching, playing was used as one of the methods, prioritizing role play. In the specific classes for laboratory sessions, role play with subjects from the pedagogical reality were performed. The play action conformed with the fundamental pedagogical rules *from near to far*, *from known to unknown* and *from simple to complex*. Each student received a specific role and task, and at the same time they had to comply with the common goals and tasks of the whole play. Practically, they were responsible both for the end result of their own activity and the outcome of the other students' activities. The sense of participation/complicity originates from the joint effort and communication, taken place throughout the play, from the desire the *playing behavior* to be as close as possible to the one in real life. This method stimulates students, mobilizes them for personal achievements, enables them to experience the satisfaction from success, increases their confidence. At the same time, the eventual dissatisfaction from the personal contribution, and the disappointment have less painful effect, because the pupils remained unaware of this.

The students from the control group were taught using the conventional way.

In the conclusive stage of the practical pedagogical training, the students were evaluated based on a couple of criteria: knowledge of educational content, command of the methods of teaching in the specific subject, emotional stability, pedagogical communication. All criteria were rated in five levels: low, under average, average, above average and high.

III. DISCUSSION

Play is not only a place and field of verification of the knowledge acquired, but it also helps each student realize that in the psychological – pedagogical work no ready-made or fixed recipes or models are acceptable(Westera W., 2008; Younis M., Loh C., 2011). On the grounds of the foregoing, we reckon that it is appropriate to pass through the educational stage of role play, in order to prevent mistakes of the students in the real school environment.

Thus, their knowledge will be strengthened and endure in time up to 75% (according to the Pyramid Model). When the latter is combined with teaching others, this percentage will mount up to 90%. Therefore, based on the principles laid out in the Pyramid Model, we include role play in the pedagogical training of the future teachers. It will enable them to obtain professional knowledge and experience in a natural way, with positive emotions and satisfaction.

Their knowledge and experience as professionals will be enriched and filled with positive emotions and satisfaction. This is due to the fact that the implementation of a lesson activity by students in an environment close to the real classroom gives them a varied pedagogical experience. Being a teacher, but in a *trial class* is a natural way to develop the appropriate skills in them before they stand in front of a class of students. Stepping into the role of a student is also enriching through experiencing their professional competencies. In general, a student could motivate students if he himself is motivated. This is achieved through role-playing in his own practical training. All aspects of teacher activity - educational, nurturing, developmental, stimulating and evaluative-diagnostic will develop positively.

IV. FINDINGS

The results obtained by the students in the two study groups are reflected and illustrated in Table-2, Table-3 and Table-4.

E - experimental group C-control group	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	C	E	K
Criteria evaluation levels	1 level		2 level		3 level		4 level		5 level	
Criteria:										
1. knowledge of educational content				2%	7%	20%	41%	37%	52%	41%
2. command of the methods of teaching in the specific subject				1%	5%	27%	43%	40%	52%	32%
3. emotional stability				7%	15%	32%	39%	41%	46%	20%
4. pedagogical communication				10%	3%	16%	42%	36%	55%	38%

Table – 2: Criteria evaluation levels

In the comparative analysis (Table-2, Table-3) of the results obtained: 93% of the students in the experimental group were rated in level 5 *high* and level 4 *above average* according to the criterion for command of educational content. In the control group, the score for reaching levels 4 and 5 was 78%. We can conclude that the introduction of role-playing games motivates students to achieve high results in mastering the learning content. At the same time, the share of the unmotivated seriously decreased. Regarding the second criterion for evaluation of command of the teaching methods in a specific subject, the comparison results were similar to the foregoing with some small differences - 95% of the experimental and 72% of the control group achieved ratings 4 and 5. From the analysis we consider that role playing as a method of teaching the students increases their professional preparation in a specific subject.

Total of 85% students from the experimental group achieved levels 4 and 5 with respect to criterion 3 *emotional stability*, and 61% of the control group achieved the same. Based on this, our conclusion is that the emotional stability of the students, who participated in the role play experiment was more significant than the said results in the control group. The same was obtained, in close range, also for the criterion *pedagogical communication*, for which 97% is the share of the students who achieved the rating of 4 and 5, and for the control group this result was 74%. The increase of skill is undisputed after application of role play in the teaching of students (Table-3).

The results of the two groups in terms of achievements at level 3 (Table-4) were completely different. The students from the control group had a higher achievement rate, as the average level 3 was achieved by twice as more students in the control group – 32% when compared to the experimental – 15% for criterion 3. Similarly, for criterion 2 – the difference was 25% in favour of the control group’s achievements.

Considering all criteria, the average level of achievements of the control group students was significantly higher than the experimental group. (Table-4).

The average results strongly decrease in the experimental group according to all criteria thanks to the significant increase of the number of students from this group with increased results.

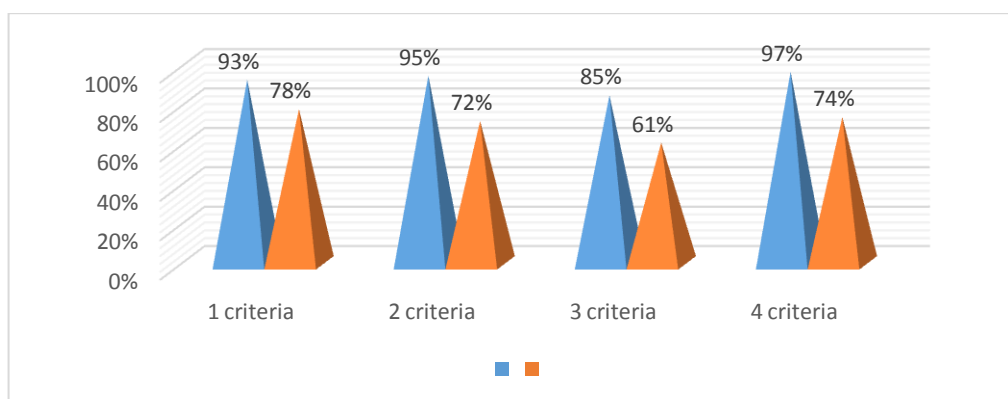


Table-3: Achievements in experimental and control groups - combined levels 4 and 5

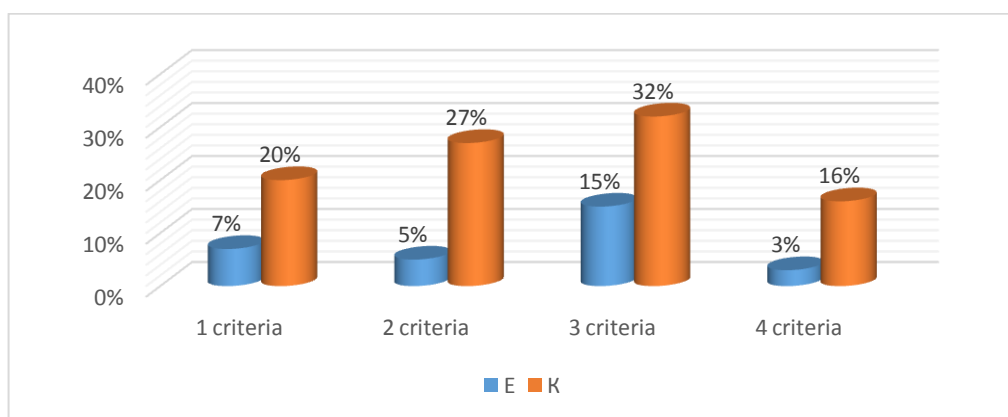


Table-4: Achievement up to level 3 in experimental and control groups

Thus, the minimum share of those students in the average level of results was explained. In all four criteria was established majority of the share of students from the experimental group who achieved higher evaluation ratings – 4 and 5.

The Impact of the role-playing games

In our opinion, the foregoing results are due to the fact that in and through play the students built and developed various professional skills, realized as competencies – communication skills, listening and conversing skill, analysis of opinions, resolution of problems, and implementation in practice of the combined adopted knowledge in a specific school environment, development of their creative and unconventional thinking. By playing, they applied and verified the knowledge obtained and were able to correct any inconsistencies and plan the improvement of their behavior as a whole. Through play, students assumed a specific role by performing actual activities, in conditions which were very close to the actual ones. Thus, they accumulated experience in the three play stages – preparation, execution and final stage of role play. This experience is very valuable for their future pedagogical realization. Through the teaching experiment the motivation of the students was increased and a prerequisite for the development of skills entirely in favour of the foregoing competencies was created.

V. CONCLUSION

The aforesaid, in no case concludes the significance and role of playing in professional training of future teachers. This is only one aspect of the vast possibilities of this method.

The use of each method in the educational process depends, at a great extent, on the teacher's competence. This is especially true for play. It can be used to combine the positive aspects of playing activity with the goals and tasks facing the students during their pedagogical practice, so that it becomes even more interesting.

The use of role play in the preparation of future teachers makes them personally complicit to the realization of the educational-instructive process and the results from it; increases their interest to learning as a whole, and to the pedagogical process specifically, increases the positive motivation for participation in it and their activity, stimulates their creative and unconventional thinking and substantiates the theory-practice relation; enables the students to experience situations close to the actual ones from the school reality in a short period of time.

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