VARIOUS DIDACTIC STRATEGIES USED IN THE ACTIVITY OF EDUCATING LANGUAGE AT PRESCHOOL AGED CHILDREN

Schaberger (Șarga) Ramona-Amalia
MA Interactive Pedagogies, UAV Arad
ramona.yellow@yahoo.com

Abstract

The didactic strategies represent a group of two or more methods and procedures integrated in an operational structure, involved in the teaching – practicing - assessing activity level in order to accomplish the general, specific and practical pedagogical objectives of the activity at high quality parameters.The didactic strategy usually takes the name of the method on which it is based pursuing an active communication, an heuristic knowledge of the studied phenomena, stimulating the child`s capacity to observe, to solve, to create problems, the reactive and proactive creativity of the educator, but also, with his/her help, of the learner.Identifying the suitable didactic strategies continues to be an open question at the level of pedagogical research involved in the context of innovative educational policies. From a curricular point of view their integration represents the premises for an efficient pedagogical projection in the teaching-practising- assessing process.

Key words: *learning skills, various strategies, education, language, preschooler*

1. *The Theoretical and Practical Documentation*
2.

Educational sciences and psychology made during the last decades important steps in deciphering the cognitive mechanisms, in decrypting the way the child learns, especially at preschool age. J. Piaget, Vîgotski and other predecessors of cognitive psychology have opened the way for fruitful research in this field, followed by contemporary psychologists and educationists such as J.S. Bruner, Shuell T.J, Rosch Eleanor.

My didactical experience entails me to state that the preschool period is one of rapid intellectual acquisitions, of development of the child`s thinking. He/she touches, combines, expresses- at the same time acts, thinks before acting and utters it. The preschool child is in full evolution of his/her thinking processes. He/she is an explorer investigating the world and its

characteristics. At young ages, the experiments lead to actions and reactions immediately noticeable. Only if the child experiments on his/her own having a stimulating material support will he/she manage to a superior understanding level of a concept. In other words, being required to discover on his/her own the answers to the questions and the problem situations, the child is given the chance to reinforce thus the knowledge acquired through his/her own experience and to possess the learning algorithm.

3. Presentation of the Researched Topic

The activities held in a kindergarten are a practice of the cognitive learning skills to the extent to which they are adapted to the traits and learning skills specific to a certain age. Only by knowing the child`s psychological characteristics and the personality of each child in particular, the kindergarten teacher can organise his/her learning experience so that the teacher facilitates the access to knowledge and intensifies his/her ability to learn new information, to form some essential skills for the intellectual work in his/her future school activity.

Starting with the premises that the promotion of a development strategy, centered on the child, on his/her individual particularities and potential, is determined by the active involvement of the kindergarten teacher in creating a climate which improves divergent thinking and develops the children`s creative attitude, therefore fulfilling the essential condition for the unfolding of a complex educational program which would prepare them for the social life, more and more demanding, in which they will have to integrate. For an adequate projection, the availability of the kindergarten teacher to try a new approach of the didactic process is necessary, as well as adapting and applying modern techniques, methods and means which lead to the targeted aim on condition that the specific working steps are respected, and the objectives proposed by the kindergarten teacher to be in accordance with the possibilities and the interest of the children.

I opted for this topic for its undeniable actuality. The varied strategies used in the activity of educating language have a high efficiency in stimulating the superior thinking operations of the children.

4. Presentation of the General Hypothesis

General Hypothesis

If we use traditional and modern methods and procedures as an educational strategy in the active cognitive learning processes of the children, this will have significant formative and practical effects on their language development.

5. *Objectives of the Research*
6.

Knowing the fact that during the preschool period, the child passes in steps from a situational, concrete thinking to the use of cognitive structures, which are more complex and more nuanced, I planned to ensure adequate instructive-educational activities which will increase their difficulty as children finish them, as they advance, in the understanding and the formation of new knowledge.

Because children learn best by actively exploring and interacting with the ones around them (either adults or children) and with different materials, I planned activities during which the children should be active participants, modifying and transforming the activity by themselves according to the stimulus and interests that are developed during the game, especially at a cognitive level. Knowing the fact that all children need to experiment with object and real cases before being able to understand abstract symbols, I will provide concrete, real and relevant materials for the child, ensuring thus many possibilities for investigation in the immediate environment, into the phenomena and events, with the purpose of forming and reinforcing the thinking processes.

In what concerns the experimental research, I have established the following objectives:
➢ Stimulating the active learning of the preschoolers by developing the thinking processes, especially aiming at the clarity of the acquired empirical concepts;
➢ A complex approach of the learning contents around a topic or a set of topics, during the activities which are meant to educate language;
➢ Close monitoring of the children`s reactions during the activities meant to educate language by using varied methods and procedures, with the aim of objectively determining the process of improving and making perfect the teaching activity.

7. *Research Design*

By seeing the child as a developing human being, the child will be treated respecting his/her age particularities, but also each child`s individuality, observing his evolution changes under the influence of the institutional environment of the kindergarten, but also outside it.

During the first semester (15 September 2014 – 31 January 2015) of the 2014-2015 school year, I organised and unfolded the following research stages:

1. The Pre-Experimental Stage (pre-test) (15 September- 31 January 2015) which consisted of:

a) Forming the samples: experimental and witness;

b) Documenting and summarising the information concerning psychological development of the children, from the two samples, at the end of the previous kindergarten class, respectively the "Little Group";

c) Deciding upon the research methods and means;

d) Devising and applying an initial test, which will determine the cognitive development level of the 4 year-old children (the starting point of the research)

e) Gathering the data after applying the initial evaluation.

2. The Stage of Experimental Intervention (1 October- 19 December 2014) which consisted of:

a) Devising an intervention program which exclusively includes activities having an integrative character and will target reaching the envisaged objective, proposed in the research;

b) Fixing some reference/behaviour objectives, which will be followed during the unfolding of the intervention plan;

c) Organising and unfolding the activities meant to educate language by using traditional and modern methods and means.

d) The Post-Test Stage (5-31 January 2015) consisted of:

e) Devising and applying a final test, which will determine the changes suffered by the two samples (experimental and witness samples);

f) Comparatively monitoring the evolution of the preschoolers involved in the research;

g) Analysing the data and interpreting the results, with the aim of confirming the research hypotheses.

8. *Research Sampling*

In forming the research samples I opted for independent samples, respectively two groups of children, the experimental and the witness one from the "Middle Group" A at the "Little Ant" kindergarten (full-time, 8 hours per day) in Arad.

After previously studying some specialised literature, in what concerns the appreciation of the psychological development of the preschool child (Chiriac I., Chiţu A., 1982) specific for the age gap I (3-5 years), I selected and adapted a psycho-diagnosis test of the thinking development level, which I applied during the first weeks of the school year.

The psycho-diagnosis test applied mostly verbally, was individually applied, in a stimulating psycho-affective climate, and in a limited time gap (between 3-5 minutes for the development of each task) writing the children`s answers to analyse them afterwards.

The test consisted of a set of oral evaluation activities, applied to the two groups: experimental (10 children) and witness (10 children), aged 4. The activities aimed at the language development field, following especially the thinking development level.

In this sense I have established the following representative items:

I1: - to pronounce correctly the onomatopoeia: meow, woof, mu, baa, honk, quack, cock-a-doodle-doo, and cluck;

I2: - to recite clearly, fluently a short poem (4-8 lines) that they know;

I3: - to demonstrate the understanding of the text by using different ways to retell the story (recounting, acting);

I4: - to express themselves in sentences, having a logical succession in presenting the actions shown by the images.

The answer for each item is assessed as follows:

➢ He/she answers correctly: 2 points

➢ He/she answers with help: 1 point

➢ He/she gives a wrong answer or does not answer: 0 points.

The data gathered has been recorded in the next tables:

Table 1.*Initial evaluation – results*
The experimental group

Nr. crt.	Children`s Names	1	2	3	4	Total points
1.	Ionescu A					*4*
2	Ionescu B					*4*
3	Ionescu C					*3*
4	Ionescu D					*4*
5	Ionescu E				(	*2*
6	Ionescu F	(				*3*
7	Ionescu G					*4*
8	Ionescu H					*4*
9	Ionescu I					*4*
10	Ionescu J					*4*

The witness group

N	Children`s Names					Total

r. crt.		1	2	3	4	points
1	Popescu A					4
2	Popescu B					3
3	Popescu C					2
4	Popescu D					4
5	Popescu E					3
6	Popescu F					3
7	Popescu G					4
8	Popescu H					2
9	Popescu I					4
1 0	Popescu J					3

7. Dependent variables and independent variables

The pedagogical research has intended to determine the clarity of the empirical concepts acquired during the unfolded activities for educating the language, which aim at stimulating the children towards an active learning. In this respect, I have introduced the independent variables which are the researcher`s responsibility, for studying the results which their action produces, results which represent the dependent variables and are specific to the subjects.

The independent variables consisted of:

➢ Informing the experiment group about the educational contents which will be studied;

➢ Using modern methods and means, during the activities for educating the language in order to stimulate an active cognitive learning of the children, but also in order to determine the clarity of the acquired concepts;

➢ The quantitative and qualitative control of the accumulated empirical concepts;

The dependent variables are:

➢ Enriching the informational volume of the children with different knowledge and notions;

➢ The capacity to transform information in knowledge;

➢ The development of the knowledge concerning the fundamental concepts by stimulating the interest towards what they want to learn;

➢ Improving their willingness to learn.

Knowing the fact that the variety of the models and means used determine the dynamism and the complexity of research, it gives us varied information and thus, closer to the reality of the manifestation of the targeted

phenomena. I have used in my research the direct observation, the test and the analysis of the products provided by the children`s activities.

8. *Unfolding the actual experiment*

After establishing the preliminary data, the objectives, the experimental and witness groups, the hypothesis and the research objectives, the application of the research experiment followed. Having as a basis the results obtained, which determined the level of cognitive development of the groups: experimental and witness (as it results from the table 2 a. and b. below), I proceeded to the pedagogical intervention on the experimental group, the other one continuing its activity in a natural way.

Table 2a.*The initial level of cognitive development*

Experimental Group	I1	I2	I3	I4	The initial level of cognitive development (total points)
10	9 45%	8 40%	10 50%	9 45%	36 45%

Table 2b.*The initial level of cognitive development*

Witness Group	I1	I2	I3	I4	The initial level of cognitive development (total points)
10	8 40%	7 35%	10 50%	7 35%	32 40%

The application of the initial test had the target of assessing the relation between the experimental and the witness group, of establishing the existing level at the time of the initiation of the pedagogical experiment. The level of the experimental and witness groups had relatively close results and in this case I could objectively observe the improving effects of the independent variable.

In devising and unfolding the intervention programme proposed as part of the experiment, I had in view the introduction of the independent

variables, at the experimental group, respectively of some changes expected, by using modern and interactive methods and by controlling the situation in an analytical, strict and precise manner; therefore the projection, realization, evaluation and adaptation of the didactical activity during the experimental group had as a target the principles and the demands of the new Curriculum for Preschool Educational System (2008) which targeted only the field of Language and Communication. Meanwhile, I applied traditional methods to the witness group used in educating the language.

During the intervention program I have organised activities meant for educating the language using modern methods. The activities meant to educate the language were held after daily scenarios with distinct themes, respecting the topic and the subtopic of the week. The diversity and variety of the materials encouraged the children to act, to observe, to think, to express their ideas, to analyse data, to make predictions. Out of the methods I have used frontally, with micro-groups and well as individually with the two groups experimental and witness, I have to mention the following: story with a given beginning, learning by heart, didactic games, retelling, examining a story, brainstorming, Venn diagram, the cube etc.

In the final stage of experimenting research, after the children have joyfully completed the intervention program I have proposed, at the end of the first semester I have devised and given a post-test, which included a set of tasks whose items comprise:

1. Describe the images, mention all the characters from the recognised stories and characterise them in a few words.

2. Choose three words connected to the given images and make up sentences with them.

3. Do you remember the phrases with which stories begin and end? Use them, together with the given images and expressions in order to create a story: "king/queen", "enchanted castle", "witch", "good fairy", "a king`s wedding" etc.

4. Give the correct answer to at least 5 riddles.

I will continue with the presentation of the results obtained after giving the individual test, to the witness and the experimental group.

Table 3. Final evaluation (post-test) – results

Tasks	Cognitive competences	Witness group (10)		Experimental group (10)	
		No. of subjects	No. of subjects	No. of subjects	No. of subjects

			who solved the task correctly	who did not solve the task	who solved the task correctly	who did not solve the task
.	*Describe the images, mention all the characters from the recognised stories and characterise them in a few words.*	Punguţa cu doi bani	6	4	9	1
		Scufiţa Roşie	7	3	10	0
		Cei trei purceluşi	7	3	9	1
		Albă ca Zapada	4	6	7	3
		Capra cu trei iezi	6	4	10	0
		Fata babei şi fata moşului	3	7	7	3
I.	*Choose three words connected to the given images and make up sentences with them.*		6	4	8	2
II.	*Create a short story using the expressions with which stories usually begin and end, together with the images and expressions given.*		4	6	7	3
V.	*Give the correct answer to at least 5 riddles.*		5	5	8	2

This test applied in the intermediary stage offered me data which analysed and interpreted helped me to form a real image about the influence of developing the thinking processes on the cognitive learning of the child, in the way he/she acquires and uses new concepts.

## 9. Analysis and the Interpretation of Results

By evaluating the children`s results from the two groups, on the correctness of the tasks solved, we can categorise them in a table as follows:

Table 4. Final test results – task correctly solved

Tasks	I.	II.	III.	IV.
Experimental sample	52	8	7	8
Witness sample	33	6	4	5

The solved tasks were considered to be those solved correctly and promptly, the hesitation and insecurity moments were considered to be partially solved, and therefore they are in the category of those who did not solve the task.

By using the statistic method I have represented the results in a graph.
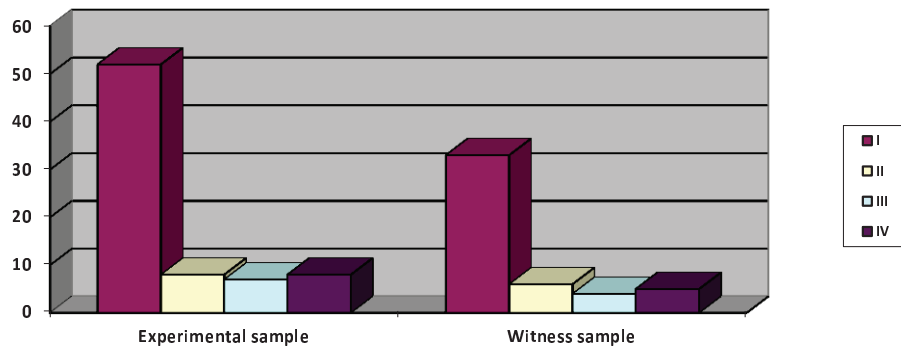
The group of children to whom the independent variables were applied have shown positive changes, by the clarity of the acquired concepts during an active learning, and the results of the above test have reinforced the conviction that modern, interactive methods and means used with preschoolers lead to changes of the cognitive and meta-cognitive abilities in the competences and performances of the learners. We present the distribution curves obtained after applying the test with the four items.

Table 5. Cognitive behaviour level – after the final testing

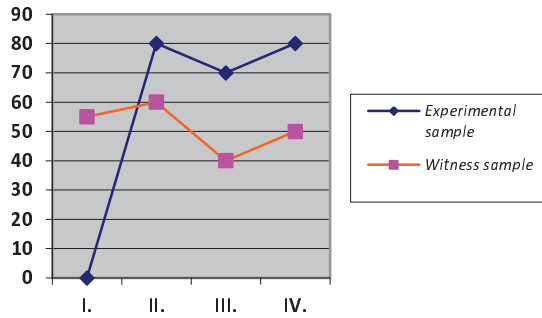| Percentage / tasks	I.	II.	III.	IV.
Experimental sample	86,6%	80%	70%	80%
Witness sample	55 %	60%	40%	50%

Fig. II The Final Level of Cognitive Development

Observing the two distribution curves of the results of the tasks, we realise that they are almost parallel, but the difference in percentage which varies between them shows the progress made by the experimental sample, but also the fact that the preschoolers from the witness sample have the information taught using traditional methods and means.

After applying the final test, we can observe that, by being stimulated by the new approach to the activities meant to educate language, by directly implying the children in their cognitive learning, children who at the initial test had poor results, at the final one, they had good results, better than our expectations. This proves that if you help the children with the adequate procedures for the teaching-learning process, the children make visible progress.

Based on the results gathered after the experimental research and after introducing modern, interactive methods and means as a learning strategy through research and discovery, after reconsidering the role of the kindergarten teacher and the child`s responsibility at preschool age as a very good organisational, unfolding and evaluation strategy in the educational process which takes place in the kindergarten.

9. Conclusions

Through the activities aimed at educating the language held with the children we bring a plus of easiness and more coherence to the teaching-learning process by using modern and traditional methods and means, named didactic strategies.

By organising such activities I have stimulated the cognitive development of the preschoolers offering them the possibility to complete answers, to make analogies, to discover by experimenting on their own, to

anticipate and positively react to new ideas, to correlate their new learning experiences with the ones they previously had, ensuring thus the strong acquisition of knowledge and therefore a better clarity of the learned concepts.

The active accomplishment of the didactic activity in order to reach the aims which the educational subjects intended to reach, imply the combined use of some methodological sets with teaching methods, seen as their auxiliaries.

It is important to mention in this case that the learning depends greatly on the methods used which become responsible mainly for the obtained results, for their level and for the efficiency of the learning process. The research concerning the application of the different methods, have revealed the attainment of the essential differences in the field of results, differences which confirm the superiority of some methods to the others.

Another necessity in making the teaching process more efficient is the frequent use of some methodological sets favouring the methodological dominant. No teaching situation can coincide with another one because each child lives in his unique way the act of learning and because there are various forms of representing reality, according to the intellectual and affective evolution of those involved in the process. This range of situations involves a pluralism of methods and varied means of organising the activity meant to educate language.

By creating a universe of pedagogical diversity, the effect is guaranteed because it dismissed monotony, it makes the group work more attractive, it diversifies the teacher-learner relationships, it enriches the kindergarten teacher`s experience offering him/her the possibility to make the right choice for a certain learning situation or another.

At the moment, maybe more than ever, there is an emphasis on the promotion of some self-teaching, self-learning methods with the aim of reaching a permanent education, which easies the discovery of the targeted individual perspective, at the same time making necessary the existence of the formative-educative tendency and not just of the instructive one.

As a kindergarten teacher I wish to mention that the learning during the activities meant to educate language had a playful trait. The children were supported in their attempts favouring the active involvement in the formation and reinforcement of their own knowledge, which had a cognitive nature, developing as much as possible their own thinking processes. The children are also encouraged to believe in their own strengths, to become aware of

their utility. Thus they try to show how responsible and competent they can be.

It has become even more obvious that by using various methods, the children work independently and the kindergarten teacher is like a guide, it is the one who offers advice or help, when it is necessary, but most of the time, the children decide how to deal with a certain problem. They learn to use the skills previously learned and develop connections between these competences and the way they can be used in the world and outside the kindergarten group. In addition, the children have the tendency to become more and more interested in the topic, when they feel they are actively involved in the learning process.

In conclusion, by using interactive methods while educating the language, I had the child search, summarise, associate, compare and last but not least to take out of the drawers of their mind the cognitive knowledge, no matter the field of activity in which the knowledge was acquired

Bibliography

Ausubel, D., Robinson, Fl. (2005), *Învăţarea în şcoală. O introducere în psihologia pedagogică*, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică Bucureşti

Ciauşu, E., (nr. 2/2007) I*ndividualizarea învăţării din perspectiva abordării interdisciplinare a activităţilor*, în Revista Învăţământului Preşcolar, Bucureşti, Editura C.N.I. Coresi S.A.

Ciolan, L. (2008) *Învăţarea integrată –fundamente pentru un curriculum transdisciplinar*, Iaşi, Editura Polirom

Cristea, Sorin (2006), *Curriculum pedagogic*, Bucureşti, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică;

Cucoş, C. (2014), „*Pedagogie*" – ediţia a-III-a, Editura Polirom, Iaşi

Dughi, (2007), *Elemente de psihologie educaţională*, Editura UAV, Arad;

Gerghit, Ioan (2008) „*Sisteme de instruire alternative şi complementare-stiluri, strategii*", Editura Polirom, Iaşi

Ilica Anton, Herlo Dorin, (2007), *Aspecte metodologice privind cercetarea pedagogică*, Editura Universităţii „Aurel Vlaicu", Arad;

Ilica, Anton, (2005), *Metodica limbii române*, Editura Universităţii „Aurel Vlaicu", Arad;

Ilica A., Preda V, Cozma J., Soriţeu E.,Kelemen G. (coordonatori), (2005), *Didactica învăţământului preşcolar*, Editura UAV, Arad;

Ilica, Anton (2007), *O pedagogie modernă*, Editura UAV, Arad;

Ilica, Anton (2008), *Comportament şi cultură organizaţională*, Editura UAV, Arad;

Ilica, Anton (2008), *Metodologia cercetării experimentale*, Arad, Editura Universităţii „Aurel Vlaicu";

Kelemen, Gabriela (2007),*Copilul cu dificultăţi de învăţare*,Editura UAV, Arad;

Knud, Illeris (2014) „*Teorii contemporane ale învăţării*", Editura Trei, Bucureşti

Moise, Constantin, „*Metodele de învăţământ*", în Cucoş, Constantin (coord.), (2005), Psihopedagogie, Editura Polirom, Iaşi;

Muşata, D. B. (2014) „*Instruirea interactivă*", Editura Polirom, Iaşi

Nacşu, Ioan (2015) „*Metode şi tehnici de învăţare eficientă*", Editura Polirom, Iaşi

Stan, Liliana (2014) „*Pedagogia preşcolară şi şcolarităţii mici*", Editura Polirom, Iaşi

Schwart, Gheorghe (2006), *Filosofia comportamentală din perspectiva psihologiei transversale*, Editura UAV, Arad;

Schwart, Gheorghe; Kelemen Gabriela (2008), *Psihologia copilului*, Editura UAV, Arad;

Voiculescu Elisabeta (2008), *Pedagogie preşcolară*, Editura Aramis, Bucureşti;

http://www.gwu.edu/~tip/bruner.html

http://psychology.berkeley.edu/faculty/profiles/e**rosch**1999.pdf

www.britannica.com

www.universal**preschool**.com

www.answers.com

pshihopedagogie.blogspot.com

www.edtechblog.org