



*Original Contribution*

**THE ROLE-PLAY TRAINING AS A MEANS AND METHOD OF  
PERSONAL EXPRESSION OF THE STUDENTS IN THE FOURTH  
GRADE IN THEIR TRAINING IN “STYLE AND SKILLS OF LIVING”**

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**ABSTRACT**

Object of research – the simulative training as a method in the training in Lifestyle and Skills in the Fourth Grade. The aim of the research was to determine the contents of this method in the context of the well-known classical methods based on games – the role-play and the plot-role-play.

**Key words:** the simulative training; method; personal expression; education.

**INTRODUCTION**

The habit to reduce pedagogical interaction to simply giving instructions to the students for individual practical activities is a major fault in the training in style and skills of living. A lot of malformations comes from it, one of which has a fundamental importance, i.e. the student remains in a passive position in the course of education. The putting into practice of the productive strategies of training revealed some potential possibilities for a change not only in the philosophy of textbooks, but also in the philosophy of pedagogical interaction (1). The teacher is more and more often turning into a collaborator for the students in the solving of technical and technological problems. The looking for information, the process of discussing it in the context of realising it, the finding of solutions, the organising of the activities for its realisation and the assessment of the accomplished tasks, are only a part of the possibilities for expression of each student in the process of education. The team form of interaction finds a more profound place in education (2). Nevertheless, today we can still establish the weak connection between practical skills and the importance for the students' problems and actions. Education is still realised as an individual gaining of theoretical knowledge, and practical actions following a certain pattern. Group work does not develop into teamwork. A differentiating

of the activities, suggesting cooperation of the individual expressions of the students, is still not being made. And this, in the methods of training is fundamentally important for the professional and personal expression of the students. The skill for teamwork is one of the major skills for personal expression. Work in a team on projects based on real or simulated problematic situations, as well as finding the solutions by rendering an account of the progress of each participant of the team, affects the whole society. This tradition is now being enriched by the consolidating role of the different characteristic features of each different person, and also by his initiative to find, use and interpret the information in order to be able to solve creatively a certain task. Provided this method is productive in the developed countries, can it not be used in our Bulgarian schools as well? Can we not use the natural predisposition of children to playing games, as an effective method of training? These are some of the questions, which determine the choice of the **object of research** – the simulative training as a method in the training in Lifestyle and Skills in the 4-th grade. **The aim of the research** is to determine the contents of this method in the context of the well-known classical methods based on games – the role-play and the plot-role-play.

Today, we are all aware of the fact that the new informational environment and surroundings are reflected in the behaviour of children. More and more often, while playing computer games, they come upon a great deal of visual information and they have to adapt it

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to their own understanding. They more often than not have to use images rather than real objects and living situations. This has its faults, for example distancing from the essence of things, easy manipulation of reality through creating the most useful for the time being image and through exchange of advertising visions. Somehow or the other, we have to have in mind the different hierarchy in the information channels and use them for the purpose of education – just those of them which would ensure the highest rate of interaction. Since children mainly watch TV, films, video, and play computer games, this means that these are the forms in which we have to organise our educational messages for the children. The requirement for them is to be personally engaging, amusing, and to lead to the development of the pupils' personal qualities and skills.

One of these forms is the use of the children's natural predisposition to playing games, provided that the term "playing" will have a new meaning. The game /playing/ as a method and means of education, the playing but not of a game – of a role, whose main purpose is through pretended actions to prepare us for necessary, and important for us, living situations, as opposed to "playing a game". And one more important thing – **the simulation**, which has the sense of role-play training determining the possibility for personal expression of each student in the process of training.

Teachers are familiar with the contents of the didactic games. In pedagogical literature the difference between the role-play and the simulation play is still not made clear, and that is why they are usually taken as one and the same thing – and usually confused. The main reason for this is the fact that a didactically-oriented game with a certain subject-matter and playing contents can be defined both as a role-play and as a simulation. For instance, each of the book-games, computer games and role playing games, which children play, suggest some activity on the basis of a choice of somebody else's personal identity. The game is actually the acceptance of an identity of interaction from the position of a certain personage. "Personage" is a term describing the character whose role you play. His life is on the level of pseudo-reality. These forms of behaviour are to a great extent also stages of the development of the Role Playing Game Genre. These stages in the development of the personage are different according to the rate of freedom that he has. It is ensured by the

author of the book or by the computer specialists defining the rules of the Worlds. The most free are those who play the Role Playing Games in their most pure kind. In them there are stories about characters and events, which are completely a creation of the imagination of the players. But here, too, there is A System of rules and a Leading character; both of them ensure the logic and the unexpected situations of the surroundings in which the action takes place. The characteristic features of the personages, as well as the preliminary contracts and agreements between the players are written under the form of various lists and graphs in a book and thus the rules of the System are fixed. The system gives chances to the players to play different roles and to enact in the virtual space their lives. A sequence of several connected adventures in one and the same World /e.g. "Dune", "Star Wars"/ is called a Session (2, 66). While each of the players retells the adventures of his personage or the Leading Narrator reflects the changes in the environment or surroundings, one constantly has to refer to the book, hence the name of the genre in Bulgarian.

Thus, we can reach to the conclusion that Role Playing is a simulative game – somebody else's life is presented as your life. But **it is also possible to simulate your own behaviour** in some given, unreal for the moment conditions. Therefore, simulation is a broader term. In it the **emphasis falls on the connection between all components of the simulative reality**, while role-playing is focused on the behaviour of the characters (8). Simulation game, as a method in training, stems from the role-playing and develops it further. This happens in the context of role-playing of different situations towards which the player expresses his own position, personal attitude or personal opinion concerning all future interactions. The simulative game is a **simulation of the period of existence of an entire situation**. When the participants imitate a non-existing reality, they can play different roles too. Then, they go out of the borders of a short theatre episode and preserve themselves by going through a firm sequence of interrelated episodes. There is a firmer and a more lasting relationship between the characters and the circumstances in which the action takes place. Their actions are directed not only by the socially formulated standards of behaviour of the character, but also by **the individual level of knowledge of the player /knowledge, understanding, attitude, judgement, competence, skills,**

**abilities/**. The players have to take in mind not the single-aspect characteristics of the interlocutor /e.g. customer-seller; reporter-guest; leader-participant/, but to be able to be oriented in his intentions, social and cultural status, even in his emotional state. In their reactions the participants have to take into consideration the story of the entire situation, but not only some previous retorts/lines. A whole bit of the reality in which a lot of characters, circumstances and events are interwoven, is being re-created.

The choice of such verbal expressions corresponding to the behaviour of the character but not following closely the defined scenario, is an important characteristic feature of the behaviour of the players. In this relation, simulation is a result of the player's own personal decisions, attitude and judgements. The personality is involved at a higher level. Even if he is playing a role, the participant involves his personal ego. Simulation can be a lasting role-play, but different situations can be played as well, in which each of the participants follows a certain role, and that's what we usually call "Role Playing Game".

The activities concerning the **structuring of the situation** depend on the age of the participants and the complexity of the situation. It is necessary for the teacher to present the situation as a sequence of actions, which the participants have to realise, as different parts of the whole. For example: a TV studio, showing a live TV show. This helps the students organise their interactions during the different stages of the show (3). A plot/scenario is built on the basis of discussion and acceptance of the common scene. In it, the suggested lines and actions of the participants are inserted. Their defining is accomplished through analysing the interests and preferences of the players in their possible characters. In accordance with the characters the number of the participants, their positions, the circumstances in which they have to act, the status of each character, the possible changes of the surroundings, e.g. bringing new information which will change their positions /the Open-Ended Scenario technique, Clark 1980, 55/, formulating the problems facing each character and each group in which the characters plays a role, etc. For reaching a better understanding a strategy for the behaviour of the character can be defined (4, 93). If possible, the behaviour of definite groups of characters in the context of a shared aim is defined, too. An attempt is made the intentions and expectations of the

participants to be clarified and specified. An important feature of the expressions is the sticking to the concept of belonging of the participant to a definite group.

The work on the scenario is actually the defining of strategies for possible behaviour, which is always interactive. (scenario: scripts of the conventionalised plans, see 4, 93).

The planning of the situation defines the frames of behaviour, and behaviour itself is dynamic and is defined by the common idea of the entire situation.

When the scenario is made, the criteria for success in the characters' behaviour are also fixed. This refers mostly to their verbal messages. The speech of the characters should correspond to the characteristic features of the players, it should be understandable, it should correspond to the expectations of the other participants, to the situation, to the speech of the characters of the same group; improvisation suggests reaching a bigger "density" of the role, etc. (4, 15-23). According to Rober de Bogrand, real intelligence is in this "small quantity of productive skills to apply and adapt to the given task" (4, 208). By balancing between typology and improvisation, simulative games develop namely it.

In conclusion, we can state, that the basic difference between simulative and role play is that it is an activity of the player himself, who presents his idea of the character and **follows his own strategy for the solving of a problem by using his knowledge, skills, competence, social experience in the frames of an entire situation**. While role-play is an activity in which the student looks for solutions and expresses his opinion only in the frame of the role/part that he has to play.

Simulation is an imitation playing pattern of interrelation between the characters in an imaginary situation. Through it, conditions for personal expression corresponding to the individual competences of the players are created. This stimulates the individual progress; adaptational patterns of behaviour and skills for acting corresponding to expected and changing conditions are worked out.

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