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## QUEST GAME AS A FORM OF DIGITALIZATION FOR CHILDREN'S COLLABORATION IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

**Abstract:** Currently, there are numerous diverse gaming technologies aimed at the comprehensive and harmonious development of preschoolers. However, despite their variety, modern educators are expected to provide innovative solutions in the creation and implementation of gaming technologies. For this reason, contemporary practitioners and researchers are developing new formats for implementing such a technology as quest games in the context of the digitalization of the educational environment in kindergartens. This article addresses the issue of using new formats for quest games, as well as the methodology for creating and conducting this technology with older preschool children.

**Аннотация:** В настоящее время существует множество разнообразных игровых технологий, направленных на всестороннее и гармоничное развитие дошкольников. Однако, несмотря на их разнообразие, от современных педагогов ожидают инновационных решений в создании и внедрении игровых технологий. По этой причине современные практики и исследователи разрабатывают новые форматы внедрения такой технологии, как квест-игры, в контексте цифровизации образовательной среды в детских садах. В данной статье рассматривается вопрос использования новых форматов квест-игр, а также методика создания и проведения данной технологии с детьми старшего дошкольного возраста.

Play activities are recognized as key for preschool children due to their age-specific characteristics. At each stage of development, children perceive the surrounding world differently. Our research focuses on older preschoolers, as this is the period when children develop self-regulation skills, active cooperation with peers, self-demanding attitudes, and an increased interest in interacting with both peers and adults.

According to the definition from the dictionary of developmental and pedagogical psychology, play is a type of non-productive activity whose motivation is focused not on the outcome but on the process itself. There are numerous play technologies used in kindergartens; however, in our view, quest games remain insufficiently studied. Quest games are an effective tool for developing creative thinking and social skills in children. With the advancement of digitalization in education, these games are reaching a new level, becoming more accessible and engaging.

One of the key directions in modern education is the learner-centered approach, which prioritizes the upbringing and development of the child's personality, stimulating their cognitive interest and research activity in various spheres of life. In this regard, the need for integrating innovative technologies into educational, developmental, and upbringing processes is growing.

It is crucial for educators to diversify activities and games to maintain preschoolers' interest. Today's children are not easily impressed by simple things like the appearance of a new toy, which necessitates the search for new approaches, forms, and techniques to sustain their engagement in learning. This technology not only helps organize the educational process in an exciting way but also provides an opportunity to present material creatively while adhering to the principle of accessibility.

The history of quest games began in the late 1970s in the United States. The game was originally designed for tourists in one of the states. Quests were a kind of puzzle game where participants solved

various tasks and puzzles to reach the finale. Initially, quest games were predominantly used in the computer sphere, developed by programmers who released game series. However, by 2007, this technology began to be widely applied in real-life settings in Asian and European countries, and since 2013, in Russia. Initially, the term "walking games" was used in Russia, as the main goal of the tasks and puzzles was to move through stations and obtain keys.

Before creating a quest game scenario, it is important to choose the type of game itself:

- **Linear** (where tasks are arranged in a single sequence, with one station following another);
- **Problem-solving** (children are presented with a problematic situation and must independently find solutions);
- **Circular** (similar to the linear quest format, but in this case, participants start from different points).

In kindergarten, a quest is a kind of game-based project-journey implemented by a team. The quest involves solving problem-based tasks with elements of role-playing. An educational quest encourages participants to independently search for solutions to emerging problems, directing them toward finding new, creative solutions. Completing intellectual tasks within a specific theme requires clear and prompt decision-making, a sufficiently high level of stress tolerance, and the ability to work in a team, recognize the team's ultimate goal, and understand the results of collective effort.

**Linear Quest** involves a game built on a chain of riddles and puzzles. After solving one task, participants receive the next one, and so on until they complete the entire route. The most widely used quest game is "12 Notes."

In a **Storm Quest**, players receive a main task and a list of points with clues but independently choose their path to solve the tasks.

A **Circular Quest** is essentially the same as a linear quest but arranged in a circle. Teams start from different points, which will serve as their finish line.

Quest tasks have a wide range: riddles, puzzles, mazes, spot-the-difference images, logical problems, etc.

Every quest has its own structure:

- **Introduction** (defines the game's storyline, its main task, and the roles of participants)
- **Tasks** (game stages, questions for participants, role-based assignments)
- **Execution Order** (game rules, bonuses, penalties)
- **Evaluation** (game results, prizes)

There can be many ideas for quests, but the most important thing is to implement them correctly. The scenario must be clear, detailed, and thoroughly thought out. All scenarios for quests must meet general requirements:

- The first task should not be complicated; its goal is to engage the player in the process and show them they are capable of succeeding.
- The artifacts and items used should strictly match the game's theme and storyline.
- Tasks in the quest scenario must be clear, not causing boredom or fatigue.
- It is also necessary to think through all risks, eliminate repetitions, ensure player safety, and consider the diverse nature of the children.

A prize can serve as motivation to achieve the set goal.

**Organizational Moment:** The introductory speech of the leader aims to shift children's attention to the upcoming activity, increase interest, and create an appropriate emotional atmosphere. This stage includes:

- Forming groups of children
- Discussing the rules of the quest
- Distributing maps and guides that outline the game route

It is very important to convey to children that the final result depends on the collective effort. If one team member struggles, the rest of the team will have to start over or help them.

**Educational Quests** take place on the kindergarten premises or indoors. Various options can be used to create the route:

- **Route Sheet** (this may simply list the stations and their locations in sequence, or include riddles, puzzles, or encoded words, where the answer indicates the next destination)
- **Magic Ball of Thread** (notes indicating destinations are sequentially attached to a ball of thread. As the children unwind the ball, they move from station to station)
- **Map** (a schematic depiction of the route)
- **Magic Screen** (a tablet or laptop displays photos of the locations participants must visit in sequence)
- Participants may learn their next destination after completing a task at a station (from the organizer, through the answer to the task, or by finding a hidden clue in the designated area), etc. If several teams participate, the zones and routes for each team are organized in such a way as to avoid their paths crossing.

Completing each stage allows the team of players to move on to the next stage. The team receives missing information, hints, equipment, etc. The highlight is that, by completing one task, children receive a clue for the next task, which is an effective means of increasing physical activity and motivational readiness for learning and exploration. Additionally, while completing tasks, children earn bonuses (tokens) or receive penalties.

Here are some ideas for quests suitable for preschool-age children:

**Pirates' Treasure Hunt Quest** Divide the children into teams and give each team a map indicating the location of the hidden treasure. At each point marked on the map, set up small tasks, such as finding specific items or solving riddles. Once a team completes a task, they receive a new clue and move forward. At the end of the quest, the teams must gather all the clues to find the treasure.

**Lost Animals Quest** Divide the children into teams and give each team a list of lost animals. Place various tasks around the playground related to finding specific animals. When a team finds an animal, they must bring it back to the base and receive a new task. At the end of the quest, the teams must find all the lost animals and return them to the base.

**Rescuing the Princess Quest** Organize the children into teams and explain that their mission is to rescue the princess by completing various tasks. Set up challenges along the team's path, such as overcoming obstacles, solving puzzles, or finding keys. After completing each task, the team receives a clue about their next step. At the end of the quest, the teams must find the princess and bring her to safety. Remember to adapt the tasks and the complexity of the quest to the children's level and age.

The choice of a storyline can be dictated by a calendar or project theme, as well as by the resolution of a specific pedagogical issue (e.g., helping children identify a cognitive task). When selecting tasks, it is important to consider their accessibility, logical coherence (systematic connection between tasks), the variety of children's activities during the quest, time constraints, and, of course, safety.

Searching for clues via notes requires minimal preparation and almost no involvement from a facilitator. In its simplest form, children receive a note indicating a hiding spot. In that hiding spot, they find another note with the location of the next hiding spot. Moving from one hiding spot to another, they eventually reach the final treasure. But what if a child cannot read?

There are several ways to address this issue. For example, a note could include a room plan with a cross marking the next hiding spot (although children must be taught how to use a map in advance). Alternatively, you could draw the hiding spot, include its photograph, or provide a picture of a similar object. Hiding spots in the quest should be designed so that each note must be sought and retrieved.

The success of any quest depends on the role of the adult, who guides and coordinates the children's activities without assisting them in solving the tasks. The mechanism of solving puzzles lies in allowing children to feel free while playing. When given a certain degree of freedom in action and thought, children can achieve the desired outcome with minimal adult involvement. The teacher's role is to subtly guide the children's reasoning in the right direction without directly providing the answers. Quest technology has several distinctive features: the educational task is implemented through gameplay and is exploratory in nature; it purposefully motivates the child's emotional and intellectual activity. The teacher's role in a quest game is organizational: they define the educational objectives of the quest, develop the storyline, evaluate the children's activities and the final outcome, and organize exploratory and research-based educational activities while engaging all participants in educational relationships.

During the quest game, the child independently sets a cognitive goal, aiming to solve a puzzle. This process activates their experiences, knowledge, and thinking skills. It fosters self-awareness ("What can I do?") and self-determination ("I can solve one or several tasks proposed in the quest"), which serves as a mechanism for individualization.

There are also many modern varieties of quest games today: text-based, educational, graphic, and others. With the development of digital technologies, web quests conducted online have emerged. For example, the "QuestGarden" platform, created by Bernie Dodge, hosts over 30,000 web quest projects. Dodge suggests classifying web quests based on content (mono-projects, integrated projects), duration (short-term, long-term), and location (online or offline).

In the context of the digitalization of the educational environment, quest games have become more accessible and appealing to children. They can be conducted in both traditional offline formats and online settings. One example of modern quest games is the use of mobile applications that include video instructions, audio clues, and interactive elements, making the gaming process even more engaging.

Additionally, quest games can be integrated with elements of virtual reality. For instance, children can participate in virtual quests, exploring different locations and solving tasks using VR technology. It is essential that such formats are adapted to the age-specific characteristics of the children. The tasks should not only be engaging but also easy to understand.

Practical experience from educators demonstrates that the use of quest games effectively promotes the learning and development of collaboration skills among preschool children, opening new horizons for their knowledge and creativity.

While quest games are an effective tool for teaching and developing children in preschool settings, they also have certain drawbacks.

First, such games may be too complex for young children, especially if they lack experience with technology. This can lead to difficulties in understanding the tasks and, consequently, reduce the effectiveness of the game.

Second, the use of technology in preschool institutions sometimes raises concerns among parents. For example, they may worry that their children will spend too much time in front of screens or encounter inappropriate content.

Third, organizing quest games may require significant financial investment in purchasing equipment and software. This can pose a serious challenge for preschools with limited resources.

Thus, these key drawbacks of quest games in the context of preschool education should be noted. However, with proper organization, adaptation of tasks to the age and interests of the children, and careful guidance from educators, these drawbacks can be significantly minimized. This allows for the advantages of this technology to shine.

A quest game provides an excellent opportunity for the integration of various educational domains. During the game, knowledge and skills from different areas of activity can be combined. For instance, the quest can include tasks involving solving math puzzles, reading and interpreting texts, exploring interesting facts, and much more.

The quest game also allows for the integration of different types of activities and forms of working with children. During the game, they can work individually or in groups, solving tasks and puzzles together. This helps develop communication skills, learn teamwork, and collaboratively seek solutions. An essential part of a quest game is the interaction between adults and children. Adults can act as guides and facilitators, directing children on their path to solving tasks. They can also ask questions, lead discussions, and help children reflect on the knowledge they have gained.

Quest games also involve interaction with the families of the children. For example, children can be encouraged to complete a task or puzzle at home with their parents, siblings, or other family members. This helps engage families in the child's educational process and creates additional positive emotions and interactions. A quest game is not only an interesting and engaging experience for children but also an effective method of teaching and developing preschool-aged children.

In conclusion, it should be noted that quest games are an excellent tool for developing logical thinking and socialization skills in children. In the context of digitalization, the new format of quest games makes them even more engaging and accessible. The key is to consider the children's age-specific characteristics and choose themes that are both interesting and educational, ensuring motivation and engagement are maintained.

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