

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

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Abstract

In the recent period, the preschool education in R. Macedonia was faced with a streak of reforms, changes, and influences, which were aimed at systematic, conceptual, program, and content innovations. As a significant sub-system in which the first organized and systematic influences are placed upon the development of one's personality, great significance is given to how its reformation is going to be approached. The main tendency was directed towards overcoming the weaknesses that were noticeable in the approaches concerning the planning, programming, and realizing of the educational process. In this sense there followed a streak of changes that mainly initiated differences in the program ordering, as well as in the contemporary conceptual ordering of the evaluation and instigation of the personality development of every child between 0 and 6 years of age. The thematic approach, being the foundation of the period up to then, was overcome with the implementation of the integrated approach, whose analytic nature moves one step further in the direction of horizontal and vertical coverage of the program areas. Such a modernized didactic-methodic determination in fact promoted a holistic approach, which in its core includes consistency and comprehensiveness in the process of stimulating all the aspects of the development of the child's personality.

The reforms defined in such a manner initiate conceptual-program changes, which should be used as the base for a didactic-methodic series of combinations of every teacher, i.e. they can leave a mark on one's personal educational creations and practical reflections of these documents, as the most significant segment of the reforms in preschool education.

Keywords: *holistic approach, conceptual and program reforms, preschool education.*

Introduction

The general atmosphere of innovating, transforming, modernizing, and reforming the educational system, has undoubtedly also grasped the sub-system of preschool education in R. Macedonia. For years this sub-system was encompassed in a series of various project-program innovations, which have either directly or indirectly influenced the comprehensiveness of the working of this system. To some extent it is understandable, considering the fact that the preschool period, although systematically non-obligatory, still represents the first institutional form of organized and systematic acting.

The continuity of such an environment is also noticeable in the openness towards the newest trends of contemporary approaches, which are primarily reflected in the conceptual ideology of the preschool education, even further attaching to it the program consequentiality. These changes, analyzed in the following paragraphs, set the base for the transformation of what is visible, as a final result in the practical work.

The reform approach towards preschool education in R. Macedonia has expanded the frames of the picture of the development of the preschool child, through the promotion and incorporation of international experiences in a national context. Moreover, there have been increased discussions about early childhood development, which is incorporated in the National Development Plan of R. Macedonia for the period between 2008 and 2013, having included in its framework for better education for all, the early childhood development directed towards the children of preschool age. In this direction, in order to be able to follow the development of the children of preschool age, the implementation of the Early Learning and Development Standards for this specific age group was brought forward.

National legislation in R. Macedonia (the Child Protection Law) defines early childhood development as preschool education that covers not only measures regarding child provision, but also measures and activities for promotion of health, and intellectual, emotional, physical, and social development. Taking care of and bringing up children of a preschool age is conducted in kindergartens, while for those children not included in such educational institutions, there exists the possibility of organizing other extra-institutional forms.

In addition, the National Program for Development of Education in R. Macedonia is focused on providing control of the quality of the educational process through the Ministry of Education and Science, which has been taking measures concerning the permanent provision of control of the quality of the educational system in R. Macedonia.

These legal documents represent a precondition for further mapping of the road towards changes, and for altering the directions of acting in such a sub-system.

The state of the program approaches in the redesigning of the preschool education

Regarding its program setting, preschool education in R. Macedonia determines the direction and approach in the organizing of the didactic-methodic articulation of the activities, and generally, of the whole educational system. It can be stated that the thematic approach in the process of planning represents the most acceptable and most frequently applied approach in the organizing and realizing of the program contents in this sub-system. Its main characteristic lies in the organizing of themes and their further logical branching into sub-themes, contents, and activities. Additionally, it seems that such an order largely builds onto the monthly, weekly, and daily planning activities of the teachers, and in that direction provides time and didactic-methodic compatibility.

Numerous scientific research illustrates that thematic planning, in all its aspects, leads towards a comprehensiveness of topics in a wider horizontal range, but through the course of practical experience there has been seen to exist a lack of vertical articulation, which would provide for a deeper analysis of the topic. It is precisely this reality that is specific for thematic planning, yet there is a tendency of overcoming this shortage.

One possibility, and a step forward in the planning process, appears to be the integrated approach, which represents an amalgamation of several program areas in the realization of the planned activities. It is precisely this approach that is based on activities, as well as aims that we wish to achieve. In addition, it is developing in a

broad direction, including almost every program area, hence further developing and solving the problems from its point of view. Integrated planning is also known as work on projects, which includes several children - the activity is realized from more than one aspect, while not placing emphasis on or favoring one or another program area.

Nevertheless, the contemporary tendency regarding planning in the educational activities in the preschool period on a global level, is the holistic approach, which is slowly entering our educational system as well. The holistic approach overcomes the weaknesses of the integrated approach, in regards to a deeper research of a concrete problematic situation (or topic) that encompasses all of the program areas. If the integrated approach does profoundly research the problem issue at hand, which covers several program areas, then the holistic approach would mean **inclusion of all of the program areas** and their being incorporated into the detailed research of the given content.

The concept of the holistic approach in the preschool period

The holistic approach represents a philosophical-educational orientation, which is based on the premise that each and every individual finds their own identity, meaning, and intention in life in connection to society, nature, and values. This approach stresses the intrinsic respect of learning, teaching, and in general, life in kindergarten.

The concept of a holistically-oriented pedagogy refers to the idea that every aspect of the development of the individual can be covered, i.e. they cannot be developed separately from certain distinct components or parts. The holistic manner of working attempts to fully determine and connect the functioning of the separate parts, while simultaneously covering and integrating the child's multiple levels of meaning and experience.

Works written on this subject have discussed several possibilities for the implementation of the holistic approach, defined as key aspects of holistic-based education:

- Learning is natural, needed, experimental, and based on collaboration;
- There is a need for a strong feeling of cooperation and engagement among the children, parents, and educators, and their care for each other;
- Respect is shown towards the child's inner world through methods that overcome the outer boundaries of the competitive environment, to possibilities for deeper questions about the significance of life and learning;
- Everything that nature has to offer (starting from the child's own nature, then the natural materials, resources, and the way in which nature functions) is joined and incorporated THROUGH the curriculum.

The holistic approach and its implementation in kindergartens do not merely mean ordering of the program content. It should be taken into consideration that the holistic approach IS NOT included in the program, but **it makes the program visible** in its own way, creating the link between the program itself and practice. As a specific approach, holism has its variants, however they are not unified or fully defined in a written or systematized form, since it is simply a personal mark of each educator, each

group, and each kindergarten. In fact, it represents the educator's view of the world, thus transmitting the world and life into preschool institutions.

Learning and development as part of life in kindergartens are integrated through:

- Tasks, activities, and context, which are meaningful for the child, or practice and activities that not are not always associated with the word "program", such as: care routines, meals, etc.;
- Possibilities for explanations and games from the beginning to the very end;
- Intensive and warm relationships that are mutually bonding;
- Recognition of the spiritual, i.e. idealistic dimension of the child's life in a cultural, social, and individual way.

The real implementation of the holistic approach in practice is faced with the imperative for the development of "**a wholesome child**", and it should present a significant challenge for every educator. The program for preschool education should especially reflect the holistic way of learning and development of each child. What is of great importance regards the need for the holistic approach to reflect the practice of **the child's wholesome context**. In this sense, the cognitive, social, cultural, physical, and emotional dimensions of development of one's personality are represented in an integrated manner. The holistic view of learning and teaching perceives the child as a personality that wants to learn, and comprehensiveness is taken as a better reflection than merely their individual experiences.

Conclusion

In the Republic of Macedonia attempts are being made to incorporate this approach in the obligatory educational practice. The analysis of all of the more significant official written documents for preschool education has provided a ground for organizing this sub-system, based on the concept of the holistic approach. The document for the standards for early learning and development for children from 0 to 6 years, as a key document, promotes the holistic approach. However, it should still be emphasized that this document offers only one conceptual framework, which are in fact directions for every educator, on the basis of the holistic approach that in the planning process will show the tendency to achieve the set standards through an individual maximum for each child.

The most recent document, i.e. the program for work in kindergartens is based on the standards, and should follow the same concept, hence allowing programming of the educational work through the lens of the holistic approach.

After so many years, a new structural-formal change has been offered; a reform in the preschool education, based on an idea, concept, and aim. These attempts at reforms offer a contemporary scientific-theoretical setting of the preschool education, whose practical implementation might need a longer period for adaptation and acceptance of the link between the theory and practice, yet this specifically is the planning phase, the role of the educators, and their readiness to implement this idea in the real sense of the word.

Furthermore, this is exactly why there is a need for clear, concrete, and wholesome directions for a real holistic approach, which is to be oriented more towards the philosophical-educational streak, requiring a simple approach to the planning and programming of each educator.

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