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Preschool Education in the Light of Current Program Assumptions. Selected Aspects

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Abstract

In the context of current education reforms carried out at various levels of education, it is important to ask about high quality and child friendly preschool education. As stated by Klim-Klimaszewska, “preschool education in Poland is the first stage of education system. Its main task is not only to help parents in mentoring and education of children, but first of all to stimulate their comprehensive development and school preparation” (Klim-Klimaszewska, 2012, p. 9). At the level of preschool education we observed multidimensional transformations that aimed at new approach to the theory and paradigms of education, which serves improvement of effectiveness of children’s education.

Keywords: child, preschool education, core curriculum, program changes, directions of transformation

Introduction

The reforms of preschool education that have been recently implemented cause various organizational, program and methodological changes. Contemporary preschool education may be perceived as a dynamic, child-oriented system that supports and strengthen child’s individual development potential. Its main goal is comprehensive development of child’s personality, which is manifested in physical, emotional, social and cognitive sphere (Sieradzka-Baziur, 2015, p. 7).

Current educational concepts consider preschool education as a first stage of education system and indicate that it is necessary to correlate it closely with elementary education. It is reflected in the integration of curricular contents between school and pre-school stage. The goal of all these actions is to give equal school opportunities (in other words, the same school start) for all children, irrespective of their place of living and socio-economic status. Hence, education process in pre-school supports systematic and comprehensive development of children as well as development of their individuality, uniqueness, development of their social position in a group of peers and building their own system of values. The goal of preschool education is to prepare children for their tasks in life, organize situations supporting their development and enable them to optimally

exploit their potential, so that they can, as underlined by Waloszek, become to the maximum extent aware and creative members of social, national, cultural and global community and be able to achieve self-fulfillment thanks to their unique and stable identity and develop it through philanthropic tasks” (Waloszek, 2004, p. 952).

Program assumptions of current preschool education

Current concept of teaching presents school age as very important period in terms of development of an individual. Preschool education consider following values as top priority: welfare of children, responsibility for their development and developing their potential along with optimal preparation for self-reliant functioning in the world. This stage of education forms basic knowledge, develops system of values and attitudes. “Children in the abovementioned age are characterized by natural activity, curiosity, high learning capacity, plasticity and tendency to imitate the others, identification and easiness of learning practical skills and learning from the environment as well as emotional sensitivity. The abovementioned factors create conditions that are particularly important to achieve optimal effects of educational activities (Waloszek, 2004, p. 952).

Pre-school age is an important period for further development and educational path of a child. Didactic and educational activities brings visible results at this stage of development. It is also optimal time to prevent any possible difficulties in learning, to counteract developmental dysfunctions and abnormalities, time for therapy and elimination of environmental neglect. Skills acquired in pre-school gives better effects at the stage of systematic education and result in harmonious functioning in social and professional sphere in adult life. Providing youngest children with access to early learning is the best way to provide them with equal chances as far as their education is concerned. Child’s developmental possibilities at pre-school age call for paying more attention to quality of the work with children, which includes also core curriculum referring to this stage of education.

Bearing in mind the above premises, the preschool education faces numerous tasks that were presented in the latest pre-school core curriculum (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej, 2017). The core curriculum defined most important goals of preschool education, preventive and educational tasks of pre-school and the pre-school division organized in elementary school as well as other forms of preschool education. It formulates results of task realization in the form of some goals achieved by children at the end of preschool education. In the light of program assumptions, the goal of preschool education is supporting total development of a child realized through the process of caring, education and teaching – learning. The influence of pre-school allows child to discover their own possibilities, the sense of undertaken actions and gather new expe-

rience at the path to truth, good and beauty. As a result of such support the child achieves maturity at the first stage of education.

The core curriculum specifies a dozen (17) educational tasks that are related to various aspects of child's development. It underlines the necessity to support versatile activity of children through organized conditions that supports acquiring experiences in physical, emotional, social and cognitive sphere of development. The core curriculum emphasizes the need to create educational space in a way that enables children free and safe development, play and rest. It underlines importance to support any child's activity that increases the level of sensory integration and ability to use developing cognitive processes. Pre-school is to create also favorable conditions that support acquiring experiences by children, which enable them continuity of adaptation processes. The core curriculum mentions also the need to help pupils who develop in an inharmonic, slower or faster way. Similarly, it notices the necessity to support self-reliant exploration of the world and selection of contents appropriate to children's level of development, their perception possibilities, thinking and understanding, with respect for individual needs and interests. Analyzed document exposes the need for strengthening self-esteem, individuality and original nature of each child. It consider it to be also important to create interpersonal relations and participate in a group of peers, as well as to create situations supporting development of habits and behaviors that lead to independence, caring of health, physical activity and safety, including road safety.

Among these tasks there is also need to build aesthetic sensitivity of a child in relation to various spheres of activity: speech, behavior, movement, environment, clothes, music, dance, singing, theatre, fine arts as well as in relation to create conditions that allow the child to get to know surrounding nature in a safe and independent way, to develop sensitivity and learning values and norms referring to natural environment in accordance with current level of the child's development. Moreover, particular importance is attached to creation of optimal conditions for safe and independent learning of technique in the surroundings along with corresponding child's activity within this scope (constructing, planning and do-it-yourself activities). Important task of preschool units is cooperation with parents and various communities, organizations and institutions, regarded by parents as a source of important values, that cooperate with them to create conditions enabling development of the child identity. It is considered essential to create such situations along with the abovementioned entities that lead the child to learn values and social norms, which originate from the family, from a group in the pre-school as well as from other people functioning in the social environment. In addition, it is considered important to develop behaviors resulting from values that can be understood by the children at this stage of their development. Among the tasks accepted for implementation, there is a need to

systematically supplement the educational content with issues related to the possible situations and events occurring in the children's environment that affect their safety and harmonious development. Therefore, new socio-civilization threats should be taken into account in the educational work.

The core curriculum underlined the necessity of constant shaping the child's learning mechanisms, which leads to school maturity as well as organization of classes, which enable children to learn the culture and language of a national or ethnic minorities. The authors of the document also emphasizes the issue of creating educational situations that develop the child's interest in other cultures and a modern foreign language.

Child's benefits from participation in preschool education

Preschool education in the light of program assumptions is the initial level of education (upbringing and teaching), which includes an organized institutional activity aimed at introducing the child into the educational space of the school environment. In many European documents, the aim of this educational stage is to build a bridge between the family upbringing and the atmosphere of the school institution. Pre-school age is treated as an extremely important period in the life of an individual. The reason is not only because it is considered an important period when child's personality is developed; then important experiences are acquired (important, as the first extremely fixed ones) and it is the first period, which is clearly remembered by children.

Many researchers in the field of preschool education, representatives of both theory and practice (Klim-Klimaszewska, Brzezińska, Waloszek, Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska and others), prove that the first years of a child's life are "golden the period" in his or her development when most of innate skills, predisposition and abilities develops intensively, including the ability to learn. Educational activities such as shaping and stimulating intellectual, emotional and social development bring very good results during this period. Pre-school age is the best time to eliminate disharmony and developmental disorders and to equalize children's chances.

The relation between a child and his or her environment is subject to the most significant changes at this period of life (Brzezińska, Burtowy, 1985, p. 33–35). „The task of each pre-school is to provide children with care and versatile psychophysical and social development and in this way prepare them to overcome school threshold (...) In Poland the goal of preschool education is defined in general as aiming at comprehensive development of a child” (Wilgocka-Okoń, 1993, p. 636–641). As rightly noticed by Suświłło, a child in pre-school learns through play, which is a basic form of his or her activity. In this way, the child finds how to learn and acquire knowledge about the world. The basis of pedagogical influence is constituted by theories worked out by Pia-

get, Wygotski, Bruner and Gardner (Suświłło, 2015, p. 71–85). Nowadays, according to the abovementioned author, the pre-school creates good social, emotional, material and organizational conditions for development and education of the child. Organizational possibilities of the education process in pre-school are, according to the author, much better than in school. The day-long stay of a child in pre-school means that the teacher can flexibly organize didactic classes and create conditions for developing the child's independence in various spheres of its development. In addition, the teacher has many opportunities to observe the child's behavior in a group and organize individual compensatory classes. Therefore, 6-year-old children who attend pre-school learn in favorable social, emotional, material and organizational conditions. Social conditions mean the possibility to establish positive interpersonal relationships, the occurrence of socialization processes, including the possibility to undertake free teamwork and learn how to resolve conflicts, as well as helping younger and less able colleagues to establish free relationships not only with colleagues, but also with pre-school staff (Suświłło, 2015, p. 71–85).

On the other hand, Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska notes that “pre-school age is the best time to support children in mental development (...). Providing each child with the benefit of preschool education one year before starting school is undoubtedly an achievement of educational policy” (Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska, Zielińska, 2003, p. 22–28).

Conclusion

Preschool education constitutes an introductory stage of learning in the education system. A child at pre-school age demonstrates extraordinary flexibility and intensity of development of particular spheres, susceptibility to personal changes, unique research sensitivity and huge potential to acquire, organize and activate knowledge. Experiences acquired in childhood, as written by Brzezińska, become fixed, generalized and determine trajectory of development for many years (Karbowiczek, Klim-Klimaszewska, 2016, p. 9).

This stage requires psychological knowledge from teachers concerning development of a child – its regularity, conditions and potential possibilities as well as stimulation and management of the development, teaching, formulating rules governing the learning process, helping a child to become an individual educated in culture, going beyond the basic information and relying on events of the surrounding world. Thanks to enormous predispositions to learn (individual, motivational and cultural factors) and factors conditioning learning, the children learn to think and express their thoughts, search and discover things that are new for them, explain, classify and interpret various phenomena, relationships, connections; learn to act, make decisions, solve problems and tasks (Karbowiczek, Klim-Klimaszewska, 2016, p. 118–119).

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