

PEDAGOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN ENROLLING IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Pedagogy, as in the past, so in the present, but also in the future, has been subjected to and undergoing many changes, because society is progressing at a tremendous pace, and as a social science it has the task of keeping pace with the changes and ensuring that it educates the participants in a way that will enable them to function more easily in the society in which they live.

Today, when enrolling children in elementary education, an assessment is made by the Professional Service, whereby the expert associate decides whether the child is ready to acquire the status "pupil". This assessment is of paramount importance both for pedagogy as a science and for the further holistic development of children. This paper deals with the pedagogical problem that refers to the assessment of the development of children when enrolling in primary education, carried out by pedagogues and members of the Professional Service in the Republic of Macedonia. For that purpose, a research was carried out in 36 municipalities, i.e. in 115 primary schools on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The research is theoretical, empirical, quantitative, qualitative, and modern, because it is intended for a current problem in the field of education in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The research provided relevant data on the quality and ways of conducting the assessment of the development of children from the professional associates, as well as the techniques and instruments used for its realization.

Keywords: pedagogy, pedagogue, child, development, assessment, research

1. Introduction

The personality is an organized and structural whole, that is an assembly of sociobiological and psychological characteristics and behaviors, through which the individual's peculiarity is expressed in relation to other people, who are part of the social community in which they live. Social influences and upbringing have the greatest role when it comes to forming a personality, so in the beginnings of the pedagogical thought, there are different views over which factors mostly determine the development of the personality and how much influence do they have in directing it into one or another direction. The developmental features of a child's personality are divided into several domains that are presented in the Early Learning and Development Standards. In the Republic of Macedonia, the process of producing the Early Learning and Development Standards started in 2006 at the initiative of UNICEF in Skopje, within the framework of the cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. The primary goal of this initiative was to develop a whole set of nationally acceptable early learning and development standards that focus on positive outcomes in holistic development in children aged 0 to 6 years. Early Learning and Development Standards outline the expectations that children of pre-school age need to achieve in various domains of development (motor development, socio-emotional development, cognitive development, etc.). These standards can be applied in all circumstances where children, aged 0-6 are raised and educated (in the family, in kindergartens, in children's recreation centers, as well as in various informal forms of children's care and education). In the document, the standards are presented in developmental

domains, but it is necessary to emphasize that the development process and learning in young children does not take place in isolation, but continuously, across all domains. Developmental domains are interconnected, and children learn by upgrading existing knowledge across all domains. Every child, as an individual, develops and shapes at its own pace, but in spite of individuality, he/she must / should meet the standards that are characteristic for each age group and which greatly point to the further development of his/her personality. The pedagogical assessment, when enrolling children in elementary education, addresses exactly the level of development in children, i.e. the fulfillment of the criteria laid down in the Early Learning and Development Standards. In this assessment, the pedagogue plays a key role, who, using his competencies and knowledge, assesses and evaluates whether the child who is assessed is ready to engage in primary education and to acquire the status of a student. The holistic development of children is of great importance for the quality of their future life, so the pedagogue, as a member of the school's professional service, is obliged to assess and observe the levels of development of the language skills, the development of the motor skills and the development of socio-emotional skills.

2. Body of Manuscript

2.1. Subject of the research

The subject of this research is focused on a current and contemporary problem within the framework of upbringing and education. Namely, this is an analysis of the process of assessing children's readiness for inclusion in primary education, with all the significance of that process, given the fact that this is an initial inclusion in the organized educational system. In this context, the appropriate assessment is a prerequisite not only for a successful start but also for the overall further educational development of students. Moreover, the first experiences, irrespective of their predicess, significantly influence the further views on organized learning in general.

2.2. Purpose and nature of the research

The purpose of this research is to examine the pedagogical and methodological bases of the assessment of the development of children enrolling in primary school in the Republic of Macedonia.

According to its character, this research has the following characteristics: theoretical, empirical, quantitative, qualitative, contemporary. It's theoretical because it is supported by theory and is directed to solving an essential question in terms of pedagogy. It is empirical because the problem is studied by way of direct experience (data collection and facts on the field). It is quantitative because the research uses techniques and instruments of quantitative character (use of precise methods, filling out a questionnaire). It is qualitative because techniques and instruments of a qualitative character are used (more natural, subjective research techniques are used). It is contemporary because it is intended for a current problem in the field of education in the Republic of Macedonia. From the complexity of the problem being investigated, it can be concluded that the research is a combination of a qualitative and quantitative approach.

2.3. Tasks of the research

Tasks move within the set objective of the research, which is complex and specificized through research tasks of a diverse nature. Tasks are grouped according to the envisaged action steps taken in the research.

The research clearly identified the following tasks:

1. Analysis of the pedagogical component of the legal bases.
2. Examination of the methodological approach of the relevant pedagogical aspects in the process of enrolling children in primary school.
3. Examination of the importance of pre-school education as a prerequisite for strengthening the educational status of children in the year prior to enrolling in primary school.
4. Analysis of the work of the pedagogue in the process of assessment of the developmental status of the children enrolled in the first grade.

2.4. Hypotheses

General hypothesis:

Xo - The pedagogical - methodological system for assessing the development of children for starting primary school in the Republic of Macedonia is consistent.

Specific hypotheses:

1. The legal provisions for enrolling children in primary school are compatible with the pedagogical requirements.
2. Most of the expert associates when conducting the assessment prefer an individual approach with the child, in the presence of a parent.
3. The number of children attending pre-school institutions in the year prior to enrollment in school is significantly higher compared to those who do not attend.
4. There is a need for the pedagogue to be a compulsory member of the Commission for assessment of the developmental status of children enrolled in the first grade.
5. Professional associates believe that introducing a game is necessary when assessing the developmental status of children enrolled in the first grade.
6. Most of the expert associates think that preschools positively influence the overall development of the child.

2.5. Variables of the research

Independent variables in this research are:

1. The way of carrying out the assessment.
2. The use of game activities.

The dependent variables in this research are:

1. The views of the respondents regarding the ways of conducting the assessment of the developmental status of children for enrollment in primary education. The views and opinions of the respondents
2. nt regarding the use of playing activities in the implementation of the assessment of the developmental status of children for enrollment in primary education.

2.6. Methods, techniques and instruments of the research

In this research, a number of scientific methods were used to obtain relevant scientific knowledge: content and structural analysis, synthesis, description, deduction, induction,

generalization. The research is characterized by qualitative and quantitative characteristics and according to the tasks set, the following techniques have been applied:

1. Technique of survey and scaling, intended for pedagogues from primary schools covered by the sample of the survey.
2. Technique of analysis of relevant legal and pedagogical documentation, intended for analysis of the Law on Primary Education and Upbringing, by-laws and rulebooks in the area of primary education, attitude towards enrollment of children in primary school and analysis of the existing techniques and instruments which are used in assessing the development status of children enrolled in the first grade.

The application of these techniques was carried out with the following research instruments: Questionnaire for examining the views about the work of pedagogues in the process of enrollment of children in the first grade.

The questions in the questionnaire are of qualitative and quantitative character (open type, closed type, combination of open and closed type and part in the form of scales of assessment). They consist of two parts:

- Part I - General data

- Part II - The views and opinions of the pedagogues for the process of assessing the development status of children enrolled in primary school.

The first part consists of 9 questions, of which 7 are open type and 2 are of closed type, and the second part consists of 13 questions, out of which 5 are open type questions, 2 are closed type, 6 combinations of open and closed type, of which 2 are in the form of scaling. When it comes to the first part, the first two questions refer to the name of the school and the municipality in which it is located. The third question relates to whether the school is central or regional, the fourth question refers to the work experience of the person who completes the questionnaire, and the fifth question relates to the level of education of the person who completes the questionnaire (higher education, master of science or PhD). The questions with numbers 6, 7, 8 and 9 (contact telephone, e-mail address of the school, e-mail address of the person who completes the questionnaire and the website of the school) are actually questions that were given for the purpose of further cooperation and clarifying the obscurity regarding the answers that the respondents (pedagogues) gave in the questionnaire. In the second part of the questionnaire, the first question relates to the ways in which the school informs parents / guardians about starting the process of enrolling children in primary school. The second question concerns the type of meetings that the school is practicing (individual or joint). The third questions concern the preparation of the school for enrollment of children (in the form of scaling and two places for supplementing, arrangement of the common premises in the school, arrangement of the premise in which the assessment will be carried out, providing materials for drawing and writing, providing toys, providing didactic materials, selection of recording instruments, etc.). The fourth question in this section refers to the way in which children's readiness is being tested in relation to who is attending it, and the fifth question refers to naming the members of the Commission. The sixth question relates to the participation of other members of the Commission (besides the pedagogue) and the way they participate. The seventh question relates to the instruments used in the assessment, and the eighth question to the developmental areas that are covered, when examining the developmental readiness of the children when enrolling in the first grade (name of the area, objectives of the assessment and which instrument is used). The ninth question refers to the use of elements of game during the assessment process and, if practiced, in what way - which games and gaming activities, and the tenth examines the views of the pedagogues towards preschool education. The eleventh question refers to the pre-school attendance rate of children before the last enrollment in the

school (expressed in percentages), the twelfth question relates to the manner in which the families are informed about the results of the examination, and the thirteenth question refers to suggestions for improving the quality to examine the readiness of children to enroll in primary school.

2.7. Guidelines for enrolling first-graders in the academic year 2007/2008

In 2007, each teacher in the Republic of Macedonia was instructed by the Commission in the Bureau for the Development of Education and provided guidance for enrolling the first graders in the academic year 2007/2008. From 2007 to the present day, the same guidelines are used, but pedagogues have the freedom to add something of their own, i.e. to conduct them in their own way.

Guidelines for enrolling first-graders in the academic year 2007/2008 (Bureau for Development of Education, 2007):

In the next school year (2007/2008), students will enroll in the first grade, who will be seven years old by the end of the calendar year (in the first grade with innovative curricula for eight years' primary education), as well as students, who until the end of the calendar year will be six years old (in the first grade with new curricula for nine years' primary education).

Bearing in mind that in the past two decades the future first graders in schools were tested with an outdated and overcome pedagogical test, the results were rarely used to classify students in classes, and the very way of testing was often perceived as uncomfortable by children. Therefore, we are committed to a different way of enrolling first-graders.

The students who in this school year are in the compulsory preparatory year are monitored by their educators during the whole school year, and they, in their dossier, mark their insights on the development and progress of each student (by completing the indicators and recording achievements that are characteristic of that student only). At the end of the school year, the educator should present in the "pocket" of the Dossier material evidence of the student's development and achievements (eg drawings, statements, picture books made by the student, observation lists of research activities, etc.) and inform the parents for the progress of their child, using material evidence from the beginning of the school year and comparing them with material evidence and perceptions at the end of the school year. By enrolling the student in the first grade, the educator, together with the material evidence, submits the completed Dossier (which, of course, he is obliged to do according to the legal regulation for the descriptive assessment of the students) to the Professional Service and to the departmental teacher, help him to see the initial state of each of them. Hence, it is pointless to test the children who will be included in the first grade in the new school year in the eight-year primary education. It is enough to get to know the future first-grader with the members of the professional service of the school and with some premises in the school itself (if the child followed the preparatory year in kindergarten rooms).

In the first grade in the nine-year primary education, will enroll students who will be six years old by the end of the calendar year. When enrolling in the first grade, the parent (or both parents) and the child should come to the school, bringing the necessary documents for enrollment. The school should determine and provide in advance a separate room for observation and conversation with the child, and in which it is good to have several picture books, toys, paper sheets, and wooden crayons, and other didactic material from the preparatory year room (which can be used for this purpose, if it is free). On the day of enrollment, the Professional Service should receive basic information about the child and the parents, so the parents will be given a form (offered in addition to this material) to fill in, or it will be filled out by someone from the Professional Service if the parent is illiterate. The representatives of the Professional Service, one of the educators from the preparatory year or the departmental

teacher and the group, consisting of three to five children, together with their parents, are referred to the pre-determined room for enrollment. The commission from the school monitors the children, conducts a conversation with them, and records their remarks. In doing so, special attention is paid to the following: for example, how the child behaves in the new environment (whether walking around the room and walking freely with the toys, whether it goes straight to the parent); how it behaves toward other children (approaches them, talks to them, takes their toys, gives them toys, etc.); how he/she relates to his/her parents (is constantly with them, asks them, asks for support from them, ignores them, etc.); regarding unfamiliar persons, in this case they are the members of the Commission (does not answer questions, communicates freely, etc.); how the parents behave towards the child (suggesting answers, constantly jumping on his/her behavior, following the child only visually, etc.). The members of the Commission (each of them separately) talk to the children to get specific information from each child separately, and especially to see what the child's speech is like (whether he/she correctly pronounces all voices, stutters, whether he/she correctly assembles the sentence, whether he/she answers in more words or just with "yes" and / or "no" etc). The conversation with the child can be lead on different topics: what interests him/her most, which toys are his/her favorites, favorite games, with whom he/she most likes to hang out and play, what he/she likes to watch on TV the most, what he/she does in the course of the day, where his/her grandparents live, where he/she wants to go for a walk, whether he/she has traveled elsewhere and with what and etc. Observations and conversations should last up to 30 minutes.

After the interviews and the observation of the children, the members of the Commission from the school give each other their opinions, remarks and suggestions, and if they have a common opinion on a particular problem, they agree for one of them to talk with the parents and give them concrete directions for improving the the situation (eg. during the summer period, the child will be taken to a speech therapist for impaired speech, etc.). The perceived characteristics in the behavior of the child will be transferred to the pre-school teacher or the class teacher in whose class the student will be, to monitor this phenomenon at the beginning of the year.

After all students are enrolled, they are grouped in different classes, and the educational work will be carried out in premises with equipment that is appropriate for the students' developmental opportunities. If the school does not have enough space for the enrollment of all students, the principal will ensure their inclusion in the premises of the nearest public kindergarten, in cooperation with the relevant representatives of the local self-government.

3. Conclusions

There has always been an intention to build an efficient and effective educational system with a good and strong foundation. For that purpose, the experts in the field of education are looking for a better quality model that will provide quality primary education.

A very important segment for the beginning of the educational process is the assessment of the development of the children performed by the pedagogues.

The research on the pedagogical assessment of the development of children for enrollment in primary education was conducted in 36 municipalities located on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia and encompassing 115 central primary schools. If we take into consideration that the survey covered all regions of the Republic of Macedonia, it can be concluded that the sample that participated was representative both qualitatively and quantitatively.

This paper is completely focused on analyzing the way in which the pedagogical assessment of the development of children enrolling in primary education is carried out, with a special emphasis on the methodological approach of the relevant pedagogical aspects, the legal

regulations, the role of the pedagogue and the role of pre-school education. The main goal of this paper was to examine the pedagogical and methodological bases of the assessment of the development of children enrolling in primary school in the Republic of North Macedonia.

In order to obtain a complete picture of the pedagogical assessment, in addition to the pedagogical - methodological bases of the assessment, the pedagogical component of the legal bases was analyzed, more specifically, the fourth part of the Law on Primary Education, which prescribes most of the laws, by-laws and regulations relevant to this problematic. The importance of pre-school education, as well as the specific role of the pedagogue in the realization of the assessment also found their place in this research.

The main / general hypothesis "The pedagogical-methodological system for assessing the development of children for starting primary school in the Republic of North Macedonia is consistent" was examined and partially confirmed through empirical research, conducted in 115 schools, located in 36 municipalities on the territory of the Republic Macedonia. It is partially verified, because during the processing of the data obtained from the research it became clear that some of the pedagogues are using outdated pedagogical-methodological documentation, which, although in large part coincides with the contemporary one, has parts that deviate. The so-called test for examining the pre-knowledge of children when enrolling in the first grade has typographical and grammatical errors regarding the formulation of the questions, was made at least a decade ago, and is composed according to the developmental characteristics of children aged 6 and 7 (in that period Republic of North Macedonia had eight years of primary education and education in which children went to school with full 6 years and 7 months or 7 years. In the school year 2007/2008, nine years of primary education were introduced, and with it a number of reforms and, among other things, the removal of such tests from use). To each question on the test, there are points that eventually sum up and depending on the result, the child is placed in a particular group, and the grouping of the groups (especially the latter) is inappropriate. In the test itself, the second point is titled – Pre-Knowledge from Ins, and the Ins (Introduction to Nature and Society) as a teaching subject does not exist since long ago. Hence, although most of the respondents are using modern pedagogical and methodological documentation, one can not ignore the fact that there are schools in which materials that do not correspond fully are still in use, therefore it is concluded that the general / main hypothesis is partially confirmed.

The first auxiliary / special hypothesis "The legal provisions for enrolling children in primary school are compatible with the pedagogical requirements" is partially confirmed by the results obtained from the research. According to the answers of the respondents, they respect all the legal provisions prescribed in the Law on Primary Education, except for the members of the Commission. Although the pedagogue is a constant member of the Commission, there are schools in which they themselves conducts the assessment of the developmental status of children.

The second auxiliary / special hypothesis "Most professional associates when conducting the assessment prefer an individual approach with the child in the presence of a parent" is confirmed through the answers to the questions with the order number 4. (the manner of carrying out the assessment) and 4.a. (why exactly is this way used), from the second part of the questionnaire.

The third auxiliary / special hypothesis "The number of children attending pre-school institutions in the year before enrolling in school is significantly higher compared to those who do not attend", is partially confirmed. After data processing, it can be noted that the percentage of children attending pre-school institutions is, unfortunately, not very high. Although in the larger municipalities the percentage of children attending pre-school institutions is

considerably larger (45% of the total number), some of the municipalities do not have pre-school facilities that children could visit at all.

Further elaboration of the results showed that the fourth auxiliary / special hypothesis "There is a need for the pedagogue to be a compulsory member of the Commission for assessment of the development status of children enrolled in the first grade", is confirmed. Although the principal is the one who establishes the Commission that implements the assessment, the Law on Primary Education stipulates that the Commission must be composed of a teacher or a psychologist and teacher for pre-school education or a departmental teacher. The results obtained from the survey show that the pedagogue is always a member of the Commission (whether or not the psychologist is present) and leads the assessment, while the other members only observe, and in some schools the pedagogue performs the assessment themselves.

Fifth auxiliary / special hypothesis "The professional associates think that the application of a game is necessary in assessing the developmental status of children enrolled in the first grade", is partially confirmed. The results of the survey show that 51% of the respondents use elements of the game when assessing the development status of children when enrolling in primary school.

The sixth auxiliary / special hypothesis "Most of the expert associates think that preschools positively influence the overall development of the child," is confirmed. During the processing of the respondents' responses, it was found that the respondents consider that although pre-school education is not obligatory according to the Law, it should become obligatory, at least one year before going to school, despite the concept of nine years of education in Republic of North Macedonia.

The final conclusions indicate that there is a need for revision of the pedagogical methodology used by the pedagogues when implementing the assessment of the development of children for enrollment in primary education, in order to be updated everywhere and be compatible with the developmental features of the children of 5 and 6 years of age, and of course, to keep up with social development.

At the last question, the respondents were asked to give their suggestions for improving the assessment process. The answers are as follows:

- "With the help of experts, prepare one instrument that will be used on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia."
- "MoES to provide conditions to children from rural areas."
- "More monitoring instruments, didactic materials, and better spatial conditions."
- "Introduce an individual test to determine the maturity and readiness of each child for school."
- "I would like to have at least one training that would address this issue, how to focus more and what to look out for."
- "Less administrative information, and more focus on the child."
- "Incorporate playing activities that will be consistent with the child's interests", etc.

From the above shown answers of the respondents, the conclusion is that a change is needed, both in terms of the pedagogical methodological documentation, and the full process of realization of the assessment. It is important to emphasize that the need for change is not an indicator of the invalidity of the existing modern pedagogical methodological documentation, given that part of the schools located in a rural environment do not have access to a wide range of didactic funds and materials.

It is recommended to pay more attention to the schools located in the rural regions of the Republic of North Macedonia, because all children have the right to a quality upbringing and education. In particular, in terms of the assessment, it is recommended to revise the existing

pedagogical methodological documentation and / or to make a choice (the Commission has the freedom to choose one of those samples for any assessment it will realize, depending on which will be detected upon the first contact with the child) on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia and to respect the legally prescribed acts and regulations regarding the composition of the Commission.

A major omission is seen in children who do not attend pre-school institutions, therefore it appeals, if possible, that pre-school education (at least one year before going to school) become mandatory.

This paper should be just the beginning that will awaken an interest in further research in this area in order to create a larger database that will draw further conclusions to improve pedagogical practice in this domain.

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