



The Traditional in Contemporary Curricula of Preschool Education

Emina KOPAS-VUKAŠINOVIĆ, Margit SAVOVIĆ

ekopas@rcub.bg.ac.rs, margo@neobee.net

(Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac, Jagodina)¹

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Abstract: *Contemporary curricula of preschool education are the result of the improvement of pedagogical and didactic theories. They imply a technical plan with which it is possible to achieve measurable objectives of preschool education. The curriculum is also defined as a tool for quality and equal education for all. It represents a reflection of the time, society and culture in which it exists, but also a model for future society and education. Thus an important research question arises as to what extent we recognize traditional ideas about learning and the development of a preschool child in contemporary preschool programs. Are traditional ideas about educating young children unjustly neglected or do we recognize them in contemporary pedagogical theory even today, at the same time forgetting about the past and declaring them innovations? This paper deals with the starting points for the development of a curriculum. The goal of the research was to determine to what extent can the starting points for the development of preschool children, which have existed in the first preschool programs in Serbia in the late 19th century, be recognized in contemporary preschool programs. A descriptive method was applied as well as a procedure for content analysis of program documents. Research results confirm that the elements of the first preschool programs, which remain relevant until today, can be recognized in contemporary preschool programs. They are related to target orientations, principles and functions of preschool education. However, these ideas are defined as contemporary tendencies, and the fact that they existed in preschool programs that were developed a long time ago is unjustly ignored.*

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Introduction

It is a fact that scientific knowledge in the education system is socially and pedagogically conditioned. That implies the socio-pedagogical conditionality of the development of preschool programs as well.

Programs of educational activity represent a basic working document of an educational institution with which it regulates its overall activity as well as each program and organizational part. In addition, they need to be clear instructions for the programming, planning and evaluation of this activity, in accordance with the character of the institution, the needs of the children, their parents and the community. As instruments that regulate educational activity, programs also have a function of determining common goals, tasks, contents and methods, which will be the starting point of working with children. Activities will be implemented with the possibility of adjusting these program elements to the needs and the specificities of children's age. Also, initiative, cooperation and creativity of people implementing the program (teachers in a preschool institution) are significant for the effectuation of preschool programs. Without programs determined in this manner it is not possible to plan an educational activity well or to evaluate its results, i.e. to coordinate the activities with the demands placed before the children in the coming period.

The significance of reviewing the development of preschool programs is reflected in establishing what their functions were throughout history, in determining how the theoretical basis of the program was established in different social conditions and how its goals, tasks and objectives were determined. Through preschool programs, which represent the relationship between pedagogical theory and practice, we can follow the development of pedagogical ideas, and with that, the development of pedagogical science as well. They reflect the strategy of the entire community in a given period, in relation to education in that community.

In preschool programs that once existed in Serbia, until the document that is relevant today – *General basics of preschool programs* in 2006 (Klemenović, 2009; Kopas-Vukašinović, 2010), it is possible to view the development of ideas about the organization of work with children until they start school. It is interesting to learn how these ideas developed and whether their development implies a completely new structuring of new programs or the elaboration and improvement of the existing ones. This knowledge also points to the development of the scientific basis of results obtained by the researchers in the process of exploring pedagogical theory and practice, in order to further develop the curriculum. In the search for the said ideas, the starting point of this paper is the fact that was established in the Lexicon of pedagogical methodology, where it is pointed out that “*in principle, every product of a past activity and every direct and indirect testimony of that activity can be a historical source*” (Gojkov, Krulj & Kundačina, 1999:79).

Theoretical approach to the problem

Programs of educational activity have a function of unification i.e. creating the basis of an education system for children of certain ages. In this system, activities with children are exercised continuously and gradually. The starting points are the psychophysical laws of the development of children, their potentials and needs, social conditions of the environment and the theoretical basis of the program. The theoretical basis of the program implies the accepted philosophy of education of a certain time, i.e. pedagogical ideas and norms, the understanding of a man and with that the understanding of childhood. This further means determining the specificities of the children's age in the education process and determining the manner of their education.

It is clear that the program also represents a "learning plan". The program specifies the contents that must be "transferred" to children at a certain time and in a certain order, during the learning process. Also, programs can be functional only if the conditions for their continual adjustment and modification exist, in accordance with the demands of the time in which they exist and with the needs of children, their parents and the wider community.

The development of preschool education in Serbia, in the period since the founding of first preschool programs until today, can be seen through the basic ideas these programs are established on. Regardless of the fact that there has been a conceptual "transformation" of a program into a curriculum, which has led to the identification of new elements of the contemporary curricula, the question arises of how evident are the changes in basic definitions and characteristics of learning and development of preschool children. Do contemporary tendencies in the system of preschool education, as ideas and vision, occur with the development of this system, or can they be recognized in the first preschool programs in Serbia, that were created in the late 19th and the early 20th century, at a time when first preschool institutions were opened. The fact is that preschool programs in Serbia have developed and became more complex, in accordance with the demands of the contemporary society, but the question is to what extent this development was determined by the already existing program concepts. The development of preschool programs is based on the idea of Frederick Froebel, that children should be educated so that they determine their own versatile development through their own action. Today, the ideas about preschool education are determined as a comprehensive development of a child's overall potential, in the context of European integrations and the adoption of European values.

Methodological approach to the problem

The objective of this theoretical research was to determine to what extent can the starting points for the development of preschool children, which have existed in the first preschool programs in Serbia, in the late 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century, be recognized in contemporary preschool programs. *Research tasks:*

1. To determine the starting points (the basic pedagogical ideas) for the creation of preschool programs that once existed and examine if they are still relevant;
2. To identify the goals of preschool education that were determined in the first preschool programs in Serbia and that exist today in the current preschool program, and then examine to what extent do contemporary goals “rely” on goal orientations determined long ago in first preschool programs.

Research methods and procedures: In this theoretical research a descriptive method was applied as well as a procedure of content analysis (of preschool programs).

Research results and discussion

Ideas about the organization of preschool education in Serbia can be found in the first preschool programs that were not official, but that were the only ones created in the late 19th and early 20th century. More specifically – the informal and semi-formal preschool programs:

- *The draft by Mate Kosovac on kindergartens* from 1890. This program determined the basic issues of the organization of work with children in kindergartens for the first time in Serbia.
- *The teaching materials for various trades of young Serbs* prepared by Milan Stojšić (1898);
- *A collection of the overall work in a Serbian confessional kindergarten for families, kindergartens and kindergarten teachers*, prepared by Mila Maletaški (1904, 1905).

What is emphasized in these programs is the significance of organized work with children in kindergartens based on *froebelian basics*. These basics implied the interpretation of children’s development as a process of discovering a man. A precondition for quality work with children was *a good knowledge about the laws of children’s development and learning*. Particular significance is given to *a unique influence of a family and a preschool institution* with an aim to develop the child’s overall potential and prepare it for the start of school. The development of children’s potential was possible only in a well structured environment, with the use of quality didactic materials.

The next goals of preschool education were determined: 1) keeping the children out of danger and educate them until they start school; 2) physical development of a preschool child; 3) development of a child's ability to think correctly, to acquire concepts and develop ideas about objects and phenomena; 4) development of children's senses, perceptions and skills; 5) social development of a child and the development of its high-mindedness; 6) development of love for parents and other people; 7) preparing children for primary school teaching (Vučetić, 1971; Maletaški, 1904, 1905; Stojšić, 1898).

In these programs, which are the precursors of the first official programs, it was pointed out that the goals of organized preschool education can be achieved only through children's play and activity (observing different objects and images, discussing them, singing, talking, learning proverbs, puzzles and riddles, working in the garden, etc.). The significance of these ideas for the further development of preschool programs is undeniable. We know that the first programs originated in a patriarchal Serbia in the second half of the 19th century, at a time when education of young children took place mainly within a family. Ideas on founding the first institutions for working with children of a preschool age were accepted slowly and difficultly. With the help of young people who were educated abroad, the European way of life was gradually accepted. This changed the attitudes on educating children until they start school as well. These ideas became slowly but surely accepted in Serbia and they defined the development of preschool programs to this day.

The current preschool program in Serbia is realized through two equal models, Model A and Model B. Common features of these models represent their goal orientations. These orientations are recognized in contemporary domestic and foreign pedagogical literature. They imply creating the conditions for learning and for the development of a preschool child, in accordance with its potentials and interests. It is significant to organize activities that will encourage initiative, cooperation and creativity of every child, until the development of its overall potential (Einon, 2003; Kopas-Vukašinić, 2012; Milovanović & Kopas-Vukašinić, 2014).

Educational goals in both models are the following: 1) acquisition of a positive self-image; 2) development of self-confidence and confidence in others; 3) encouragement of self-reliance, responsibility, authentic expression and action; 4) development of intellectual potentials; 5) development of social and moral values; 6) cultivation of children's emotions; 7) development of physical abilities and skills; 8) encouragement of creative expression of every child; 9) development of awareness about the significance of protecting and preserving the natural and social environment; 10) preparation of children for the start of school (Klemenović, 2009). The program emphasizes that these goals are achieved in accordance with individual needs and interests. The models are oriented toward the humanistic understanding of a child's nature and its development (Kopas-Vukašinić, 2010).

When the goals of preschool education of the first preschool programs and of the current program in Serbia are analysed, it becomes evident that in time they became more concrete and more complex. At the same time, this complexity is based on the pedagogical basics of children's education

recorded in documents that determine the beginning of institutionalized preschool education in Serbia.

We recognize the *froebelian* basics of preschool education in preschool programs, both in those that were created at the time of the opening of first preschool institutions, as well as in the program that is current today (development in accordance with the nature of the child; good understanding of childhood, education and development through play, significance of didactic materials for stimulating children's development, etc.) (Kamenov, 1999; Kopas-Vukašinović, 2006; Mirkov, 2013).

Comparing the goals established in the first unofficial preschool programs in Serbia with the goals established in the preschool program that is current today, it is evident that goal orientations are identical in relation to certain determined aspects of the development of children, which have become more complex in time. Specifically, the goals of preschool education in all of the mentioned programs are established in relation to the physical, intellectual, socio-emotional, moral and creative development. It is also evident that the preparatory function of preschool education (for starting primary school), as well as offering help and support to parents in the education of children, have existed in programs from their creation until today. Of course, social development and its contemporary heritage bring with them changes and determine new needs of the individual and the community as a whole. These are recognized in the goal orientations of the current preschool program related to developing awareness about the significance of protecting and preserving the natural and social environment.

It is certain that the ideas about the organization of activities with children have developed with the development of goal orientations in the contemporary preschool program. However, regardless of the citation of specific methods and procedures, the essence of the activity of preschool teachers implies encouraging the child to be active and learn through play, directing children's attention and interests, creating a stimulating environment for learning and development.

Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to review the basic functions and goals of preschool education which once existed in preschool programs and to determine to what extent they are relevant for the development of a preschool child today. It was important to learn to what extent can the starting points for the development of preschool children that have existed in the first preschool programs in Serbia be recognized in contemporary preschool programs. The goal was to prevent the falling into oblivion of the pedagogical ideas that served as a base for establishing the first preschool programs and that are still relevant today, and to prevent attempts to present them as a creation of contemporary pedagogical contexts.

It was confirmed that contemporary pedagogical basics for the learning and development of a preschool child date back to the founding of first preschool institutions and that they are based on Froebel's understanding of the child and the childhood. His ideas have remained the backbone of learning and development of preschool children to this day. These grounds

served to determine the goals of preschool programs as well. Both in the first preschool programs, as well as today, these goals are presented in relation to the significance of developing children's potentials. It is certain that in current models of preschool programs we notice contemporary trends, primarily in relation to the ways of implementing contents and activities. At the same time, we recognize in them the ideas of the classic preschool pedagogy of learning and the development of preschool children, which should neither be forgotten nor presented as heritage of the contemporary era.

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