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Professional Competences of Preschool Teachers in Montenegro

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Abstract

The most recent findings concerning human development, opportunities in early childhood and nature of learning, transition from behavioral to constructive model reflect the anticipation of modern preschool educational model and changed role of preschool teacher. The profession of preschool teacher has vastly changed in the last few decades, especially concerning competences they have to possess new skills and they are supposed to develop so the same would be encouraged and developed at children. Additional to having the expertise in the area and knowledge of the modern didactic methods, preschool staff has to know basic strategies of creating curriculums and their execution as well as an evaluation of their efficiency. Due to changes that have been happening in the modern pre/education, the position and needed competences of preschool teachers are becoming more complex and they include: professional competences, pedagogic skills of managing the process of learning and didactic-methodical transformation of educational contents, communicative competence, advisory capacity, evaluative competences and readiness for changes.

In accordance with new requirements of the overall changes in the educational system in our country, as well as the recently defined needs of all participants in the educational process and in the light of the current changes in practice, the need for improvement of pre-service teachers was naturally imposed.

In our country, initial education is improved, but a practical dimension is still in the shadow of the theoretical, academic approach, as it is evident that this model still lacks the research and developmental dimension. Apparently, professional development, which is predominantly responsibility of the Bureau for Education Services of Montenegro, occupies an increasingly important place in the context of the overall professional development in a unique educational system in Montenegro which is confirmed by the analysis of the Catalogue of professional development (there was a move from 4 to 19 programs aimed at the professional development of preschool teachers). Despite the slow changes and the promotion of the didactically small and school-like planning of all the activities, the current pre-school context in Montenegro is getting more and more prominent features of an open, flexible learning environment, consistent with the authentic experiences and needs of children, the participants and the surroundings and promotes preschool teachers as researchers of their own practice and creators of the unique educational context.

Keywords: Role of preschool teacher, early education, participation, life context, initial education.

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INTRODUCTION

In Montenegro an extensive reform of the whole pre-academic educational system was carried out in the period between 2000 and 2010. Strategic goals of the reform are of developmental nature and they represent the constituent part of the process of social, political and economic transition of Montenegro in the context of global movements. Changes in the area of education necessarily derive from social, political, economic events, dominant educational paradigms, development innovations, demands and new findings of professionals-practitioners. Necessity of adopting functional knowledge and developing professional competence needed for execution of reformative goals represent the starting point and the source of the whole educational system. Modern educational observations on human development, potentials of early childhood, transition from behavioral to humanistic and socio-constructivistic paradigm reflect anticipation of directions of molding the modern preschool educational model in our surrounding. In that sense, the basic ideas/structure in reference framework for changes of the educational system of Montenegro were defined previously (*Book of Changes, 2001*), and they were improved in the recent *Strategy for Early and Preschool Education* (2010), which arises from foundation of implementation effects of the mentioned solutions during the last decade.

Considering the fact that in the pedagogic-psychological science the belief that the early education is very important and that the positive experience in the preschool period (0-6) has durable positive effects on the complete development of personality is every day more spread, the belief that this segment deserves more serious and thorough contemplation and more precise positioning in educational and social mainstream has been growing.

In the last decades of 20th century, intentions of preschool reformers were going in direction of leaving behind contextual education, in the widest sense, towards more open milieu, in which there would be enough space for self-activity and children creation, cooperative activity of all participators, pair and team work, with the constant cooperation with public institutions. Modern programs relying on numerous scientific and theoretical postulates on developmental needs of children, on manners and paths of development, on quality and functionality of knowledge indicate to the fact that the worlds of children and adults are not remote, that institutional-educational and family context are not parallel but complimentary places of life, that kindergarten and school do not represent separate systems and that by providing continuity, on horizontal and vertical level, we build holistic, natural ties among all segments in the system. In those coordinates, the position of preschool teacher changes and enriches by more complex professional competences and roles: organizer-planner of learning, coordinator-facilitator of the process, observer, regulator of educational process, researcher of personal practice. It has been shown that the practice itself can have the greatest impact on change of 'personal' paradigms of professionals if practitioners research it, get to know and understand it which is based on that change and improve it.

Significance of Early Education

Previous scientific beliefs on constancy of brain capacity and invariability of intellectual potential have given place to new findings on extraordinary effect of early experience obtained in narrower and wider surrounding for molding of brain as well as the whole personality. The fact is that the largest part of the brain development occurs in primary years of life and the largest part of intelligence development occurs before a child turns 7. It is needed to emphasize that the most intensive growth of brain cells happens during the first three years of life, with constant forming of neuron connections in the brain (Pašalić-Kreso, A., 2000). In the past it was assumed that brain development depended on an innate genetic configuration. Monitoring of a child's development begins at fetal life, and physiological, neurological development constantly pervades with psychological dispositions. Earlier orientation on normative studying of differences between the behavior of a child and behavior of a mature or adult, were replaced by researches directed at interactivity between a child and adults and among children, as well as researches of child's authentic experience (Pešić, M., 2009). This path leads to holistic, integral monitoring and stimulating the complete child development and not only some aspects. Instead of exclusively medical/normative model, social inclusive model of child protection, which implies relocation of centre of professional and generally social interest for development-biological characteristics of a child on the wider ecological context, is being gradually promoted. Humanistic model of childhood at primary introduces other socialized actors the concept of healthy and natural child development. Child is indentified, recognized and respected in their entirety and particularity. Considering a great possibility of accepting impacts and inclination to changing, adjusting, improving, developing, serious demands for scientifically based and pedagogically contemplated interventions of professionals/preschool teachers, aimed at a child at young age, are being profiled. Child naturally has a tendency for development, self-actualization and creation. Cultural-historical model of childhood whose representatives are, dominantly, Vygotsky and Valon comes from a standpoint that child's nature is given and that by personal activities child grows into mature formed person. According to this understanding, a child in interaction with different members of community through different playing activities of adopts or internalizes cultural forms of a specific social context and develops personal contemplative notions and concepts. *When the complex forms of complex interactions arise, they lead to appearance of new forms of individual behavior* (Vygotsky, 1977). Programs of support to children, therefore, have to include different forms of activation and support from professional preschool teachers needed so each child would progress in life, as well as support to family and community in promotion of the healthy child development. Biserka Petrovič-Sočo states within her research (2007) *Context of Institution for Early Education and Education-Holistic Approach*, that the context of institution for early development and education is as 'live orgasm' which acts as an interactive network of social, cultural, ecological and temporal relations with which a child is in constant interaction. In all that, preschool teachers have an important role, as professionals who create supportive surrounding of kindergarten context for children and parents and promote the concept of active participation of a child in the modern world.

Reference Characteristics of the Current Preschool Context in Montenegro

Key points of the reformed system of preschool education in Montenegro are: adopting aimed process-developmental curriculum in Montenegro, establishing more flexible and more open spatial-temporal organization of work (there are no specific, uniformed solutions), partnership with family and social community in conditions of more active participation and exchange among all participants with the aim of the institutionalization and approaching the life context, including children with special needs in regular kindergarten groups and with the aim of establishing natural continuity in educational vertical including preschool teachers in realization of the program for the first grade of the nine year long primary school. Stimulating specialized programs is one manner to provide diversification of offer to children and parents and to respect wishes, needs and interests of all involved. In work conditions which are modified in this manner the role of preschool teacher becomes more complex and naturally implies more complex professional competences and new demands/activities.

By comparison with the overall number of children aged up to 6 years in Montenegro (47,506), preschool education includes 26.11% (12,405) of children in school year 2009/2010 (26.43% of boys and 25.76% of girls). As the overall number of children in preschool institutions amounts to 12,405 (school year 2009/2010), we can talk about the ratio 17.55 children per preschool teacher.

With the aim of decentralization, democratization and professionalization of the educational system, relying on abundance of the established strategic documents, our newly adopted laws in the area of education (for the entire pre-academic education) define and establish institutional structure, professional demands for teachers, who will implement the curriculum based on goals/results and who will implement the system of evaluation. Curriculum for preschool education in Montenegro is formed as an open, aimed-processed, humanistic model. As such it gives to preschool teachers a creative, autonomous interpretation of programmatic goals. When it comes to structure of this model, it is required to emphasize that it only includes the important ideas in the form of (1) goals for selection of certain contents and educational strategies, (2) principles of progress evaluation of all participants in the educational process, (3) possibilities of implementation in different contexts and information on variability of effects, as well as (4) possibilities of critical investigation of purpose and goals towards which it is aimed (Stenhouse according to: Miljak; 1991, 71). This kind of model is open towards the concrete context and "flexible" towards diversity of participants and it will depend on the level of competent and professional preschool teachers to which degree it will be open for the true inclusion of children from different groups/conditions. The current **Program for Areas of Activity in Preschool Education** includes principles, goals, didactic recommendations for work of preschool teachers, manner of planning and evaluating. In development of general principles per areas of activity three types of goals for each area are identified: *discovering and mastering oneself, developing relationship and constructing findings about the others and discovering the world and constructing knowledge about it*; then three types of activities: life practical and free activities, specific and complex activities. What follows are methodical instructions for preschool teachers, significance of surrounding for learning and significance of family is especially

emphasized in the process of providing an adequate support on internal (family) and external that is social-institutional plan. Contents and activities are not prescribed but opportunity and professional autonomy were given to preschool teachers, to develop curriculum according to concrete context, which is made by the unique formations of children, professionals, parents in the especially structured milieu and in local and social surrounding which necessarily gives a specific mark to the curriculum itself. It is clear that contemporary programming of demands of emancipated professional/preschool teacher, who will revolve the practice, construct, evaluate its and their own effects while planning the future steps based on reflection not dogmatically on norms (**action-reflection-action-** Pešić, M. 1987).

Role of Preschool Teacher in the Modern Preschool Montenegro in Context

Profession of professional teachers has significantly changed during the last few decades, especially considering the competences which they should possess and new skills which they are supposed to develop so the same would be encouraged and developed at children. Although some authors indicate the fact that the mentioned vocation became an established profession, it seems that in our society there are still prejudices towards this vocation and that reputation of preschool teachers is still not proportional to significance and responsibility they have in the society.

In addition to expertise from this area and in addition to knowledge of the modern didactic methods, preschool staff has to know the basic strategies of creating curriculum and its execution as well as evaluating its efficiency. The place and role of preschool teachers in interactive educational work are seen by the Italian educationist L. Miato in the following:

1. explains the purpose and functions of suggested manner of learning;
2. individualizes work of children and suggests strategic elements which favor the climate of cooperation and efficient communication;
3. plans cognitive and social goals and tasks of learning;
4. defines roles and duties of children;
5. monitors interaction within groups and among them;
6. orients and supports children and groups;
7. controls the process of learning;
8. motivates children with positive feedback to continue learning;
9. estimates the behavior of children in the process of learning and their level of acquired knowledge (Capaldo, N, Neri, S. & Rondanini, L, 1999).

What has changed regarding the position and role of preschool teacher in the current educational milieu in our country and in which areas are the demands for strengthening professional competences of this staff and with that their advanced professional status in educational and social context recognized?

Traditional understanding of the profession of preschool teachers/teachers is based on behavioral understanding of learning and transmission model of educational system, positivistic model of pedagogical research, technical-rational understanding of professional acting and professional development. Bearing in mind that the professional identity of a teacher represents a conglomerate of personal experiences and experiences of all who built that vocation before or have built it along with them

and of the acquired wise ideas on how to more efficiently implement an educational process, it is not odd that teachers strive to keep the current state as long as possible. Changes threaten to bring into question the mentioned experiences and with that also the skills that have been used, to disturb fine rationalizations and compensations by means of which they used to adjust the different aspects of their own position (Fullan, M., 2000). On the other hand, critical-reflexive understanding of teacher's vocation is based on socio-constructivistic learning, paradigm of knowledge and model of pedagogical research, broader understanding of professionalism. Professional growth represents the entire process of growth, which includes personal, social and narrowly professional plan. Transition from transmission to transformational curriculum, which involves co-construction of knowledge among all students, strongly affected the changed role of teacher as well as expectations concerning the quality of preschool educational process and the quality of a teacher (Vonta, T., 2009).

Openness of preschool educational institution as an organization which teaches affected the changed role of preschool teacher improved by new tasks and obligations. Professionals turn themselves to a different concept of work in which children should be encouraged to learn »to know, to do, to be, to live together« (Delors, 1998). A preschool teacher is not anymore merely a consistent implementer of the given solutions, but he/she becomes »thinking practitioner«, »critical professional« (term, Pešić, M.) and intermediary of programmatic ideas whose forming is aided by children themselves. Therefore the position of a preschool teacher and the roles that arise from it are strengthened by new dimensions. He/she creates conditions for work and life in a community, starting with nationally important programmatic instructions, chooses and carefully moulds personal professional techniques and strategies of work, constantly monitors, observes and evaluates advance and development of child, that is of group with the constant self-evaluation with the aim of planning their own professional growth and improving the quality of the preschool educational process. Preschool teacher creates opportunities for child's active participation in consideration and discovery of reality, relation among people, appearances, questioning their own abilities, without offering ready answers and circled suggestions. Through empiric researches (Palekčić, 2004; according to Weinert, Schrader, Helmke, 1997) four crucial areas of competences of preschool teachers/teachers, which are needed for achieving qualified preschool educational process, were established: professional competences, diagnostic, didactic-methodic and competences in managing a group of children.

In orientation which we advocate and which is reflected in training preschool teacher to be a researcher and reflexive practitioner, he/she is given an opportunity to research and discover the relation among child's socio-emotional, physical, intellectual characteristics, and similarities and differences among educational actions in different institutional surroundings (family and kindergarten). By researching those relations, preschool teachers discover which elements are similar or completely different from those that he/she advocates and implements so he/she could adjust and selectively react to them (Miljak, A., 2007).

Therefore systematic reform of teacher training demands on a close relation of research and development in education, initial education of teachers and their concrete work in preschool educational institutions (Vonta, T., 2009).

In accordance with the newly arisen demands of all changes in our educational system, as well as newly recognized needs of all participants in the educational process, in the light of modern scientific-technological achievements, current changes in practice (changes »upward«, Fullan), the need for improvement of program of initial education of preschool teachers have naturally arisen.

Initial Education of Preschool Teachers in Montenegro

During the last few decades in the pedagogical public of developed educational systems a lot of attention has been paid to the issue of education of teaching staff and to the attempts of finding a solution on numerous questions, such as: whether the education level of teachers needs to be raised; whether to emphasize pedagogical-psychological knowledge or academic disciplines in education of teachers; whether the quality of teacher means more academic knowledge or more practical knowledge, skills and experiences, etc.

Study program for preschool education at the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić (Montenegro) is organized based on the previous experience in the area of education of preschool staff, modern European tendencies in the area of higher education and restructured according to the principles of the Bologna declaration 2004 in the applied three-year studies (the only applied program out of 15 existing programs at our Faculty). The base for forming an innovative curriculum for our preschool education is requested in all key documents for changes of higher education in the European area.

The program of *applied studies for preschool education* combines adoption of the basic theoretical knowledge with acquirement of professional skills and competences.

Starting points for formation of the current curriculum are included in some common values of the modern society (democracy, openness, responsibility, pluralism, identity...) and new findings in the pedagogical theory and practice. Common determinants in science on education represent a reference framework for creation of the entire system of initial education of the future teachers of preschool education:

- new philosophy of education
- open education
- flexible educational policies and strategies
- encouragement of individuality and socialization
- intercultural education
- alternative pedagogical ideas and directions
- interdisciplinary dialogue (Hrvatić, N., Piršl, E., 2007)

The new approach in the entire educational system is reflected not only at the plan of changes in the manner of structuring the curriculum itself, choosing the right programs, the supporting literature and sources, but also at the level of its implementation: combining different methodic actions and strategies, encouraging team work, adopting democratic values, strengthening motivation and individualization, through the changed manner of work/learning - *to learn how to*

learn, standardization of education, application of new techniques and technologies, new literacy and values.

The goal of the higher education of the future teachers in preschool education is development of their professional competences, which include professional knowledge and pedagogical-psychological skills. In addition, it is necessary to enable them to participate in research projects in accordance with growing demands of the society of knowledge. Actually, the basic competences of university teachers and preschool teachers are common and they include: professional competences, pedagogical skills of management of the process of learning and didactic-methodical transformation of educational contents, communicative competence, advisory capacity, evaluative competences and openness to changes (Hrvatić, N., Piršl, E., 2009). Of course all tasks/roles which are listed teachers execute in the multicultural society which requires improvement from a professional in the area of intercultural competences.

Research and improvement in education as well as research culture of teaching and learning in education of teacher can be considered as new components of dynamic systems of learning and improving. However, that means concrete mutual actions towards promotion and development of the culture of constant improvement. Systemic reform of teacher training demands the close relationship of research and development in education, initial education of teachers and their concrete work in educational institutions (Griffin, G., 2007). In that sense it is necessary that the actors in education from different positions and levels are included in the unique community for learning.

The process of professional training of teaching staff implies, next to already mentioned, initial education: introduction of teachers to the teaching process, education during work, additional education for vocation, educational researches and improvement.

Plan of training will include clear description of roles and responsibilities for the additional professional development of the entire preschool staff. The additional development of preschool education has to be based on qualitative changes of pedagogic practice in preschool institutions as well as development of modern concepts of professional education and improvement of preschool teachers.

CONCLUSION

Role of preschool teacher as a professional described in accordance with demands and expectations of the modern reformed concept in Montenegro that is the current pedagogic paradigm, is questioned and constantly updated in the current context.

Everything that happens in an institution and not only specific contents and methods which are used in implementation of so-called common activities (programs) has an educational impact on a child. Therefore it is hard or virtually impossible to close or limit by means of educational program the richness of interactions and actions in an institution (realistic curriculum). New reforms rely on understanding that success depends on more autonomy of preschool teacher, professional and

scientific responsibility and creativity than external solutions, centrally placed, uniformly formed legal and programmatic concepts.

Preschool teachers filtrate legal and curricular solutions through personal implicit interpretations in practice and form their constructions of quality preschool educational process. More often researches begin to emphasize significance of the modern, open, participative initial education, continual professional development of preschool teacher, constant improvement of knowledge, competence in accordance with changes in family, as well as scientific findings in the area of pedagogic science.

In our country, initial education is improved, but a practical dimension is still in the shadow of the theoretical, academic approach, as it is evident that this model still lacks the research and developmental dimension. Apparently, professional development, which is predominantly the responsibility of the Bureau for Education Services of Montenegro, occupies an increasingly important place in the context of the overall professional development in a unique educational system in Montenegro which is confirmed by the analysis of the Catalogue of professional development (there was a move from 4 to 19 programs aimed at the professional development of preschool teachers). Despite the slow changes and the promotion of the didactically small and school-like planning of all the activities, the current pre-school context in Montenegro is getting more and more prominent features of an open, flexible learning environment, consistent with the authentic experiences and needs of children, the participants and the surroundings and promotes preschool teachers as researchers of their own practice and creators of the unique educational context.

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Karadağ'daki Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerin Mesleki Yeterlikleri

Özet

İnsanların kendini geliştirmesi, erken çocukluk döneminde ve öğrenmenin doğasındaki fırsatlar, davranışçı yaklaşımdan yapılandırmacı yaklaşıma geçiş, modern okul öncesi eğitim modelinden beklentileri ve okul öncesi öğretmenin değişen rolünü yansıtmaktadır. Çocuklarda özendirilecek ve geliştirilecek olan yetenekler ile geliştirmeleri gereken yeni beceriler konusunda okul öncesi öğretmenlik mesleği son yıllarda çok değişmiştir. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri, alan bilgisi ve modern öğretim yöntemleri bilgisine sahip olmaya ek olarak, okul öncesi öğretmeni öğretim programlarının etkililiğini değerlendirme, öğretim programını geliştirme ve uygulamadaki temel stratejileri de bilmek zorundadır.

Eğitimdeki değişiklikler sonucunda okul öncesi öğretmenlerin görevleri ve sahip olmaları gereken yeterlikler daha karmaşık hale gelmiştir. Okul öncesi öğretmenlerin sahip olmaları gereken yeterlikler; mesleki yeterlikler, içeriğin eğitsel sürecini yönetme becerileri, iletişim yeterliği, danışma kapasitesi, değerlendirme yeterliği ve değişime hazırlık olarak belirtilebilir.

Ülkemizde, eğitim sistemindeki tüm değişikliklerin yeni gereklilikleri doğrultusunda, eğitim sürecindeki kişilerin belirlenen ihtiyaçları ile uygulamadaki mevcut değişiklikler ışığında, hizmet öncesi öğretmenlerinin geliştirilmesine gereksinim duyulmuştur.

Ülkemizde, ilköğretim gelişmektedir ancak uygulama boyutunun araştırma ve geliştirmeden yoksun olması nedeniyle uygulama boyutu hala teorik ve akademik yaklaşımın gölgesindedir.

Karadağ Eğitim Hizmetleri Bürosu'nun sorumluluğunda olan mesleki gelişimin, Karadağ'ın kendine özgü eğitim sisteminde genel mesleki gelişim bağlamında daha önemli bir yer tuttuğu mesleki gelişim katalogunun analiziyle onaylanmıştır (okul öncesi öğretmenlerin mesleki gelişmelerini amaçlayan programlarda 4'ten 19'a bir artış olmuştur). Tüm etkinliklerin öğretici üslupta küçük okul türü planlamasındaki yavaş değişiklikler ve gelişmeye rağmen, Karadağ'daki mevcut okul öncesi ortam, çocukların gerçek deneyimleri ve ihtiyaçları, katılımcılar ve çevre ile tutarlı açık, esnek öğrenim ortamının önemli özelliklerini daha fazla göstermektedir. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri kendi uygulamalarının araştırmacıları ve kendine özgü eğitsel ortamın yaratıcıları olmaya teşvik edilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Okul öncesi öğretmenin rolü, erken eğitim, katılım, yaşam ortamı, ilköğretim.

