Practical activities and child development the implementation of the Programme for Educating Children aged 2-7 in Bulgaria

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Abstract

This paper discusses the implementation of an early years education curriculum, in Bulgaria, known as the Programme for Educating Children aged 2-7. Following Vygotsky’s conception of social development speech is regarded as a core moment in child development and it is considered as a key mediator in the process of the functioning of children’s practical intellect. Accordingly, the practical activities such as labour, design and block building are regarded as socially contextualised in this programme. Each of the modules which concerned children’s practical activities was thought as a family and school situated activity. Subsequently the textbook package for each module consisted of A Teacher’s Book and A Parents Book. This paper elaborates results of a study addressing the attitude of the teachers and of the parents towards the developmental value of children’s practical activities.

Randomly selected teachers and head teachers were interviewed and their narratives examined in order to identify the key issues in their understandings of the philosophy of the programme and its management as a school-home based programme. Home situated activities with parents and their children were observed. The results were analysed with regard to the parents’ experience in order to identify how they regarded themselves as key players in the process of the collaboration between “teachers-children-parents”. In addition, their understanding of the framework of the programme was also examined.
The University is the first school of higher education in Bulgaria. It is opened 1885. It is the largest and most prestigious educational and scientific centre. (www.uni-sofia.bg)
The Faculty of Pre-school and Primary School Education was founded in 1983.

- There are same subject: pre-school and primary school education, primary school education and foreign language, pre-school education and foreign language, social education, special education, fine arts education, musical education.

- There are same department: Pre-school Education, Art Education, Primary School Education, Social Education, Special Education.

(www.fnpp.uni-sofia.bg)
The Centre for European Research in Special Education

- There is the Centre for European Research in Special Education
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

The Program System for the education of the child aged 2 through 7 is provoked by our strive for responding a number of “hot” questions in the theory and practice of preschool education:

- educational program open for the needs of the family and changes in the society;
- humanity in establishing and carrying out of the educational strategies;
- continuity in the education and the development of the children in the family and the kindergarten;
- democracy in choosing the educational versions and possibilities for their enrichment by the teacher and parents;
- integration of the national experience with the world educational practice.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

The base, on this Program are the theories:

**Lev Vygotsky**, a Russian psychologist and philosopher in the 1930's, is most often associated with the social constructivist theory. He emphasizes the influences of cultural and social contexts in learning and supports a discovery model of learning. This type of model places the teacher in an active role while the students' mental abilities develop naturally through various paths of discovery.

Vygotsky's Three Principal Assumptions:

- *Making Meaning* - The community places - a central role. The people around the student greatly affect the way he or she sees the world.

- *Tools for Cognitive Development* - The type and quality of these tools determine the pattern and rate of development. The tools may include: important adults to the student, culture, language.

- *The Zone of Proximal Development* - According to Vygotsky's theory, problem solving skills of tasks can be placed into three categories. These are as follows:  
  (a) those performed independently by the student;  
  (b) those that cannot be performed even with help;  
  (c) those that fall between the two extremes, the tasks that can be performed with help from others.
The base, on this Program are the theories:

- **Genetic epistemology - Piaget** called his general theoretical framework "genetic epistemology" because he was primarily interested in how knowledge developed in human organisms. Cognitive structures are patterns of physical or mental action that underlie specific acts of intelligence and correspond to stages of child development. There are four primary cognitive structures (i.e., development stages) according to Piaget: **sensorimotor, preoperations, concrete operations, and formal operations**.
- In this sense, Piaget's theory is similar in nature to other constructivist perspectives of learning (e.g., Vigotsky, Bruner).
- Similar detailed analysis of intellectual functions is provided by theories of intelligence such as Guilford, Gardner, and Sternberg.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

The base, on this Program are the theories:

- **Constructivism** - [S. Papert, M. Resnick, A. Maddox and other] Martin Briner says that: "Constructivist learning is based on students' active participation in problem-solving and critical thinking regarding a learning activity which they find relevant and engaging. They are "constructing" their own knowledge by testing ideas and approaches based on their prior knowledge and experience, applying these to a new situation, and integrating the new knowledge gained with pre-existing intellectual constructs"

- Constructivists view learning as the result of mental construction. Students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know. People learn best when they actively construct their own understanding.

- The crucial element is that the learner actively creates a knowledge base through the linkages and the experiences.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

The base, on this Program are the theories:

- **Multiple Intelligences** - The theory of multiple intelligences has been focused mostly on child development although it applies to all ages. This theory suggests that there are a number of distinct forms of intelligence that each individual possesses in varying degrees. Gardner proposes seven primary forms: *linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, intrapersonal (e.g., insight, metacognition) and interpersonal (e.g., social skills).*

Principles:
- Individuals should be encouraged to use their preferred intelligences in learning.
- Instructional activities should appeal to different forms of intelligence.
- Assessment of learning should measure multiple forms of intelligence.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

22 paper bodies have been edited - 15 books for children and 3 books for the teacher, 1 book for the kindergarten headmaster, and 3 books for the parents. People from the country have been working under this program since 1993.

A new point in the System is the structuring of educational content into global zones: “My World”, “The Other and I”, “Nature and I”, “The World is Large”, “I am Celebrating”, through which the concretized according to the age themes integrate the child with different aspects of reality and give the opportunity to form competence in the various fields: linguistic, mathematical, art, motor and so on. The educational content is integrative and three-stage ranged: from the global zone to the age emphasis and towards concrete topics vital to the child.
Components the PROGRAM System:

- Program for the education of the child (2 – 7 years old)
- Book for the teacher
- Book for planning and reference
- Book for the headmaster and the expert

Books for the child –
The educational content of the System combines five global zones: My World, The Other and I, Nature and I, The World is Large, I am Celebrating, through which the themes, chosen according to the specific age, integrate the child to various aspects of reality and enables its competence in different spheres: linguistic, mathematical, art, etc.
- Book for the parents
Pedagogical interaction /main accent in the programming system/

- expressed in change of the idea for the position of the adult regarding the child – from the ambition for education of similar persons, to the care for safekeeping and development of child value.

- *Fundamental is the thesis* for the overall development of the child by adaptation, individualization and integration of its activities in the environment.

- *Fundamental are the aims* directed to forming of culture of the person, based on the understanding of L. S. Vigotskiy that “higher form of behavior is where there is mastering of the processes of own behavior.”
The model of pedagogical interaction includes:

The adult **orients** the child by **introducing** it to the environment - the child **takes** in the environment and the relations by **living** them through;

the adult **controls** the process of education by **providing** - the child **tests** and **learns of**;

the adult **evaluates** by **stimulating** - the child **expresses** by **transforming**.

**The main aspects of education are:**
- emotional, motion, gnostic, social, esthetic.

**All happens** in a specific environment. This environment is saturated by relations: **child/children/ - adults/parents, teachers/**.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

This model confirms the pedagogical interaction as main characteristic of educational process in child establishment and characterizes the kindergarten as:

- environment for development of art;
- environment for cultural-educational work;
- center for cooperation between children, parents and teachers.
Methods of pedagogical interaction

By system of methods is realized joint work of children and adults in conditions of cooperation. This allows for dynamic change in their positions.

The methods of pedagogical interaction are symbolically divided into four groups pursuant to the processes of taking in, testing, expressing, which provides for the successful pedagogical interaction between child and adult /teacher and parent/:

- object-operative;
- game-transforming;
- practice-testing;
- informational-cognitive.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

Methods of pedagogical interaction

The choice of methods is done depending of:

- sphere of their application;
- type of pedagogic situation and specific educational tasks;
- individual and group competence.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

**Situation – main form of pedagogical interaction**

The pedagogical situations symbolically may be divided into:
- unintentional – intentional;
- individual – group;
- game – practical – training.

The pedagogical situation is realized pursuant:
- specific educational aims;
- the individual characteristics of children;
- the group competency;
- the perspective for development.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

The pedagogical situation provides for:

- personal forms of communication;
- discrete pedagogical strategy;
- active forming of mechanisms for self-regulation;
- differentiation and individualization of influences;
- varying of educational contents;
- unification of individual and group needs, of pedagogical and living situations.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

- Books for the child

A new moment in the System is structuring of educational content in global zones: “My world”, “I and others”, “I and nature”, “I celebrate”, “World is big”, by which the child forms competency in different areas.

My World . 2 – 3 years
My World . 3 – 5 years
My World . 5 – 7 years

The child is to find out the truth about My name, I am eating, In the Shop, I am Going to the Theater, Mummy and I are Crossing the street, Let’s Travel, Going to school and mani other interesting events.

The Others and I . 2 – 3 years
The Others and I . 3 – 5 years
The Others and I . 5 – 7 years

The little ones can find answers to questions concerning My room, Together with Mammy nd Daddy, My Toys, A day in the kindergarten, I was born, My Body, The Truth about Babies, Children in the World, The People Around Me and so much more.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

- Books for the child

These zones include different spheres of human life and knowledge and are based on the striving:

- to be close to child living and experience;
- to be mutually supplemented;
- to be focused in different themes, taking into consideration the interests of children and the conditions of the environment;
- to be systems of information, subjected to children experience;
- to be means for developing the cognitive, social and artistic activity of children by variant presenting of the pedagogical aims.

Nature and I . 2 – 3 years
Nature and I . 3 – 5 years
Nature and I . 5 – 7 years

These books help the child to learn more about animals and plants. The child gets familiar with the Vegetable garden, The Bee hive, The bottom of the Sea and many other aspects of Nature.
The content of the educational zones is directed to learning of knowledge and practicing of behavior by the child borrowed by the idea of L. S. Vigotskiy that “one submitting to one’s power in the process of one reaction, enters into principally new relation to the external environment.”

**Books for the child**

- Going through the books the child is drawn by the atmosphere of traditional celebrations. It finds out more about *The Christmas Carols, The New Years Party, Granny Martha, The Colored Eggs, In the World of Fairy tales*, which make the child experience a lot of new happy moments.

- These books will help the child find an answer to some questions on its own. The child will be able to explain *Why the Sun shines, Who has eaten the Moon, What turns day into night, Who has painted the rainbow, Why the grass cries* and many other new and miraculous things.
The PROGRAM SYSTEM:

- **Book of the parent – My child**

As element of the program system “Book of the parent – My child” allows for:
- diversification of forms for influence “child-adult” – “children group-environment”;
- unification of the efforts of the family and the kindergarten for creation of favorable psychological climate for stimulation of the child;
- providing the right to choice of activity of the child in family environment;
- creating atmosphere of trust and emotionality which to help the parent to accept his child with its dignities and pretensions;
- helping the teacher to come closer to the child and its parents by their joint experience.

Parent books
- My Child. 2 – 3 years
- My Child. 3 – 5 years
- My Child. 5 – 7 years

The parent as a partner in the games, in communication and the child’s growing up. The parent as a teacher and a pupil – what we can learn from our children and what we can teach them as well as various ideas about choosing the most appropriate of bringing your child up.
Another importance of “Book for the parent” is that the teacher may see the achievements of his student from another position – what the child did together with mom, dad, sister, brother – the perspectives of development in the family environment. These achievements refer mainly to the broad life situations /in the family and in the cultural society – L. S. Vigotskiy/.

"Book of the parent" reflects the content accents of pedagogical influence for separate ages in generalized kind. This orients the parents for the abilities of their children. By the information in this book, the teacher may coordinate his efforts with the parents for the achievements of their child /what it can do and what it should know/.

The PROGRAM SYSTEM:
Mother:
“The teacher consults me. We help each other in order to manage with its particularities.”

Teacher:
“This program gives a new insight to the education of the child. The mutual influence is not influence.”

Teacher:
“Before, the child was lost in the pedagogical process. The main was the group/team/. Its achievements were looked for mainly as knowledge.”

- **Book of the parent**
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Mother: “I try to see the child as development of its independence.”

Father: “I try to give the necessary in order to be developed the practical experience. I follow the ideas.”

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**Book of the parents**

The books describe example means for influence and cooperation between parents-children-teachers. Commented are also forms of communication and are offered markers for own style of education. How is this book included in the work of the teacher? Possible are various combinations of transformations for planning the influence, given in the “Book of the teacher”.

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Methodology of study

Defined are focus groups: group of teachers; group of parents. Held were interviews. In them accent falls on several basic moments: Is the philosophy of the program concept understand; what is the new and valuable in this system; Is it realized the mutual connection between parent-teacher-child.

Answers of teachers:
“This program gives a new insight to the education of the child. The mutual influence is not influence.”
“Before, the child was lost in the pedagogical process. The main was the group /team/. Its achievements were looked for mainly as knowledge.”
“The respect is important in the pedagogical influence.”
“The education of emotion is no less important than the education in knowledge.”
“The interconnection with parents has its strong sides and they should be used. It is well cleared in this program.”

Answers of parents:
“I try to see the child as development of its independence.”
“The teacher consults me. We help each other in order to manage with its particularities.”
“I try to give the necessary in order to be developed the practical experience. I follow the ideas.”
“Before school”:

- Until 2002 was updated the program for children’s preparation for school “Before school”. This is proses of continuity in the education and the development of the children in the family and the kindergarten.
- I am an author of other books (work books and diagnostic books) for children from 6 to 7 years old.
“Before school”:

Practical skills:
• Creating beloved images—my favorite place, I draw my name, I and the others etc.
• This is a system of education and self analysis through creation of construction models, construction of plays, creation of theatre plays, pictures.
The construction in the child's skills.

In the children's education the construction toys and plays can be used for specific global purposes:

- Use of the construction toys and plays for cognitive purpose
- Use of the construction toys and plays to the purpose of socialization
- Use of construction games and toys to the educational purpose (nursery school, primary school)
Use of the construction toys and plays to the purpose of socialization:

- the environment should be suitable;
- constructions should be full of life;
- to have place for individual activities;
- putting the stress on topics, related to the integration of the child in the outer environment-nature and society;
- structuring conditions;
- creating relations which presume justice;
- establishing and supporting complete relationship;
- notice of provocative expectations and so on.
Students projects:

- This is a system of education and self analysis through creation of construction models, construction of plays, creation of theatre plays, pictures.