

Early education - strategic field of the educational reform

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Abstract

Nowadays, early education represents the educational area that benefits from a multitude of researches and theoretical and practical contributions, pursuant to acknowledging the necessity in order to holistically approach pre-school pupil's development and to report to education's European dimension. The managerial approach of the early education implies strategic decisions regarding the: a) plan, organization and implementation of the school curriculum, by referring to legislative documents and in the spirit of focusing activities on pre-school pupil's global development; b) institutional development of pre-school educational units, regarding all functional fields and managerial activity's efficiency, for reasons related to optimal organization of the pre-school pupils' learning and development conditions. The article approaches early education issues from multiple perspectives: a) theoretical, legislative and conceptual premises; b) strategic orientations and finalities of the curriculum for early education; c) educational management as part of the early education area. The above mentioned premises, strategies and directions represent elements that supply new reflections and points of view as part of future studies and backgrounds of some empiric researches we foresee as part of early education field.

Keywords: early education, early development of the child, curriculum for early education, managerial approach of early education, management of pre-school institutions.

1 Conceptual premises in analyzing early education

The semantic evolution of the early education concept has experienced two relatively distinct stages, regarding the delimitation of the age period's scope extension to which it refers and also regarding the specific curricular approaches:

- the stage that includes the last two decades of the last century, when early education aimed the age range from 3 to 6/7 years old;
- the stage that includes present days, foreshadowed by the National Conference from Jomtien (Thailand) - 1990, which promotes the lifelong learning concept and the necessity in order to start the educational process from birth.

Broadening the age period to which early education refers (0-6/7ani) has determined the reconsideration of pedagogical and managerial speech. The concept "early education of the child" has provided a unitary approach as part of the specific curriculum, of the educational, social and sanitary field, and adjustment to managerial functions in order to efficientize the educational process and to achieve high standards of performance with regard to curricular and institutional objectives.

Early education represents the studying field of pre-school pedagogy (as a genetical pedagogical science, in order to study education of the child aged 0 to 6/7 years old, functionally integrated as part of pedagogical sciences), composed of a system of actions, processes, contents, methodologies, situations, international relations, oriented towards accomplishing some finalities specific to pre-school education, guided and conditioned by principles, norms and application rules, managed, monitored and optimized through managerial functions; all these variables are mobilized in order to provide the foundation for free, integral and harmonious development of the child's personality, in accordance with one's own pace and needs.

The studying object of pre-school and primary education pedagogy are holistically approached and aim educational interventions as far as multiple levels are regarded (Stan, 2014):

- early education's role, as part of formal and permanent education;
- early education, as an education available for all children; from this perspective, social and educational policies are based on ensuring equal opportunities for all children, with regard to benefiting from high quality educational services and integrating as part of the formal education of children coming from economically and socially disadvantaged

- backgrounds, ethnic minorities, geographically isolated areas;
- pedagogical approach of small school age as part of the postmodern society's contemporary issue;
- curriculum's characteristics with respect to early education and primary education, based on psycho-pedagogy data of the pre-scholar and small scholar's integral development, around which curricular elements are being adapted.

2 Strategic principles and directions of the curriculum regarding early education

The psycho-pedagogical and sociological researches of cognitive and social development have revealed the high significance of storages while being a child, as a basic stage in building personality. Educating the child as an individual with specific development needs (not as an adult in miniature), while being aged 0-3 years old, has constituted an essential argument in order to elaborate a curriculum for early education, structured on two age levels, having a unitary vision and a coherence of the process:

- curriculum for early education, children being aged 0-3 years old (ante-pre-scholars);
- curriculum for early education, children being aged 3-6/7 years old (pre-scholars).

Internationally, trends in educational policies regarding concerns, investments and educational strategies with respect to this level of age, have been adopted by our country, too. Lately, if we analyze the percentage of the legislative framework and pedagogical speeches, we notice the field of early education as being a strategic one, belonging to the Romanian curricular reform and benefiting from a *convergent strategy regarding child's early education*, elaborated by the ministry with support from UNICEF Romania. The elaboration and implementation process of the curriculum for early education is oriented by a series of principles and requests, whose unitary compliance ensures the educational process' coherence for the entire pre-school period (The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, Curriculum for early education of children aged 0-6/7 years old, 2008):

- *the holistic approach of child's development*, by unitary accomplishing objectives belonging to multiple fields, as part of curricular contents and by adapting the training strategies: physical development, health, language

and communication development, cognitive development and socio-emotional development;

- *promoting education focused on child, on his global development*, by capitalizing educational effects of interacting with natural and social environment;
- *adequating the educational process to age and individual characteristics*, by providing equal conditions and opportunities in order to play, learn and develop, in accordance with each and every child's potential;
- *avoiding expressions and prejudices of any type* by didactic staff, non-didactic staff, parents and children, which could injure child's dignity;
- *applying the principles of social inclusion*, having the effect of accepting and capitalizing children regardless of their culture, ethnic group, sex, religion, mother tongue, family environment, disabilities regarding their capacities, satisfying their individual educational needs;
- *integrating as part of the curriculum diversity principles*, by playing games, learning situations in order to capitalize child's cultural and educational experience earned as part of the family and community;
- *taking into consideration families' needs* as part of the process in order to configure educational approaches and involve parents in organizing and deploying educational partnership activities;
- *respecting the principles of genuine learning*, characterized by challenging the child to become the author of his own learning by being active and interacting with the environment;
- *ensuring curriculum's coherence and continuity*, through a unitary vision upon the entire period of early education and by ensuring link elements with the curriculum, as far as the primary education is regarded;
- *respecting European and international standards concerning early education.*

The finalities of early education are defined having in consideration early education's principles and values, in accordance with the psycho-pedagogical characteristics of pre-scholars' integral development and with education's European Dimension and Romanian education's values. The educational finalities that head and regulate all curricular elements of the early education are (The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, Curriculum for early education of children aged 3-6/7 years old):

1. „Free, integral and harmonious development of the child's personality, in accordance with his own pace and needs, supporting his autonomous and

- creative training.
2. Developing capacities in order to interact with other children, with adults and the environment in order to achieve new knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors.
 3. Encouraging explorations, exercises, attempts and experiments, as autonomous learning experiences.
 4. Discovering by each child his own identity, autonomy and development of a positive self-image.
 5. Supporting the child in achieving knowledge, capacities, skills and attitudes necessary when attending the first year of school and for the rest of his life.”

3 Managerial approach of the early education

3.1 Conceptual analyses of the educational management; implications as part of the early education

Managerial approach of the educational system and process is based on:

- ensuring educational process' rationality, by applying and adequating general management's principles and functions to school activity's specific;
- asserting contextual creativity of school managers and educators, as part of situations specific to institutional managerial process and also as part of the class;
- using all types and channels of intra- and inter-institutional communication, informational system, planning methods and procedures, in order to efficientize the organization, management and coordination of activities and resources, to provide evaluation with a motivational character, to highly accomplish objectives of the educational system, school institution, educational process;
- promoting school organization's stability, through transactional modalities of action and respect regarding the rules ascertained, but also promoting change, through transforming modalities and expressive behaviors;
- promoting managerial research, in order to efficientize the managerial practice as part of specific organisational context, to generalize results in one of a kind theories and methodologies;
- managerial professionalization, by achieving the managerial culture,

developing managerial competences in order to divide this culture in managerial approaches adequate to the organisational context, capacities and attitudes necessary for the managerial self-improving process (self-management), responsibility regarding the institutional development and children's development.

A review of the educational management definitions reveals the following options:

- interdisciplinary pedagogical science, engaged as part of the „study of experiments involved in making a decision in order to organize a given pedagogical activity and to manage educational programs” (De Landsheere, 1992);
- „a modality of superior management – global, optimal, strategic – planned and accomplished as far as all its working levels are concerned” (Cristea, 2002, 224). Regarding the author quoted, the above mentioned managerial activities present the following characteristics: a) global management, of primary system, implies approaching the ensemble of the issues, given their functional and structural inter-dependency; b) optimal management, pilot type, implies maximally capitalizing functional and structural resources; c) strategic management aims system's innovative evolution as far as all levels of organization are regarded;
- „theory and practice, science and the art of planning, organizing, coordinating, evaluating, adjusting educational activity's elements (not only those of the resources), as an activity of permanent free, integral and harmonious development of human being, in order to autonomously and creatively assert one's personality, given the ideal of the educational policy” (Joița, 2000, p. 25).

Beside specific elements brought to the fore, each and every of the four options represents definitions in terms of management of the educational process, by mentioning the managerial functions and activities applied as part of the educational activity.

As far as early education is regarded, the educational management represents adequating general principles, functions, strategies and means of the school management to the characteristics of the institutional system and early education's process, in order to efficiently accomplish multiple categories of activities with respect to strategic, tactical and operative levels (of the system's management and pre-school education's process): strategic planning,

programming, organizing, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, meta-evaluating and adjusting.

3.2 Management of pre-school institution - strategic field of the managerial reform

As part of the educational reform, in general, and as as part of the early education reform, especially, the management of the pre-school institution represents a strategic field, because pre-school institutions present priority when it comes to significant investments, in order to synchronize this level with international demands and especially with those as part of the European Union, with respect to educational infrastructure, ensuring a qualified staff in order to achieve strategic projects, as well as with respect to those ensuring educational processes' quality.

The strategic targets of the reform as part of pre-school institution management, are:

- facilitating a qualitative education as part of pre-school education, by implementing managerial strategies and tools specific to the institutional management of pre-scholars;
- providing conditions in order to assert pre-school institution's identity as a decentralized unity, having a specific vision, strategic projects of institutional development, able to achieve resources, community's support for educational programs;
- developing the managerial competences of pre-school institutions' managers, attesting them as professional managers;
- professionally develop the didactic staff in the spirit of new pedagogical and managerial orientations;
- favouring some attitudes open in order to develop partnership based programs.

As far as pre-school institution is concerned, the educational management consists in applying all general functions of the management in order to highly accomplish the curricular reform's objectives as part of early education field, the pre-school institutions' strategic objectives, in order to satisfy children and parents' needs, taking the shape of managerial activities, actions, operations specific to the institutional management (which represent the competence and responsibility of the managerial team) and class management (case in which the educator fulfills specific managerial roles). The managerial activities as far as the early education is regarded and the specific roles are grouped on the following

categories, resulting:

- management of projects and educational programs;
- curriculum's management;
- management of tensional conditions as part of pre-school institutions;
- (self)management of the professional development programs;
- management of community relations.

All these categories of the managerial activity are unitary and coherently integrated as part of the institutional development project, implying an involved management with responsibilities belonging to the managerial team, as well as belonging to the didactic staff, who assert their competences specific to multiple sub-fields: communication management, resources management (human, temporal, material, ergonomic), quality management, informational system management, change management.

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