

REQUIREMENTS FOR REORGANIZATION OF THE FIRST CYCLE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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Received: April, 29. 2014.

Accepted: May, 23.2014.

Original Article

UDK 373.3.014(497.7)“2005/2015”

Abstract. As one of the two basic aims in the key fields of intervention in the National Program for Development of the Education in the Republic of Macedonia for 2005-2015, the issue of increasing the primary education, from 8 to 9 years, was posed. The requirements in this period are mainly initiated by the developmental characteristics of the children. The need for more intensive application of play and the activities of play has been shown to be the most appropriate approach in the process of acquiring of knowledge, abilities, skills and habits, and as an educational reform it should be respected in school conditions.

The subject of scientific research refers to the didactic-methodic components of the activity of play in the first educational cycle. The methodology, methods and techniques that were applied during the course of the research are: the method of analysis (analysis of content and structural analysis), the descriptive method and the method of comparison, as well as the techniques of analysis of pedagogical documentation, observation and surveying.

On the basis of the received results, it can be concluded that: the organization and realization of the activity of play partially depends on the professional training of the teachers; the majority of teachers believe that the syllabi are appropriate for the realization of the activity of play as a methodical concept; the necessity of appropriate didactic-methodical preparation of the teachers for realizing the activity of play.

Keywords: *Requirements, First educational cycle, Developmental needs, Contemporary didactic-methodic approach.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The global social changes that dictate novelties in the educational system are undoubtedly part of the Macedonian social and educational climate. In recent decades, the need for finding new and suitable solutions that will follow the contemporary trends and directions in the field of education, is noticeable. Theory and practice move towards creating various strategies, materials and documents, which will give their contribution for this tendency. The world organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF, The European Council, The European Committee), which are interested in the field of education, are becoming more numerous and louder in their proposals for goals, principles, directions and recommendations that should represent the foundations for a new ordering in education. In the attempt to keep up pace, the Republic of Macedonia is creating national documents in order to set up its own education. The most recent document is the National Program for the Development of Education of the Republic of Macedonia 2005-2015, with additional program documents, published in 2004 by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Macedonia. This significant strategic document refers to the goals, challenges, the national educational vision, mission, values, principles and key areas for intervention. A plan has been made about the way in which one of the more significant global educational goals can be accomplished, and that is education for everybody, how to advance one's intellectual growth and learning, increasing the chances for participation, as well as the opportunities to increase the competitiveness

of the Macedonian society. One of the main tendencies found in this strategic document refers to the structural changing of the primary education as a key educational requirements, and what the direct influence and reorganization of the two subsystems would mean; they are preschool and primary school education.

The new systematic and conceptual changes in the primary education in the Republic of Macedonia call for finding contemporary and appropriate approaches to the realization of the syllabus, which will mean rounding up the already started process of structural and content redesigning of the primary schools. The pedagogical theory and practice has always been searching for possible methodical solutions that at the same time will fulfill several aspects, such as: the developmental characteristics, interests, needs and opportunities of students, the syllabi and didactic-methodical apparatus that the teacher will be operating with (from the scientific qualifications of the teaching staff to the technical conditions).

One possible methodical solution which will be in accordance with the big educational reform is the activity of play with its numerous specificities that will be additionally analyzed. The activity of play results from game, which in its initial and natural form has an excellent pedagogical (scientific, theoretical and practical) foundation. The methodical concept of the activity of play does not start from the beginning, on the contrary, it is based on a very healthy and scientifically-founded starting position of play and continues to develop into a concept that is significant for the final period of the early childhood, and that is the early school age. The numerous scientific and practical research of the importance and role of play mainly refers to the preschool period. The need for its application even in the early school period has been increasingly felt, but in different conditions, teaching conditions, learning, acquiring knowledge, skills, abilities, etc. The methodical conceptualization of the teaching in those conditions provides the opportunity for play to be modified into an activity of play.

The need for implementation of the activity of play in the early school period, among other things, has appeared for fulfillment of the following pedagogical components:

Didactic - methodic compatibility between the two subsystems (preschool and primary school education);

Following and respecting the

developmental characteristics of the pupil, as well as their needs, interests and wishes;

The role of the teacher in the methodical conceptualizing of the teaching in the early school period;

Following the recommendations given by the teaching plans and programs.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The problem of the researching is directed towards the analysis of the role, the meaning and readiness of the teachers in the organization of the activity of play as a methodical concept in the first educational cycle of the new compulsory nine-year education.

The expected results refer to the following:

- Among the surveyed participants the dominant view is that the organization and realization of the activity of playing partially depend on their initial education.

- Among the participants the dominant view is that there are partial representation and influence of the trainings for professional improvement aimed for the organization and realization of the activity of play.

- The majority of teachers/educators consider the teaching programs to be suitable for realizing the activity of play as a methodical concept.

- The necessity of appropriate didactic-methodical preparation of the teachers for realizing the activity of play.

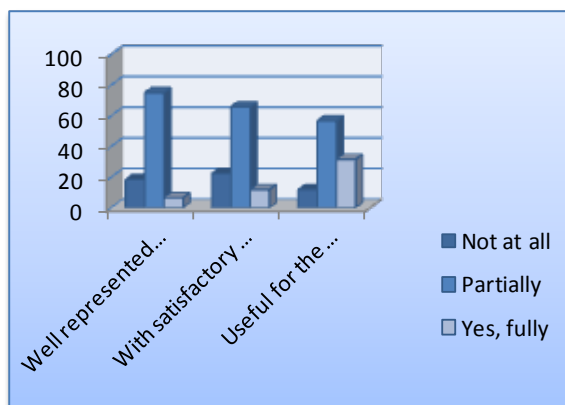
The research implemented the quantitative approach, using the research technique of surveying to reach relevant information. The questionnaire for teachers was structured in four parts, out of which in the first part the questions referred to receiving more detailed information about: The importance of initial education, training for professional improvement, the appropriateness of the teaching programs of the first educational cycle, and the didactic-methodic preparation of the teachers in the process of organization and realization of the activity of play as a methodical concept. With the aim of questioning the views and opinions the research included a sample of teachers who have classes in the first educational cycle. This research covered a total of 152 teachers from 16 primary schools in 5 cities (Skopje, Kumanovo, Kočani, Veles and Vinica).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The importance of initial education

For the needs of the organization and realization of the activity of play, it is necessary in order to satisfy certain preconditions. The initial education of the teaching staff of the first educational cycle of primary school, as an important factor, refers to the representation of the content of this issue, the acquired practical experience as well as the application of the acquired knowledge in the given professional engagement. In order to establish the importance of the initial education, the participants had the opportunity to express their views on the following question, and the results are presented in Graph 1.

Graph 1. The importance of initial education



From the results presented in Table 1 (Graph 1) in all three categories, the largest percentage of the surveyed (75.0%) think that in the initial education there is partial content representation of the issue of the activity of play as a methodical concept. According to 18.4% of the participants, there is no content representation at all during the initial education, while an insignificantly small percentage of the surveyed (6.6%) stated that there is full content representation on this topic during the initial education.

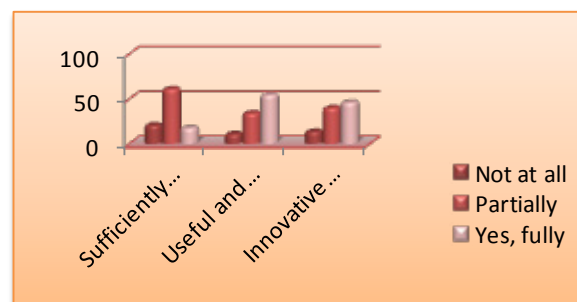
Considering the practical experience, the largest percentage of the surveyed (65.8%) shared the opinion that they have partially acquired practical experience on this content, while 22.4% stated that they do not have any practical experience during the initial education, and 11.8% of the surveyed have satisfactory practical experience in the initial education.

Regarding the issue of the dependence on the initial education and the given professional work, the largest part of the surveyed (56.6%) thinks that the initial education influences them only partially in their given professional work. A very small percentage, i.e. 11.8%, think that they have not acquired a satisfactory practical experience in this period, but the rest of the surveyed, i.e. 36.6%, demonstrate that the content of this topic during the initial education is fully useful for their given professional work.

The importance of training for professional improvement

The system of professional improvement presents innovation of the acquired knowledge through practical work and research activities, skills improvement, abilities improvement and continued professional development of the teachers. The goal of our research, among other things, was also directed towards establishing the representation, the usefulness and application of the trainings for teachers, as well as following contemporary trends for the trainings in this field. Concerning the state of the primary schools at the moment, for the trainings of the teaching staff, the surveyed stated their opinions in the following way, demonstrated through this graph:

Graph 2. The importance of training for professional improvement



According to the data shown in the table, the highest frequency (93) of replies, i.e. 61.2% of the surveyed, consider the trainings for professional improvement aimed for organization and realization of the activity of play as a methodical concept in the first educational cycle to be partially represented. 21.1% of the surveyed share the view that there are not

enough trainings, while only 17.8% consider there to be full representation of the trainings for professional improvement in this field.

According to more than half of the surveyed, the trainings for professional improvement and development are fully beneficial and applicable in their teaching practice. 34.2% of the surveyed share the view that they are partially useful and applicable, while only 11.2% of the surveyed consider these trainings to be non-applicable in their everyday teaching.

Regarding the issue of innovativeness and application of the trainings for professional development, 46.1% of the surveyed claimed that they are fully innovative and contemporary, 40.1% stated that they were partially represented, and 13.8% think that the trainings are not at all innovative and contemporary.

In the framework of this part of the questionnaire, one open-ended question was given: What trainings have you attended up to now?

The surveyed gave the following answers to this question:

Step by step; Active teaching-Interactive learning; Toolkids; With reading and writing to critical thinking; Creative teaching and learning; Leading the classroom; Strategies and techniques of learning and teaching; Team work and envisioning; Personal management; Life skills training; Application of ICT in teaching; Training for the LINOX-edu buntu program; Approaches for visual thinking; Mathematics with thinking; Web-quest; Mathematics and the natural sciences; Methods and techniques of grading; Communication and communicational skills; Improvement of the learning environment; Numerical literacy; Algorithm center.

The suitability of the teaching programs of the first educational cycle

The teaching programs of the first teaching cycle are of great importance in the realization of the activity of play in the educational process. The structure of the teaching programs moves towards content, directions and examples that give ideas for creating activities of play.

From the data that was received at the end, it can be concluded that the teaching programs according to 57.9% of the surveyed largely offer content possibilities for organization and realization of the activity of play in

the first educational cycle, while according to one third of the surveyed, 30.3%, they largely don't offer the needed content possibilities. A very small percentage, 11.8%, of those surveyed had opposing views in terms of the content possibilities of the teaching programs, i.e. 7.2% of them think that it is fully the case, while the rest of them, 4.6%, think that it is not like that at all.

From the sample of teachers, 46.7% think that the teaching program for the first educational cycle for the most part offer defined directions, while 42.8% had the opposing view, that the teaching programs largely do not offer such. Regarding this issue, once again we are faced with a low percentage, 6.6%, of surveyed who think that it is fully the case, and 3.9% who stated that the program does not offer any directions.

A large percentage of the surveyed, 49.3%, share the view that the teaching programs for this period largely offer ready-made solutions and examples of the activity of play, while the frequency of 45 answers points to the view that one-third of the surveyed think that they largely do not offer ready-made examples and solutions. Taking these low percentages of 16.5% and 4.6% into consideration, it can conclude that part of the surveyed do not favor the existence of ready-made solutions and examples of the activity of play in the teaching programs.

Didactic-methodic preparation of the teachers

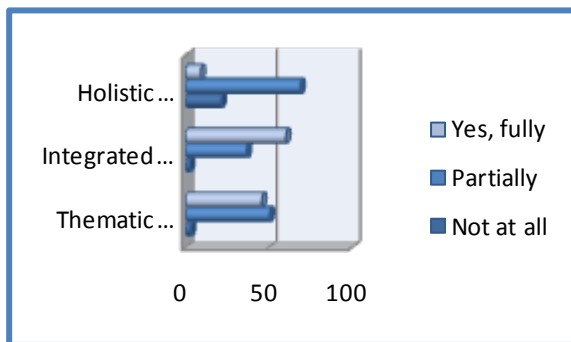
In the process of making and realization of the activity of play, it is necessary to have didactic-methodic preparation of the educators and teachers. It helps them to find appropriate solutions and set the ground for the issue on a wide didactic-methodic foundation. This type of preparation presents a guide according to which the teaching staff will realize their idea. The didactic-methodic preparation presupposes several aspects, but for the needs of this research, the focus has been placed on: the subject and approach from which it has started, and the nature and application of the didactic materials.

The ranking list that has been made on the basis of the views of the teachers for the initial basis in the organization and realization of the activity of play shows that a high percentage of the surveyed start from the teaching content, while the interests of the pupils

according to the data have been ranked second, and the last place on the ranking list is taken up by the present school events, because of the low frequency of answers. This data directs us to the conclusion that the teaching content still has primacy in the creation and realization of the activity of play in the teaching practice.

Didactic-methodic preparation of the activity of playing largely depends on the approach that has been applied by the surveyed in their everyday practice. In the pedagogical theory and practice there are several approaches to the planning of the teaching process, and they are: the thematic, integrated and holistic approach. Each of them has their specific characteristics that undoubtedly influence the realization of the activity of play. The following graph demonstrates which of these approaches is most commonly applied by the surveyed:

Graph 3. The suitability of the teaching programs of the first educational cycle



From the final data that are shown in Table 4.2, it can be concluded that the largest part of the surveyed, 50.7%, only partially uses the thematic approach, but not much less, or 46.0%, fully use the same approach. Only with 5 surveyed is the view that they are not applied it dominant, but their percentage in this case is insignificant.

Regarding the application of the integrated approach, 60.5% stated that they fully apply it, 36.9% of the surveyed partially apply it and only 2.6% do not apply it at all.

Of the total number of surveyed, 21.7% stated that they are not applied the holistic approach at all, while only 9.2% fully apply it. Largely, 69.1%, the holistic approach is only partially applied by the surveyed and since this percentage is the highest of all the offered it can freely be stated that the teaching staff is open to implementation of contemporary approaches in the planning of the didactic-methodic aspects of the teaching.

In the didactic-methodic planning of the activity of play, the didactic materials and means of a different nature should always be involved. The necessity of their presence results from the need to include them in the teaching, especially in the early years. The nature of the didactic materials and means is different and it depends on the aim they are used for. The educators and teachers have the opportunity to choose the type of didactic material that can or doesn't have to be for a certain purpose in accordance with the needs of the activity of play. Considering the need for didactic materials, the largest percentage (67.1%) of the surveyed stated that they apply combined materials and means that contain all the already offered categories of material types. This is especially significant for the realization of the activity of play in practice because the surveyed will have the opportunity to choose the most suitable materials that are needed in order to satisfy the nature of the content. In addition, in the combination of materials and means, the freedom of choice among teachers and educators as well as their respect of the pupils' interests takes up an initial position.

4. CONCLUSION

The data that have been received demonstrate the state and influence of the different aspects on the manner of organization and realization of the activity of play as a methodical concept. The surveyed largely share the views that they are partially trained for organization and realization of the activity of play. The content offers, practical experience and also the application in their given professional work are not fully, i.e. are partially, and covered during the course of their initial education, which calls for the need to increased involvement in these aspects in the process of initial education of the future teachers.

Regarding the trainings aimed about this issue, the surveyed largely thinks that they are partially represented, which can lead us to the conclusion that they feel the need to organize them more often. The need that often comes from the practice should be followed, supported and realized. The views of the teaching staff about the appropriateness of the teaching programs show that the teaching programs largely offer content possibilities, defined directions and ready-made solutions and examples for the realization of the activity of playing for the appropriate subject.

However, there is a need for clearer, more concise and more concrete recommendations for the realization of the activities of play. In the offered directions and examples of the activity of play in the teaching programs, there is content unsuitability, which creates a misstep between the interpretations of the educators and the teachers and their real meaning.

Didactic-methodic preparation as a significant issue has stressed the views of the educators and teachers in several significant segments. Firstly, it can be possible to conclude that the teaching staff cannot show autonomy in terms of the teaching programs. The research showed that in the preparation of the activity of play they most commonly start from the teaching content, and then the pupils' interests or the school events at the moment. Secondly, the surveyed clearly aired their views regarding the application of the thematic and integrated approach, but it is a surprising fact that for the most part they apply the holistic approach as well as an important novelty in the pedagogical theory and practice. Thirdly, the surveyed show practice as a colorful, i.e. a combined application of didactic materials and means for the realization of the activity of play, which points to their freedom and creativity in the choice of such.

Conflict of interests

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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