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Sofia Loredana TUDOR

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Educational Resources – Functional Elements of the Educational Environment at Early Age

Sofia Loredana TUDOR¹

Abstract

Introducing skills as goals of the school curriculum in preschool education, by redefining curricula in primary schools, by formulating them in explicit terms of general skills/ specific skills, represented for these levels of schooling a starting point in redefining the educational acting frame, also in redefining the components of the educational process and the analysis perspective of pedagogical interdependencies between them. The school curriculum incorporates new elements of the educational process by taking into account the paradigmatic evolution, the innovations in the sphere of teaching methodology, the development categories of educational resources and the need of optimum use of their formative and informative value.

This paper aims to analyze the importance of valuing the pedagogical potential of educational resources at early ages by providing a suitable educational environment for child's training needs, for multiple intelligences development, for his interactive involvement in building his own knowledge.

Theoretical study findings highlight the compensatory value of the modern and traditional educational resources, the multimedia and open resources, as their complementary value by increasing the educational potential of the educational environment.

Keywords

Early childhood education, educational environment, educational resources, stimulating areas, educational toy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Current pedagogical paradigms highlight the need for investment in education made since the early ages. According to the Global Monitoring Report on Education for All (2007), early education supports the children's

¹ University of Pitesti, Romania, Faculty of Educational Sciences, e-mail: tudor_lori@yahoo.com.

learning, survival, growth and development from birth to the entry into primary school including health, nutrition, hygiene, cognitive, social, physical and emotional development (The Global Monitoring Report on Education for All, 2007). The importance of education from early age is supported by the latest results of psychology, pedagogy, etc. studies, which shows that early learning promotes learning opportunities later. Early acquired skills and knowledge favor the development and production of others later, and the knowledge and skills deficiencies produce bigger deficiencies in time, poorly capitalized learning opportunities.

Developing a paradigm of education at an early age and small schooling premises on various policies and international and national strategies (Convention on Child Rights, New York, November 20, 1989; World Conference from Jomtien, Thailand, 1990; World Conference Access and Quality, Spain, Salamanca, 1994; World Forum on Education, Dakar, 2000; Millenium Statements of UN General Assembly, 2000; National Strategy on early education; The Project for Early Education Reform, The Project for Early Education for All, the government program 2009-2012 - early Education section). (Tudor, 2015, pp. 12-13)

II. A theoretical basis of the theme

Early education

Early education is a growing concern apparent to all the educational factors and it achieved a more and more important status in Romania. The significance extension of this guidance refers to the entire period of child development from 0 to 8/ 12 years, regardless of the educational environment in which this development takes place - family, community, kindergarten, etc. Guideline was developed following the development of international educational policies and practices, regarding the value and importance of young age, based on the importance of the interdependent action of the educational factors in supporting the child in developing his physical, mental, social skills.

The premises for education from early ages are highlighted by current psycho-pedagogical paradigms and results of research and studies on child development, that bring to the foreground the uniqueness of the child and hence the need for a holistic approach to his development. The educational consequences of this approach are: the need to give constantly equal attention to all areas of development - physical development, health, language and communication development, cognitive and socio-emotional

development; the importance of promoting and practicing child-centered education and his overall development in the context of interaction with the natural and social environment; the adequacy of the entire educational process to age and individual peculiarities; authentic and significant learning principles capitalization (in which the child is author of his own learning through active involvement and interaction with the environment in meaningful contexts for his age and individual peculiarities).

Having different definitions and interpretations in literature, we stop on the analysis of early education from the perspective of the acting framework that provides the foundation, design and achievement of child development. In this approach, "early education is started in the first moments of life and supported by individualisation and adequate organization of direct and indirect educational influences." (Vrasmas, 2014); "Early education is the set of all objectives, knowledge and ways of achieving optimal development of children from birth up to 6-7 years, based on considering each caring act as a learning experience, education and creating new situations predominantly through game, to stimulate and direct the formation of the child's personality earlier. This process is only possible in the educational partnership between family, community and competent professionals" ("Early education in Romania", Step by Step-IOMC-UNICEF Vanemmonde, 2004); early education is essential for further development of the child and requires methodology and curriculum appropriate and qualified personnel, in collaboration with the family and social services and health (Tassoni, Beith, Bulman, 2005; Tassoni, 2006).

The educational environment at early ages

The educational goal of early learning assumes that every child should be able to autonomously communicate with adults and children in the group, to acquire coordinated motor skills, to feel safe in the organization's area and accept the parents absence, to satisfy curiosity and to enjoy his knowledge, to feel a capable person, worthy and respected (Curriculum for early childhood education from birth to 3 years, 2008, pp. 6-7).

Educational practice at early ages will focus on three fundamental needs of children (Paun, Iucu, 2002): child's need for emotional security and expression of autonomy and independence; the child's need for differentiation, recognition of their identity and self-image building; the child's need for exploration and to dominate his environment.

It outlines a new paradigm of integrated training, centered on global approach to child development, on promoting centered learning child/student by respecting children's individual particularities, their uniqueness, everyone's personal basic needs (care, knowledge, food), emotional (love, emotional security, positive reinforcing actions), action (freely chosen game), learning through game (freely chosen game, educational games categories etc.) and cooperative learning (using cooperative, collaborative, competitive strategies etc.). (Tudor 2014, p. 19)

Implicitly, these changes in educational outcomes and curricula should support the revival of the educational environment and its components, the main dimensions being the environment organizing on areas of interest to ensure the development and exploitation of individual potential (discovery and recovery skills/ identification and improvement of learning difficulties).

The freedom that the current school program offers to the teachers, in arranging the educational environment, for all activities in kindergarten, allows each and every teacher to take into account the particular conditions of the area, kindergarten, classroom space, available materials, the needs and interests of children and leads to a huge variety of models of practice (Popescu, 2014, p.75).

Defining the educational environment as a learning environment means all resources and educational materials offered and used in the educational space of an educational institution. An optimal educational environment will be organized to foster activism and creativity of children, the desire to engage in activities, to suggest and motivate cognitive and participation behavior. Pedagogical literature provides conditions/suggestions in organizing the educational environment: dividing of the learning environment in areas/ thematic centers according to different types of activities; arranging furniture and activity centers will take into account pedagogical requirements and will enable the use of space in silence at a reasonable sound level between activity centers; means and materials that form the educational environment will be adequate to psychological and age peculiarities, it will correspond to the sanitary-hygienic and aesthetic requirements; the aesthetic location should be appropriate, orderly arrangement, on material categories, labeling materials etc.; the planning of the centers is recommended to carry with children; regular sorting of materials; the gradual introduction of new materials; means and materials used for demonstration will be exposed at children's sight, being changed periodically according to the specific of educational activities (created, thematic centers, theme of the day, educational

objectives, didactic activity type, etc.); resources and learning materials will be placed in the area of children's learning, having easily access to them; means and materials specific to topic centers will be built on these centers (areas for them). (Tudor, 2014, pp. 74-75)

Educational resources - functional elements of the education environment

Curriculum changes, occurred in the 2008 educational reform at the level of fundamental educational cycle, were focused on all components, which are defined by the reorganization of aims and curriculum contents, ways of design, implementation and evaluation of child activity. These redefinitions of the education process specific for early ages involve the reorganization of the educational environment and its components in order to configure child's optimal development framework.

Stimulating areas (centers of interest, workshops game, entertaining centers, thematic corners) are a way of organizing educational space by dividing it into different spaces, with the purposes of child's experiential knowledge and development. These are reflected in the class as the place where materials related to the theme of the project are exposed so that children to be able to look, operate and play with them, to speak and read, and to be read about them, to add new products made or purchased by them - a closet, a shelf, a carton labeled with the theme title and related materials.

The arrangement of educational materials on these centers complies with stimulating area specifics of child development and the theme of the day/ thematic project. Stimulating areas specific to educational activities at early ages are: the area with water and sand ("Sand and Water" Centre), construction area ("Construction" Centre), familiarization with nature area ("Science" Center), book and pictures interaction zone ("Library" Center), role play area ("Role Play" Center), table games area ("Arts" Centre), area for dynamic games etc.

Educational resources means all materials produced or adapted and selected in accordance with pedagogical and psychological criteria in order to achieve the instructive - educational objectives of the educational process. Pedagogical/ teaching resource, in the functional sense, is that material, technological product that serves the educational process, has formative value, is part of the teaching strategy and then belongs to the "teaching technology (methodology), to a course of action". (Joita, 2002, p. 243)

The variety of means of education that can be used in educational environment is given not only by the availability and own specific in creating school space ergonomics, but also by their educational functions: communication function (information) - providing intuitive support as a source of knowledge, transmission of information about objects, facts, events, studied processes; illustrative-demonstration function - means serve as tools used by the teacher in an experiment or a demonstration, serve to support learning and to value learning content; substitution function - educational means can replace reality, ensuring group and simultaneous observation of what is representative; substitution function - the use of technical means in distance education; stimulating function- means of education stimulate curiosity, interest, knowledge and action, focusing attention and learning effort; formative and educational function - means of education contribute to operating processes and to the ability of logical analysis, synthesis, generalization, the activation of attention; they are tools in the formation of psychomotor skills; rationalization effort of learning function- educational means facilitate and optimize students learning effort; school performance evaluation function - use of educational means in measuring learning outcomes, in measuring students school performance. (Tudor, 2010, pp. 182-183).

Pedagogical potential of means of education largely depends on the skills and pedagogical talent of the teacher in their design and use, on the way he processes, interprets and restructures the information submitted with their help. For that purpose, it is recommended to be respected some criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of educational means: the quality of the used teaching means; content ideas orientation; the level of students contribution to activity, the level to stimulate interest in learning; training students intellectual capacities; heuristic capacity (insofar they facilitate students' access to discovery lead them to make comparisons, to solve problem situations, etc.); operational capacity (the extent to which it facilitates the development of practical skills and abilities); motivation potential (stimulation and development of skills, creative spirit).

Restructuring the learning environment in terms of creating a stimulating and intensified environment, are imposed from the need to configure an optimal framework for multiple intelligences development in early ages. (Flueras, 2005) Pedagogical literature offers some suggestions regarding the use of multiple intelligences in the educational context, methods, means, choices of educational activities that can be developed in this respect (Bocos, 2008):

- linguistic intelligence development - means of education like worksheets, journals, collections of texts, videos/ audio, reading sheets, used in educational activities of reading in choir/ individual, writing activities, debates, play activities;
- development of logical-mathematical intelligence - educational means using modern tools/ media, used in educational activities in games , calculations, demonstration;
- development of rhythmic music intelligence- educational means using musical instruments used in educational activities for driving rhythm, murmuring, whistling, singing, listening to music, analyzing music using musical instruments, creating music sequences, choirs, concerts;
- development of visual-spatial intelligence - educational means like drawings, graphs, charts, graphic symbols, patterns, models, molds, maps, atlases, charts, used in educational activities to make models, collages;
- naturalistic intelligence development - educational means like livestock/ stuffed animals, collections of plants, rocks, material, insects, seeds, photographs, science films used in educational activities of observation, experiments, viewing shows with animals, plants, activities based game, reading texts with specific content;
- bodily-kinesthetic intelligence development - physical education equipment used in practical activities, physical activities, crafts, free movement;
- development of intrapersonal intelligence - educational means: questionnaires used in educational activities of independent study, self-assessment activities, personal reflections;
- development of existential intelligence - educational means: journals, treaties used in educational activities of independent study, discussions, debates, self-assessment activities.

Educational toy is a means of education especially for young children, schoolchildren and preschoolers, helping them to develop their intellectual abilities, creative, logical, linguistic, emotional and psychological; "A substitute to social activities, they are preparing the future, satisfying present needs" (Claparede in Tudor, 2014, p. 76); functions of educational toys (Moale, 2005).

The formative value of the toy as a means of education derives from its role in the socialization process of the child, meaning that through game he is integrated into a system of relations homonymous to the social ones, close to the environment where they live, he learns to communicate silently and to receive what it is said about other children; other formative-

informative consequences of using the toy as an educational resource: broadening the representations content; stimulating creative imagination; activization of thought and communication process; speech development, mathematical thinking.

From this point of view, it is useful to classify the educational toys in relation to educational objectives (Piaget in Tudor, 2014, p. 77): sensorimotor educational toys, in which reality is assimilated in intellectual structures and in old practices of the child; educational toys as exercise - which consists of repetitions for adaptation pleasure; symbolic educational toys - are based on signs representation of objects that cannot be yet perceived; educational toys with rules - are considered the starting point for progressive socialization process that is applied to children aged 2 to 7 years; building educational games, which are based on symbolic games that transform actions in internal physical processes and move from symbols operation to abstract operations, this process is very important for the development of child's intelligence.

III. Discussion and conclusions

In Romania, at the moment, we cannot consider the existence of a consolidated framework for the development and optimal diversity of educational resources that we identify either in pedagogical literature or in specialists discussions/ analysis, either in educational practices from other educational systems or/ and in the insertion efforts, in the Romanian education, of some effective educational resources. There are efforts in the practitioners work that give pedagogical value to various educational resources relative to criteria such as: objectives, the specific of the teaching content, the education level and specific of child/ student training on each age level, continuity of teaching approach in objectives - content - strategies relation (methods, means and forms of organization) - evaluation. If we were to consider the wish to introduce digital textbooks in the Romanian system, we have a clear picture of the contradictions that Romanian educational system must overcome: the relation between efficiency and pedagogical value of educational resources - necessary financial support; another example is revealed by a ratio between the efficiency of the insertion in education of open resources - necessary financial support - the institutional framework defined by main technical and pedagogical attributes needed to develop an open and interactive educational process.

In this context, educational resources prove their contribution to the development of an optimal educational environment by stimulating

learning experiences characterized by: relevance to the learning needs of pupils; cooperation by intensifying relations student - student in learning, especially student - content interactivity; students must be determine to access the knowledge and experience of experts whenever they need, stimulating innovation and emphasizing the sense of community; formal or informal continuity, education should be integrated into work processes throughout life, resulting in productivity growth, centering on results - in a dynamic society, learning must be geared directly toward organizational goals, leading adaptively to performance.

The didactic quality is determined by the quality and the optimal interdependence of its pedagogical components, each of them provide independently and interdependently the increase of students' intellectual independence and creativity, performance in learning.

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