

**THE PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM IN THE REPUBLIC  
OF MACEDONIA FROM THE ASPECT OF THE HOLISTIC-  
INTEGRATIVE DISCOURSE IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD  
DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT:**

The holistic-integrative discourse is the basis of the concept of a quality preschool educational process. Accordingly, the modern preschool curriculum should follow the modern holistic paradigm and it should be based on holism as a philosophical-humanistic approach, which interprets the socio-emotional relationship of man and nature as a unique ecological-developmental phenomenon. The curriculum should be developmental, it needs to provide an integrative approach towards the development of the children and promote education based on the nature of the child.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the segments of the preschool curriculum in the Republic of Macedonia, which contain and promote holistic-integrative postulates for planning a quality holistic educational process. Using the descriptive method, we analyzed:

- The objectives of the preschool curriculum, the way and the extent to which it is oriented towards the nature of the child;
- The philosophical postulates of the preschool curriculum;
- The structure of the syllabus;

The conclusions, elaborated in the paper, indicate that the curriculum has potential for planning holistic-integrative education in the Republic of Macedonia.

**Keywords:** preschool curriculum, holism, holistic-integrative discourse, humanistic paradigm, preschool educational process, structure of the paradigm, early childhood development, early childhood education.

**Introduction**

The holistic-integrative discourse in the early childhood development is a philosophical interpretation of the alternative and natural education and it comes from the theoretical approach called holism (Greek *ΕJ· D-J· μm*: meaning complete, entire, whole), which treats people as a complete system connected to nature, and interprets their behavior through their entire interaction with it, as well as the social interactions in the surrounding. The followers of this approach support the thesis that the whole determines the development and the behavior of the parts. However, bearing in mind the humanistic interpretation, the

individual is not only a whole as a single unit, but also a whole with the universe, hence nature. Because of this, the development is determined by the interaction with the surrounding. Ron Miller, one of the founders of this discipline, among other things, said "...the holistic education should not be defined as a special method or a technique; it should be understood as a paradigm, a sum of basic presumptions and principles, which can be used in different ways" (Sirous Mahmoudi, Ebrahim Jafari, Hasan Ali Nasrabadi, 2012, p. 178). The holistic discourse is based on the humanistic pedagogy which treats the children as active beings with own characteristics and needs. They participate in the overall development, including their own, in a way that actualizes their natural needs and potentials.

All previously stated suggests an educational system that is based on the individual learning approaches of the children. The modern educational process should support experiential and active learning, in which all children will recognize the answers of their own interests and will learn in their own preferential ways, thus developing their whole personality. Through natural stimuli and rich experiences, the spontaneous processes of curiosity and attention of the children gradually transform in deliberate and conscientious activities. All this fits the modern concept for open, integrated and active preschool educational process opposed to the academically organized education. This means simultaneous engagement of all functional, socio-economic, physical, cognitive and intellectual processes, which implies an integrated approach towards the development of the children. In the modern humanistic approaches, this is also interpreted by **holistically directed influences** on the development which should be a priority in the organized preschool educational process.

Accordingly, the preschool curriculum that follows a modern, organized, preschool concept should be based on humanistic foundations and it should promote a holistic approach in the organization and realization of the educational process. (Koteva-Mojsovska, 2015). It needs to provide active learning and teaching based on the nature of the child and the individual potentials, specifics and needs. (Koteva, 1996). Today, the world trends favor the concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP), (Ellen Frede and Debra J. Ackerman, 2007), which implies educational practices that respect the individuality of the child. In this sense, the modern syllabus that strives to be based on humanistic-holistic grounds should follow these trends. The modern curriculum needs to provide an open educational system with respectable participation of all subjects in the educational process, including the parents and the children themselves. It needs to be a compass for the educator while allowing

great creativity and professional development. In other words, the modern curriculum for preschool education should:

- *Be developmental;*
- *Not be highly, but partially structured;*
- *Be orientated towards the child;*
- *Be open;*
- *Come from the child;*
- *Respect the holistic development;*
- *Be humanistic, partner-based;*
- *Be constructive (developmental model;)*
- *Be inclusive .*

#### **About the research**

In the Republic of Macedonia, the preschool education is part of the entire educational system, according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011. The concept of preschool education of the Republic of Macedonia is based on the humanistic-holistic paradigm, and it is carried out in kindergartens and in centers for early childhood development. The educational process in them is regulated by *national documents*. The basic document is The Curriculum for Early Learning and Development brought in March, 2014. The Program for Early Learning and Development is founded on the standards for early learning and development brought by the document named *Standards for early learning and development of children aged 0 to 6*.

In the analysis of the Curriculum, a basic idea was to determine how much it sets and provides humanistic-holistic approaches in the learning and teaching of children in the early developmental and the preschool period. In this aspect, it was interesting to see how and whether it abides by the scientific postulates regarding the individuality of the children, what its goal orientation is, and the philosophical approach. Accordingly, we carried out an analysis of several key elements of the Curriculum for Early Learning and Development, more specifically:

- The goal orientation of the preschool curriculum, the way and degree of orientation towards the nature of the child;
- The philosophical postulates of the preschool curriculum;
- The structure of the curriculum.

**The analysis** of this document allowed us to see the segments and ways in which it manifests orientation towards the nature of the child, whether and to what extent it allows the educator to plan and carry out holistic and integrated educational process based on the developmental and individual needs of the children.

***Analysis of the Curriculum for early learning and development in the Republic of Macedonia from the aspect of its humanistic-holistic approach***

The Curriculum for early learning and development in the Republic of Macedonia is established on pedagogical-psychological values typical for an open preschool educational system that prefers partner relationship of all involved subjects, respecting the country's educational orientations.

When it comes to the statute and the role of the children in the preschool process, we can say that the Curriculum encourages consideration of the individual characteristics of the children and that it prefers organized stimulation of their natural development. Accordingly, we can see the orientation and focus on the nature of the child. In the part of the program titled: "Occupational-Scientific Foundation of the Curriculum", (Curriculum, 2014 p.1) among other things, we can find the following orientation towards the development of the child: "...The development is a process of change, which is a result of the respect of the individual characteristics of the child, the monitoring of his/her internal strengths and the natural development, in which the child increases and strengthens the skills for movement, reasoning, feeling and speaking. The educators in the kindergartens / centers for early childhood development commence activities with the goal to create conditions for cognition and learning through games, interaction (child-child, child-adult), engagement of all children in discovery-researching processes and solving different problem situations, thus encouraging the motor, language, cognitive and socio-emotional skills...". (Curriculum, 2014 p.1)

It is also founded on the established standards for early learning and development, bearing in mind the individual characteristics of each child. This is also evident in part of the principles listed in the Curriculum, i.e.: "...Principle of active learning and encouraging different ways of expression (Curriculum, 2014, p.2) and "Principles of accordance to the age characteristics and the principle of individualization" (Curriculum, 2014, p.2). The first principle shows that "...The environment in which the children learn, stimulates curiosity and is adequate to their physical and emotional needs, the goal being that they feel safe and use different strategies when devising solutions and answers" (Curriculum, 2014, p.2). The second principle refers to the respect of the individual integrity of the child, as a humanistic orientation, i.e. it shows "...Respect of the personality and the individual characteristics, needs, interests, abilities of each child, including the children with special educational needs." (Curriculum, 2014, p.2.).

The goal orientation of the Curriculum for Early Learning and Development of the Republic of Macedonia in terms of the individuality of the children can also be seen through the regulation of the role of the educators. The educators are important subjects. Without a doubt, they are responsible for the realization of the educational context, the process and goals (OECD, March 2004), and it is evident that in this document, the educators are defined as stimulators, creators and organizers of the environment and the educational influences, whose efficiency also greatly depends on the activity of the children themselves. In the part concerning the role of the educator, there are many determinations. The following are important for the holistic approach:

- “Monitoring the development of the children individually;
- Respecting the children’s individual differences, needs and suggestions in the planning and realization of the educational activity (integrated);
- Motivating the children for different types of activity;
- Developing partnership with the family;
- Respecting the choice of the children, and using it in the realization of the specific goals;
- Realistic planning, adjusting it to the abilities, needs and interests of the children, as well as the conditions in the closer and wider surrounding;
- Stimulating the children to join research, discovery, and creative processes, as well as engagement in the planning and the realization of the goals, etc.” (Curriculum, 2014, p. 3)

The document that we analyzed, apart from the need for respecting the individuality and the personality of the children, also highlighted the need of an integrated holistic approach in the development of all aspects of the personality simultaneously. This orientation of the Curriculum for Early learning and Development in the Republic of Macedonia can primarily be found in the principles upon which it is founded. Namely, one of the principles is “The principle of wholeness and integrity” (Curriculum, 2014, p.2). The following interpretation comes with it: “The content of the standards cover all aspects of development of the personality of the children, without favoring specific aspects. The holistic approach is the basis for the development of the standards for their creation, having in mind that the children see the world as a whole...” (Curriculum, 2014, p.2). Hence, it is very understandable why the program favors the games as the most adequate method for connecting the children with reality, as well as for the integrated-holistic approach in the realization of the educational influences.

Respecting the differences is a humanistic formulation in modern pedagogy, and it is also a priority in the Curriculum for Learning and Development in the Republic of Macedonia. It is stressed by “The Principle of equal opportunities and the respecting of the differences among the children and the Principle of multiculturalism” (Curriculum, 2014, p.2), which states that “...all children regardless of gender, ethnicity, their socio-economic and cultural differences, as well as the health and special needs must be provided with education”. (Curriculum, 2014, p.2)

The orientation of the Curriculum towards the humanistic-holistic discourses can also be confirmed through the regulation for an open educational process. Namely, the document highlights the need for an open preschool system, in which all involved subjects will have a partner relationship in the influence on the development of the children. This is especially emphasized by *the Principle of openness of the educational process*, (Program, 2014, p.2). This principle in the Curriculum is explained in the following way: “Joint activities of the kindergartens / the centers for early childhood development and the family and the community for stimulation of the development of the early learning in the children. The integrated approach is especially important for the development and the early learning of the children.” (Curriculum, 2014, p.2)

In terms of the structure of pedagogical influence, the classification on the grounds of the developmental domains with instructions for their integration and simultaneous stimulus on all aspects of the development of the children is clear. One of the principles, upon which this program is founded, clearly shows the need of an integrated holistic approach, i.e. “The principle of wholeness and integrity...emphasizes that the content of the standards cover all aspects of the development of the personality of the children, without favoring specific aspects...” (Curriculum, 2014, p.3). This indicates to the following of the holistic approach in learning and teaching, as an important segment in the development of the child. The curriculum covers the following developmental domains: Access to learning; Health and motor development; Socio-emotional development; Language, communication and development of literacy; Cognitive development and acquiring general knowledge. The domain **access to learning** is a reflection of the modern interpretation of the differences in the abilities, potentials, and the experiences of the children. This part of the curriculum stresses that each child is a special individual and that they all have a different approach to understanding nature and reality, finding of sources of knowledge, using the learning resources, the interpretation and the use of knowledge, etc.

The developmental domains and subdomains are distributed according to age groups which reflect the age-developmental characteristics of the children. They are supported by the general and specific goals, the examples of activities in the educational work with the children and by the expected results listed for each domain, subdomain and age. The expected results are flexible and cover wider time frame in the appearance of a particular trait, according to the scientific accomplishments and the doctrines of Vigotsky, Piaget and other classics in the pedagogy

The goals and accomplishments are flexibly listed, allowing the educators to independently and creatively connect them, according to the needs and characteristics of the children in the group that they instruct. For this purpose, there are didactic instructions which serve as a compass in the organization of the educational process.

However, the given examples of activities that the educators may use can render the job easier to the extent of blatant use of ready-made situations. This is dangerous for the creative role of the educators and may result in a pattern in their activities, discarding the characteristics of the group of children that they instruct. This approach in the Curriculum imposes an academic note in its applied variant. More specifically, this can easily result in a discrepancy in the written and applied curriculum.

### CONCLUSION

According to this, we can say that the goal orientation of the Curriculum comes from the humanistic pedagogy, because it has characteristics of partially structured **cognitively-developmental program** with elaborated, determined goals and with a humanistic role of the educator. However, at the same time it includes many examples of *activities* in ready-made form that the educators can combine.

To a degree, this gives us the right to conclude that it also includes elements of academic-highly structured programs, which could marginalize the creativity of a part of the educators, resulting in omission of the concept of natural development based on the children's needs and characteristics. Hence, we can conclude that in terms of its character, there is dualism, i.e. it is a developmental or constructive model of a curriculum, but it also includes characteristics of the instructional, i.e. academic model of the curriculum.

Nonetheless, the overall analysis and the possibilities that it offers, and according to its goal orientation and philosophical postulates, we can conclude that the Curriculum for Early Learning and Development, generally has the following characteristics:

- It is founded on the Standards for early learning and development brought by a special national document
- It is founded on the scientific pedagogical-psychological values for human development
- It respects the national orientation for a modern educational system
- t prefers an open and democratic educational system
- It respects the individual characteristics of the children
- It is founded on democratic principles
- It is based on humanistic theoretical grounds (it supports the humanistic paradigm and the phenomenological theories)
- It has characteristics of a **cognitively-developmental** program, as well as elements of academic orientation
- It respects the world trends of support and organization of the natural development
- It respects the world trends for inclusion and diversity

The listed characteristics elaborated in the conclusion of the paper show the positive potential of the Curriculum for Early Learning and Development for conceiving holistic-integrative educational practice in the Republic of Macedonia.

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