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**CONCEPTS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE FOR  
DEVELOPMENT IN ROMANIAN EDUCATION**

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**Abstract**

Early education was considered a systematic activity carried out in specialized institutions like nurseries and kindergartens. The Jomtien Conference was a very important moment for early education. The Salamanca Statement adopted the concepts of accessibility, participation and quality in the context of education for all, as well as the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 underlines that welfare and development of children is the result of a convergent approach, including children's health, education and protection.

These views are related to other concepts, specific ages in general psychology and child psychology in particular: care, growth, development, Early Childhood Development programs.

In Romania early education began to be developed in 90 years through reform documents followed by the specific programs. Implementation of the first program of early education belongs to XX<sup>th</sup> century. There are a few general objectives of early education for children from birth to 6/7 years of age in Romanian education.

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**Keywords:** A Convergent approach; children's health; education and protection, care, growth.

## 1. Introduction

The paper aims to provide a perspective on what was and is the concept of early childhood education in Romania. Information was collected from different sources: the general framework of early education issues worldwide and European, convergence with the development and care like future premises of a good education, the importance that it has for lifelong learning.

The main findings of the paper highlight a number of issues concerning Romanian pedagogy history and concerning conceptual developments for future of this segment of Romanian education.

Until the last two decades of the last century the concept of "early education" involved pre-schooling education, conducted within 3 years to 6/7 years of age. Early education was considered a systematic activity carried out in specialized institutions like nurseries and kindergartens and was known as preschool education. Preceding the moment Jomtien, the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20th of November 1989 at New York and ratified by Romania in 1990, outlined the definition of early education. The World Conference in Jomtien (Thailand) in 1990 - Education for All - introduced a new concept: the "lifelong learning" (lifelong education) and, with it, the idea that education begins at birth. Thus the concept of early education was expanded, falling below 3 years of age and was expressed by the phrase "early childhood development" - including in its sphere education, protection and health. This had as a result a new discourse in the policies regarding the young child/toddler, through a convergent approach of the social, educational and health domains (health and nutrition), (UNICEF, 2002).

The Salamanca Statement, adopted in 1994, on the achievement of an inclusive school, regarding accessibility, participation and quality in the context of education for all, as well as the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, reiterated at the World Summit 2005 in New York, namely: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, completion of primary education, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, reducing infant mortality, improving prenatal health represent programmatic directions, which developed the concept of early education.

## **2. Theoretical Aspects**

### **2.1. Nowadays**

Nowadays, early education means a teaching approach that covers the range of life from birth to 6/7 years of age, when the child enters school and, at the same time, when significant changes occur in the child's development. This new focus on early childhood takes into account family development and women's role in society, as well as new discoveries and theories on child development, and it boosted a new speech by the governments of many countries on integrated services. It has led to the orientation of experts and of all those who are rebuilding socio - educational strategies and policies, towards the idea of the opportunity for little child's care outside the family, by specialized services, and therefore a shift from private caring within the family to caring by public services, referred to as services for care and education "out of family" (Landers, 2002).

This new perspective on family and young children, as well as the significant moments of the year 1990 in this area, which marked significantly the policies on early childhood development, have contributed significantly to shaping the basic principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which underlines that welfare and development of children is the result of a convergent approach, including children's health, education and protection.

### **2.2. Concepts**

**Care** includes all actions of parental and non-parental careers, as well as of the community, to ensure the health, nutrition, psychosocial and cognitive development of the child. It defines all practices

followed by parents, non-parental careers (teachers, doctors) and communities, which protect and promote health, nutrition, psychosocial and cognitive development of the child.

Some reflections:

- The educational environment provides respite care child by another person than parents. Child care should provide a safe environment for the healthy growth and development.
- The increasing need of care for children increased lately and is a reflection of several economic and cultural factors.
- How care is appropriate for the age level of the child's personality and development.
- Staff dealing with child care must be experienced, responsible and caring.
- The state provides access to public education in institutions for children with disability or certain conditions that will require special care. Therefore, it must investigate all the options available for such care.

Therefore, **care is the key-factor** to successful development of the child.

Children's **growth** relates to the specific physical changes and increase in size. **Growth** also means differentiation, transformation, organization, biological maturation and regression. Raising a child is considered one of the most difficult responsibilities of an adult. Most people get knowledge about child rearing from people around or from their own childhood. Consequently, when they become parents, repeated patterns of interaction from their childhood that may be inappropriate for their children. Worse, they argue their children with phrases that parents used to use them.

Discipline allows parents to show children acceptable behavior and unacceptable behavior. By setting limits, the child is helped to learn what is expected of him and how to behave in society. These things are necessary for the child to become a responsible adult.

**Development** is defined as the increase in complexity, or change, from simple forms to more complex and more detailed forms. It is an orderly, continuous process, in which children get extensive knowledge, while developing more varied behavior and more diverse skills. Although the development model is generally the same for all children, **the pace of development varies from one child to another**. The pace and quality of children's development are related to their physiological maturity of the nervous, muscular and skeletal systems. Hereditary and environmental factors, unique for each child, also influence pace and quality (UNESCO, 1996).

We believe that Early education and care is a structured, theoretical and methodological response, significant challenges in the last period of growth and development of the young child. These challenges are related to educational reform strategy and practice in educational institutions offering early education, and determines a reorientation of teacher training towards dynamism, openness and diversification in professional didactic approach. The acquisition of knowledge and practices to stimulate the development of children from birth in the family is a requirement not only professionals, but also all parents.

#### **Historical landmarks in Romania:**

**(1991-2004) Implementation of the first program of early education and publication of the first documents of the reform**

- "The Early Education" Program on Stimulation Areas (1991-1998), implemented at national level with the help of UNICEF Romania (teacher training, multidisciplinary teams, stimulating areas in classroom organization and working in small groups, a new curricular approach);

- *Organization of pre-primary education* conducted under O. M. no. 4321/1999) and *Generalization of preparatory groups* in Romania (2002-2005), developed under O. M. no. 3799/22.05.2002);

- Amendments and revisions, harmonization of the Program of instructive and educational activities (1993, 2000, 2004).

#### **(2005-2006) Steps taken in order to promote the concept of early education**

- The Project for Early Childhood Education Reform - financed by CEB

- The Project "The Early Education for All" – Financed by WB).

**(2006-2007)** The Initiative for the elaboration of the *Fundamental Pillars in Learning and Early Childhood Development from birth to 7 years of age* (supported by UNICEF)

- Content validation of the *Fundamental Pillars in Learning and Early Childhood Development from birth to 7 years of age* (the relevant development areas for children in Romania, periods of age and profile of the child when out of preschool).

**(2007-2009) Launching of the two projects for early education and age validation of the Fundamental Pillars in Learning and Early Childhood Development from birth to 7 years of age**

- Elaborating, in PETI, the *Curriculum for early childhood education* (0-6/7 years of age) and the guidelines for its implementation on age groups (0-3 and 3-6 / 7 years);

- promoting, through OM 5233/01.09.2008, the *Curriculum for early education* (part of the curriculum for pre-school, 3-6/7 years of age) and the *Support material for people who interact with the child between 0 and 3 years of age* (part of the curriculum for 0-3 years of age) (MECT, pg. 34);

**(2009-2010) Promotion of related documents, to support the implementation of the concept of early education in Romania**

- establishing and equipping, with the support of local authorities, the Centers of Resources for Education and Development (CRED);

- promoting, through OM no. 3851/17.05.2010, the *Fundamental Pillars in Learning and Early Childhood Development from birth to 7 years of age*;

- promoting, through OM no. 3850 / 17.05.2010, the *Standards on teaching and learning materials in early education* and the *Norms on minimal equipment of early education services for children from 3 to 6/7 years of age*;

- *The Assessment Tool for Child Development at the end of kindergarten* was elaborated (ATCD);

- The ATCD and its user guide have been finalized, the number of kindergartens and areas of development allocated per county have been set for piloting, and ATCD was piloted in 2011.

#### **General objectives of early education for children from birth to 6/7 years of age**

- Developing freely, integrally and harmoniously the personality of children, according to their own pace and necessities, supporting their autonomous and creative formation;
- Developing their ability to interact with other children, adults and environment in order to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and new behaviors;
- Encouraging exploration, exercises, attempts and experiments, as autonomous learning experiences;

- The discovery, by each child, of his/her own identity and autonomy, and developing their positive self-image;
- Supporting the child in the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes necessary for his/her entry into school and throughout life.
- The child is an entity that evolves all along his/her educational path.

For the best preparation of the child for school and for life, it is of paramount importance to focus, in early childhood, on his/her development in all respects;

The areas of development are essential pedagogical tools in order to individualize education and learning, enabling the identification of both skills and difficulties of each child.

**The areas of development** are (cf. B. Bloom):

- **Growth/Physical development, health and personal hygiene**
  - Physical Development: development of coarse motricity skills/ development of fine motricity skills
  - Sensorial and motor Development
- **Cognitive development** (Glava & Glava, 56)
  - Perceptual development
  - Cognitive development
  - Development of Speech
- **Socio-Emotional Development**

Dimensions of the field:

  - Social Development
  - Development of skills of interaction with adults
  - Development of skills of interaction with children close to their age
  - Accepting and respecting diversity
  - The development of prosocial behaviors
  - Emotional Development
  - Development of the concept of self
  - Development of emotional control
- **Abilities and attitudes to learning**
  - Curiosity and interest
  - Initiative
  - Persistence in activity
  - Development of emotional expressiveness.

**Basic principles in the practice of Early Education:**

- The principle of considering the child as a whole
- The principle of full respect for the rights of the child
- The principle of learning mediation in the process of education
- The principle of differentiation and individualization
- The principle of game-based learning
- The principle of the integrated approach to curriculum
- The principle of the diversity of learning contexts and learning situations
- The principle of alternation of the forms of work organization and learning strategies

- The principle of partnership with family and community (Early Childhood Resource Pack, 2004, p. 26).

### **Personal interpretations**

In the Romanian education system, it is necessary:

- to improve the current infrastructure system of early education for children from 3 to 6/7 years through rehabilitation and development of educational units;
- to improve the quality of preschool education;
- to foster the development and career development in areas of scientific training oriented directly towards lower ages of children (from 0-8 years) and mobility in careers as part of the validation of initial and continuous training of teachers and specialists;
- to provide adequate training to all who want to understand and appropriately address the growth and development of young children (from 0-8 years).

### **3. Conclusions**

An effective education program is a program which aims to take into account **the child** from the first moments of its existence and involving all educational agencies that contribute to his growth and development.

Education institutions cannot replace family, but it supports and contributes to the development of intra- and extra family relations.

The primary beneficiaries of early education are children and secondary beneficiaries are parents, teachers and all educators in the community, and, by the effects, society in general.

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