

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LEGAL CONTEXT OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN ROMANIA OF TODAY (CORE IDEAS AND COMMENTS²⁵)

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Abstract: *A critical analysis of curriculum for the preschool education connected to the in force law of education. The intention of this analysis is to highlight the strengths of the curriculum and to suggest some possibilities to develop a higher quality of its implementation. The paper underlines the importance of the pre-school level as fundamental of the entire school route. The analysis is a detailed one with comments and suggestions for the core issues involved.*

Key words: *pre-school curriculum, aims-goals-objective, experiential fields, capacities and attitudes to learning, competencies at pre-school age*

1. General context

The Curriculum for early education can be considered as a preparatory phase of the new regulations introduced by the Education Act of 2011 for the early education level. A new philosophy about the early education in general, and about the goals of this important ontogenesis stage has been introduced.

The curriculum states, in its introductory part, the idea that the rate of school flop and failure are quite high, like that of leaving school early; the statistics show for EU: 15.2%; Romania: 20.8%, in 2005. The need for a formal educational intervention at very early age is argued starting from this statement (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008).

Another argument is based on Chuna's statement, a Nobel Prize winner for economy, who highlights the role of early learning for the further development of a human being.

Early education starts at age 0 and covers the period up to entry into school, as the concept is understood worldwide ((Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:4).

²⁵ Note: the author's of this paper comments are put in Italic

Year	Rate of enrollment %
2000-2001	67.1
2001- 2002	67.5
2002- 2003	71.1
2003- 2004	71.8
2004- 2005	73.9
2005-2006	74.7

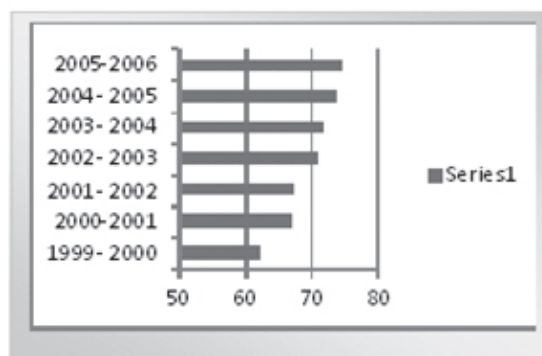


Figure 1: *Rate of enrollment in preschool education 2000 – 2006 (after Curriculum for preschool education 2008: 4)*

Distinctive notes of early education are considered: (1) the child's uniqueness that asks a holistic approach meaning to consider all the components of child's development, (2) the need for a multidisciplinary approach (care, nutrition and education simultaneously approached; *I would also add the necessity of a correlative approach*); (3) mature adult's status as partner of the game, having good knowledge of all the details and rules of the game; *in my opinion, the adult must perfectly know the game's objectives; the adult must be aware about the game's purposes and consequences*; (4) the necessity to see the activities of early education as situational learning opportunities; (5) parents' status as key partner together with the essential role of an effective relationship between family – kindergarten and the community (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008).

Data about the increased rate of enrollment in kindergartens are presented (figure 1.)

The Curriculum gives some landmarks of the early education concept evolution along the recent history. Thus, in 2000 the propaedeutics function of the preschool education is stressed. In 2002 the preparatory level (6–7 years old) of preschool is extended and almost generalized and the extension of the compulsory education to 10 years is announced. The interval 2005–2006 gave the strategy for the early education as a result of the cooperation of the ministry of resort with UNICEF.

The introductory part of the analyzed curriculum states the idea of the strong necessity to design a coherent system of early education. UNICEF has as priority for the new millennium the full completion of primary education by all children regardless of sex. Early education is seen as a necessary first step to achieving this goal.

United Nations General Assembly's Declaration has adopted in 2002 a set of principles which offer an optimistic picture of the future world. This world should be one in which children can enjoy their childhood, in which their interests are respected and their status of being born free and equal is considered as fundamental. A proper start in life can be the first step in ensuring completion of primary education by all children. The document avers that youth must ensure the future of humanity (Curriculum for Preschool Education,

2008:5). The authors of the analyzed curriculum declare as fundamentals of its design the Action Plan adopted by the United Nations Assembly.

A brief analysis of the curriculum has three core aims: (1) to highlight its strengths and the real opportunities opened by the new design; (2) to present the issues that need, in my opinion, to be improved; (3) to underline the constraints to be considered when an assessment process of the implementation of the new curriculum takes place. Even if the pattern of analysis is that of a SWOT one, the presentation will follow the logic of the design's steps instead of grouping my comments on SWOT categories.

A first idea is connected to the manner of wording the finalities of the analyzed curriculum (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 6,7).

Unfortunately, these finalities are not consistently formulated; thus, the first three finalities show directions of child's evolution along early education and the last one is focused on the educator's action. Thus, the first of the three finalities speaks about the full, free, and harmonious development of the child's personality, depending on child's needs and his own pace. The action of educator is also added: by supporting the autonomous and creative child's formation. This finality is concerned about the child as an entity. The second finality is focused on the social aspects of child's personality development: developing the ability to interact with other children, adults and the environment in order to gain knowledge, skills, attitudes and new behaviors. The further wording is put as finality but it contains in fact ways to achieve the previous target: "encouraging exploration, exercises, tests and experiments, as autonomous learning experiences" (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:7).

The ambiguity and lack of consistency of this wording is obvious, especially in Romanian. The third finality come back to the child autonomy, identity (The discovery by each child, their identity, autonomy and developing a positive self-image) which is a normal trajectory because this identity is achieved after and based on the child's confrontation with the social environment.

The last finality focused on the educator's action aiming to stimulate the child's achievement of knowledge, capacities, skills, and attitudes necessary for starting the school, and further in life.

Unfortunately, it is not obvious the authors' concern for offering a logical, consistent and clear target of the early education process, as a starting point of the necessary process of developing the overall and specific expectations related to the entire educational process along this stage of ontogenesis process. This comment could be considered as being too sophisticated but I wanted to underline that these kinds of ambiguities, which in Romanian are more obvious than I could put them in English and into an explanatory context, have determined questions, and bases of contradictions within the practical area. I had the opportunity to assist to these kinds of debates that revealed the importance of wording within a document as the official curriculum is.

The authors stress explicitly that the contemporary pedagogical ideas and the worldwide and Romanian evolution of the preschool education are taken into account. Thus, the approach of the method of projects, the integrated activities, and interactive educational methodology is mentioned.

Four other anchors are listed: (1) the role of preschool level inside of the Romanian education system; (2) the specific psychological level of nowadays preschool children; (3) the

positive experiences and the difficulties of the activity on this level of education; (4) tendencies and evolutions in informatics and technology (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:7).

A specific chapter of the document presents the “Child development and education within 3–6/7 years”.

The presentation declaredly based on a European document is less focused on the specificity of the psychological development of the generation of 3–6/7 years old of nowadays and more on re-enhancing the general role of this age for the further development of the personality. Even if the wording is sophisticated and sometime harder decipherable some ideas deserve to be highlighted (European Commission, 1995)

The chance of action of the formal education at preschool age to have a positive influence upon child’s evolution, regardless of the child's social affiliation and the educational power of the family is highlighted. References to longitudinal studies are made in order to support the role of a formal preschool education.

An entire paragraph is focused on a debate about the effects of the educational group size to work with. The necessity of an attentive action for each child inside an optimum size of this educational group is expressed.

The same mentioned part speaks about the role of adult’s behavior for the child’s development; some important aspects are highlighted as conditions of an effective educational act: (1) the manner of organizing the educational activity in order to facilitate children’s interaction in small groups, or their individual performance; the possibility of an influence upon children's sociability, independence, capacity to cooperate and solving conflicts is stressed; (2) the importance of the manner of introducing and using different teaching/ learning materials, affordable and appropriate to children’s specificity; *I would add, to the nature of the activity (especially its purpose and content)*; the reasoning introduced by the authors: “this gives children opportunity to become involved in the elaborated game and at the same time, to develop social skills” *is not enough connected to the core idea and not enough convincing*; (3) the quality of the interconnection between children and adults as a powerful stimulus. *The explanations given for this idea are worded in such a bushy manner that it is really impossible to be analyzed. I infer that the authors were referring to the child’s social behavior that can be developed in terms of independency, willingness to interact, on one side, and to the development of child’s communication skills that can be stimulated within the context of an effective child – adult interaction* (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:8).

The document also highlights the importance of involving children’s families within their activities. Several interesting ideas are encapsulated in an, *unfortunately, too bushy way of wording*. Thus, the necessity to take into consideration the family's characteristics for designing a differentially involvement of the families in the benefit of the child is well stressed; some special situations are highlighted: disadvantaged families, families that have children with special needs.

Even if the arguments are eclectically organized and delivered, however the conclusion is right: the early education can have a high influence for the further development of a child if it is well and professionally managed.

The more complex the learning situations are the stronger influence of them upon the further development exists.

2. Structure and content

Under the title *structure and content* the authors firstly present some core intentions of their curriculum design. Thus, they speak about the intention to ensure: (1) continuity inside the same curricular cycle; (2) a clear connection and interdependence of the curriculum for preschool education and the curriculum of the first two grades of primary; (3) openness towards optional modules. (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:8). *No doubt that a direct reference to the requirements of onset of primary education from the very beginning of this curriculum design would have been useful. The connection of these requirements to the declared finalities developed by the curriculum designers for early education stage, as a whole, would have been more compelling than the simple announcement of the intention of continuity. I think a curriculum design must explicitly connect to the next step of the educational process. In the same time it should explicitly refer to its starting points. The early education has as starting point the age 0, when only the inborn characteristics are to be considered, but it has at least two big sequences, and the explicit connection between them should be clearly presented. This is, in my opinion, the manner to support the three intentions without the risk of remaining only on a declarative level.*

This curriculum is defined, as the authors say, by six basic characteristics: **extension, balance, relevance, differentiation, progression, and continuity** (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:8, 9).

The first characteristic, **extension**, is connected to the offers of training through learning situations belonging to a wide number of so called experiential fields. *It is remarkable that implicitly the authors suggest the difference between the learning situation designed by the educator and the learning experience lived by each child in a very peculiar manner.* The listed experiential areas are: language and literature, science, socio-human (man and society), psycho-motor, aesthetic and creative. *The further wording again somehow unclear, suggests that a wide range of learning outcomes is covered; but an explanation of what these outcomes are supposed to mean is absent.*

By **balance** attribute of curriculum the authors stresses the necessity to ensure the interconnection of all the mentioned experiential areas and the optimum integration of each area within the curriculum as a whole.

The **relevance** reflects the quality of curriculum that ensures its proper answer to the immediate and long term children's needs. (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:9). *Again the added explanations are sophisticated and eclectic. Also is it difficult to understand why the word concepts is here and later in the text into a copulative relationship with knowledge (always linked in the text by the conjunction and or separated by commas), as long as any concept represents a core element of knowledge.*

Curriculum offers **differentiation** as well, meaning that it is designed to be effective for each child with a peculiar development level, with individual traits even if the child belongs to groups of the same age with general common traits.

Progression and **continuity** represents two characteristics presented together and expressing the intention to ensure consistency inside the curriculum of preschool stage for each age level and in connection to the previous before preschool stage and the further

primary education stage. *This definitely is an extremely good intention and necessary condition for a well designed curriculum.*

These characteristics are well enough chosen and stressed but the whole design of curriculum offers a lot of room for improving their evidence.

However, I would like to highlight a real strength of the analyzed curriculum: the accuracy of its explicitly presented structure based on the D' Hainault ideas and explanations about what a competencies – centered curriculum should mean. After so many years still this philosophy of competencies – centered curriculum is debated and criticized or, on the contrary and worthily, superficially adopted as something in fashion but not in depth understood. The Romanian curriculum for early education is structured based on this philosophy and this structure is also followed in its core points. The authors seem to have understood some fundamental issues. Thus, the development of children's competencies designed as finalities (outcomes) of the educational process does not mean that the contents, the time of learning, the strategies of teaching and those of assessment are not important anymore. They remain elements of the curricular structure, but they should function into a perfect synergy in the manner of leading the learner along the routes of the designed aims, passing with them through the "stations" of reached objectives and goals towards the overall expectation designed by curriculum. These are designed in terms of competencies and their training needs to involve the learners into learning situations designed by their teachers. This design means that teachers must find specifically and attentively chosen contents, deliver them through appropriate methods until the moment when children are able to genuinely live their unique and individual learning experiences; these are expressed through competencies developed on defined standards. The assessment of these competencies can be done in problem solving contexts where they are expressed as a synergistic product of the involved components: knowledge, capacities, and attitudes based on values. In this case the competencies are assessed as entities, in their effective action. The assessment on all the schooling levels can be focused on separate elements of competencies, but this does not mean that the competencies should be neglected and the excessive emphasize on assessing the quantity of knowledge could remain on its traditional status.

Unfortunately, the authors use terms coming from the theory of curriculum in an ambiguous manner, a weakness additionally stressed by the using of the same word in various contexts with slightly or substantially different meaning.

It is difficult to guess the authors' way of understanding the relation between concepts and knowledge, on one side, and between knowledge – skills – attitudes and competencies on the other side. Unfortunately, even after other three years the new law of education keeps the same ambiguity. Thus, the new law of education states that its vision consists in promoting an education "focused on values, creativity, cognitive skills, volitional and actionable capabilities, basic knowledge, and knowledge, competencies, and abilities of direct utility in the profession and society". (Education Act, 2011, article 2, paragraph 1). Reading further the article 4, a repetitiveness of ideas and an uncertain relation between "knowledge, competencies, and abilities" are obvious; while the article 2 connects these concepts by commas suggesting that competencies and knowledge are two distinctive and equal categories, the article 4 establish another type of report between them: "competencies, understood as multifunctional and transferable ensembles (sets), include knowledge, skills/abilities and aptitudes (..)" Education Act, 2011, article 4

This is an evidence of a certain ambiguity of using the specialized terms in very official and important documents: the Education Act of 2011 and the Curriculum for preschool education (2008).

The education is not aimed to be a process for its sake. The development of the human beings as personalities is necessary for the progress of society. Thus, the society is the wide receiver of the education's products, and the fields of society are complex and interconnected; they involve both the professional hypostases of human beings and their socio-relational hypostases. Each profession and each social status imply general and specific competencies well defined and ranked, encapsulated in what can be named as profiles of competencies for different professionals or statuses. These represent the target of the formal educational process, a process supported by society to meet the fulfillment of these profiles of competencies in the benefit of society.

The educational process has different levels: each level has a final moment with a specific profile of competencies needed to be reached by the enrolled graduates. This profile should meet in the final moment of the considered level of schooling at least the minimum standards of the competencies requested by the further level of the training process.

In my opinion, it is necessary to clearly connect the originally designed outcomes as expected results with the eventually obtained ones. A well structured curriculum first establishes the expected outcomes; they are called in different documents with different terms: overall and specific objectives, goals or finalities. Their design and wording have as a starting point the core requests of the future level of schooling or, at the end of schooling, the professional and social profile of competencies of a specified area, the later training had been done for.

An important thing must be highlighted. The designing process of the outcomes is done from up to down from society's requests, passing downward through all the levels of education, from the highest level till the early education.

The educational action starts with the fulfillment of the concrete objectives, and step by step it fulfill through these objectives the connected goals, if the route of aims is correctly kept. Thus, the educational action has an ascendant trajectory (down to up). The Figure 2 shows these directions and establishes the place of early education within the system.

The aims' category expresses this trajectory (in terms of the way, direction of the process.) The choice of the word aim comes from the value of this word not only as a noun but also as a verb, showing an action precisely directed. In fact, the most important aspect here is to distinguish between targets seen like products and action leading to targets, no matter what words one use to name them.

This distinction is necessary to properly design and establish the targets in terms of outcomes and then to design the proper path of the educational process leading to the outcomes' fulfillment. Too often this connection is not properly done and the targets are not fulfilled. It's like when one make a great project for spending a holiday in Paris, because Paris seems to be the fashionable or the officially requested final point. But immediately after this we buy tickets for Hong Kong, as my students metaphorically said trying to highlight the lack of match between goals/ objectives and their correlative aims. Important is not only to establish a correct or proper destination but to be able to chose the right track as well. Of course, the students said, the holiday's success further depends on the selected luggage to be

carried (contents to be taught); it also depends on the vehicle used and the adapted driving (methods of teaching/learning, assessing) and on the time spent (adapted speed seen as the learning time). All these are strongly, intimately connected, and the degree of satisfaction for a successful holiday (an effective learning process) depends on each of them, and on all together.

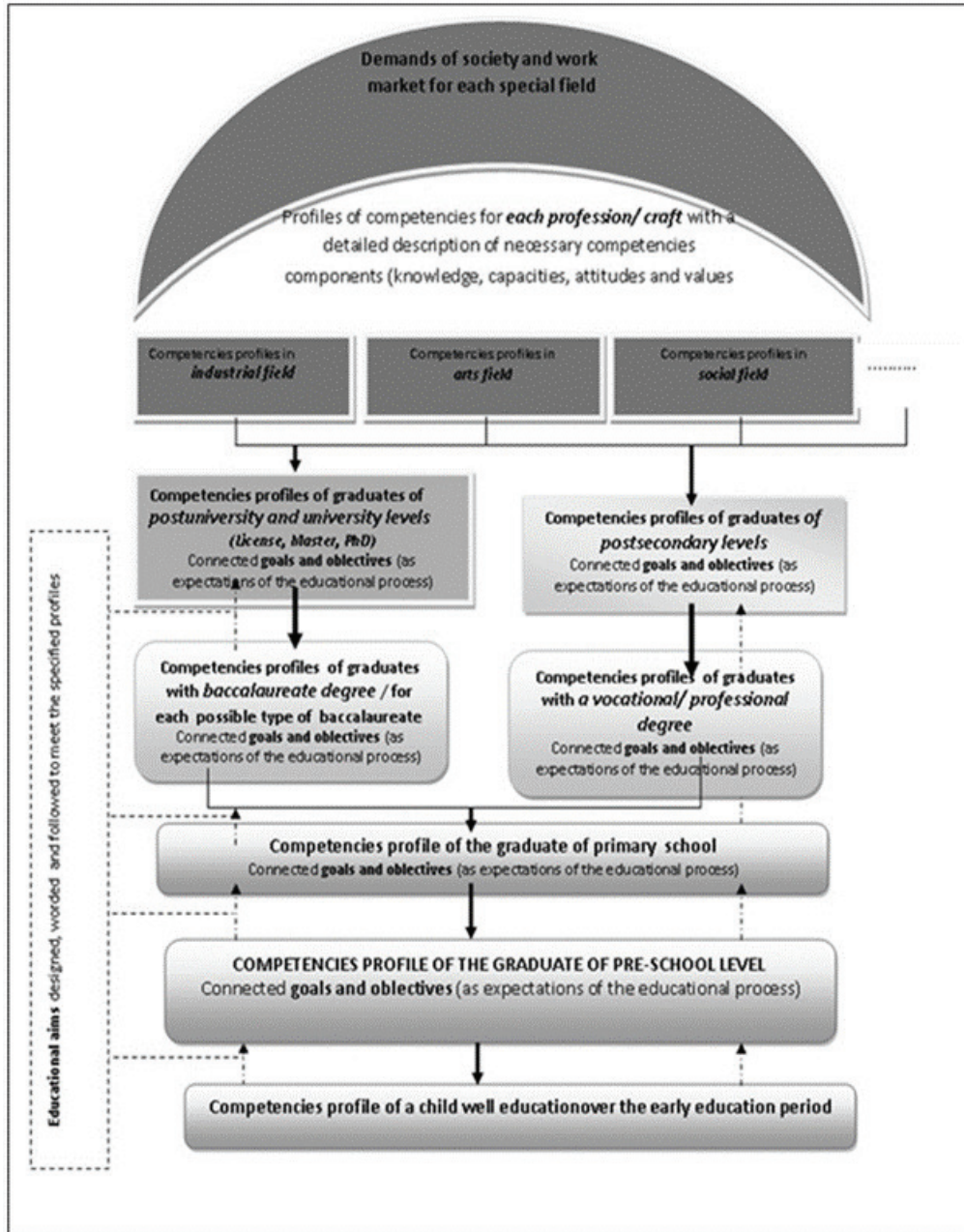


Figure 2: The place of pre-school level (early education) within the whole educational process

The figure 3 expresses how the three categories of knowledge, capacities and attitudes involved in the goals design can be unified: (1) first, by putting them to the same direction of a precise aim; (2) and second, at the level of the product, within the competency structure, a structure resulted from the synergistic effect of these three core components. Thus, this figure explains the relations between the educational process and the level of its outcomes (education as a product).

The graduate's profile of competencies is seen as a set of competencies that can be assessed: (1) through the level of achievement of its components: knowledge, capacities, abilities supported by skills (understood as aptitudes), and attitudes involving values. Performance descriptors can be detailed; (2) the synergistic result of these three components – the competency itself, with an effectiveness proved within a solving problem context. The educational process is a long way of developing these competencies, more and more complex, and it is built in a kind of integrative way till the moment when, at maturity, one can speak about a competent personality.²⁶

Looking again to the figure 2, it is obvious that the early education and the preschool level are situated on the bottom of curriculum design, in terms of a deep determination from all the levels that come after them along the ontogenesis. It is totally normal to happen like this. Diachronically speaking, each society is obviously much more developed than the previous one. Accordingly, a new and more performing level of education is requested (professionally, politically, socially, morally, aesthetically etc. speaking.) In this case, the ultimate profile of competencies of a mature personality will have a specific structure, a more dynamic, maybe more complex one, but anyway ready to answer to the demands of a dynamic society; each new generation must be more highly trained and with a higher level of performance. This means that for each previous stages of education a higher level of requirements will appear: a more performing graduate of higher education asks a more performing undergraduate – graduate with baccalaureate, – graduate of lower education, of primary education. As a consequence, new requests are obvious for the early education including preschool level in order to prepare the new generations for such stronger demands. This is especially important as long as the role of early ages is highly recognized as being determinants of the growth of potential of development for future stages in ontogenesis.

On the other side, kids themselves are more and more developed from a generation to another. A higher pressure for changing the curriculum comes from here, as well. That is why it is genuinely difficult to design a new curriculum. Thus, an appropriate curriculum design requires: (1) a clear strategy of the general curriculum design with a well established place and role of these ages for the children further

²⁶ *Competence, understood as a potential of personality, is somehow abstract; it is assessed through its materialized hypostases – competencies (the plural form of competency), as I have chosen to call them. The place of manifestation is the life itself, the practice considered within its social and professional context. An implicitly similar view can be detected in the description of the twenty five behavioural competencies edited at the University of Guelph (Behavioural Competency Dictionary, 2010:1). The authors define competencies as “observable abilities and skills, knowledge, motivation or traits defined in terms of behaviours needed for successful job performance.”*

development; (2) a clear understanding of curriculum theory as a foundation for curriculum to offer the opportunity to develop effective learning situations for children, with a great potential to be turned into effective and unique learning experience by each child.

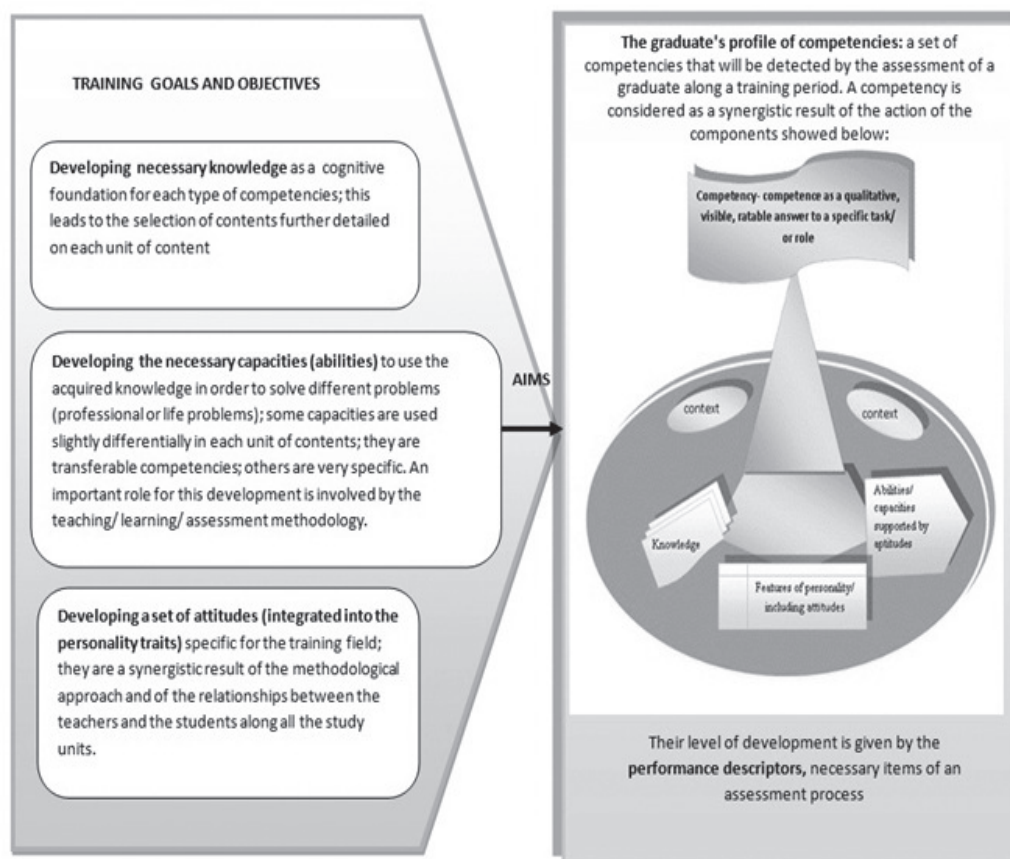


Figure 3: Aims, goals, objectives leading to outcomes expressed through competencies

The new Romanian curriculum seems to respect, generally speaking these requests as I have already mentioned. The age interval is considered on two great sequences: 3 – 5 years old and 5 – 6/7 years old. *Unfortunately, again I have to emphasize the idea that the pedagogical language is not enough consistent and coherent for the entire document not only for the introductory part. The text's wording is somehow bushy, as well.* However, I have also mentioned as notable that this document seems to have caught the distinction between the learning situation designed and run by the educator and the child's own learning experience. The declared intention to *give freedom* to the teachers, to determine them *to compete* with the curriculum, by developing nuances of its requests and adapting them to the real life of

their children is certainly a genuine strength of this curriculum (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 9).

3. Experiential fields

The documents operates with the concept of *experiential fields* defined like “true ~integrated cognitive fields~(L.Vlăsceanu) that transcend the boundaries between disciplines and in context of this curriculum, meet with the traditional fields of child development, namely: psychomotor domain, the language, socio – emotional, cognitive domain” (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:9).

Five *experiential fields* are described and considered within the curriculum’s construction (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 9,10).

They are presented eclectically; a pattern of presentation aiming to give consistency is not noticed. Some fields are presented by starting from the outcomes they intend to reach, as it is normal, eventually, but consistency in the experiential fields’ description cannot be found. That is why I structured this presentation by putting the information encapsulated in the document wording into a common pattern. This pattern has three milestones: (1) **outcomes** (overall expectations) of the experiential field; (2) **characteristics of learning situations** offered to children as being the proper context for their own learning experiences; (3) **domains of knowledge and action** connected to each experiential field.

Aesthetic and creative field is supposed to((Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:9):

(1) **Outcomes:** the expected outcomes of this experiential field are represented by response behaviors to perceptive learning situations; they are children’s own learning experiences, lived in a proper emotional and intellectual manner. They involve: an adequate level of development of sensibility for quality, and beauty; an appropriate level of development of child’s behavior according to aesthetic criteria (implicitly presented in text);

(2) **Characteristics of learning situations** able to be turned into **effective learning experiences**, genuinely lived as: (a) opportunities for exploring a wide range of emotions; (b) opportunities for learning to develop creative procedures, based on experimenting practices with an high accent on children’s freedom; (c) opportunities to learn new knowledge, to develop new abilities; (d) opportunities to develop a personal bases of values as source for future personal reactions in front of the life they are in contact with.

(3) **Connected knowledge and action domains:** these learning experiences can be lived in any curricular component; explicitly they are presumed to be aimed by learning situation designed within activities of music, drawing- painting, drama, and eurhythm.

The field of Man and Society(Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:9):

(1) **Outcomes:** social skills effectively developed within the psychological level of the age; they involve children's active and reflective research of their environment; geography, history, daily life of the medium is considered.

(2) **Characteristics of learning situations** able to be turned into **effective learning experiences**, genuinely lived as: (a) opportunities for understanding the human being and the specific living conditions, interrelations between people or of man with the environment (social or natural) ; (b) opportunities for developing capacities to control events and to put order within the own environment; an involvement of technology appears in this point; (c) opportunities to develop manual and technical abilities; (d) opportunities to learn more knowledge about natural materials, their characteristics and utility for humans; (e) opportunities for developing emotional feelings for nature, society, and work; (f) opportunities to discover themselves, their interests and possibilities as a first step of their own future development; (g) opportunities to discover what historical time means, to understand the ongoing line of past, present and future (the active exploring attitude of the own history and of family or community history should be encouraged; (h) opportunities to learn more about their environment by an active , explorative and reflective action. (i) Opportunities to internalize moral values and develop moral appropriate behaviors. Children's action within their environment is stimulated. Reflection on their own history and the possibilities of intervention in this environment, according to the psychological possibilities of age are supported.

(3) **Connected knowledge and action domains:** these learning experiences can be lived in different educational context; an implicit request to fructify the possibilities of each learning situation appears, no matter to what area of contents this learning situation belongs to, in order to achieve the desired outcomes of this field (family, social and natural environment, any other social or learning context.)

Language and communication (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 10)²⁷

(1) **Outcomes:** effective oral and written communication skills according to the age's specific (speaking, understanding oral and written messages, and writing as the normal action involved by children's age); these skills are to be developed in children's mother language; basic communication skills in an international language is aimed as well; children's capacity to effectively express their feelings and thoughts. They involve children's thinking, their fluency in oral communication, correctness of oral and written language (according to the psychological traits of the age) in their mother language and the children's capacity to communicate at least as a basic level in a foreign international language.

(2) **Characteristics of learning situations** able to be turned into **effective learning experiences**, genuinely lived as: (a) opportunities for listening and speaking within small groups; (b) opportunities to explore the experiences of others and to expand their repertoire of significant experiences; (c) opportunities to learn new knowledge within linguistic area, to develop new communication skills; (d)

²⁷ Adapted and reorganized text

opportunities to develop the quality of children communication skills: fluency, correctness, self confidence in communication; (e) opportunities for children to expand their ability to understand complex interpersonal situations and contribute to the development of evaluation capacity; (f) opportunities for a first contact of children with a foreign international language.

(3) **Connected knowledge and action domains:** these learning experiences can be lived in absolutely all the educational contexts because the communication is involved anywhere. Thus, the activities focused on science, arts, sport, and man and society will support children's learning of a specific vocabulary and to express as fluently as possible what they think and discover. But, most of all the approach of literature for children, the specific activities focused on *memorization of poetry, activities of telling stories, communication games, and dramatization* are the core of this experiential field.

Science field (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008:11)²⁸

(1) **Outcomes:** basic mathematic skills, effective skills of counting, of operating with sets of objects, capacity of recognizing geometric shapes, skills of using patterns in solving mathematical problems, and skills of creating mathematical problems; basic research skills connected to the real life and children's perceptive environment. These outcomes involve developing the children's representations about certain concepts such as: volume, weight, number, discrimination, classification or quantitative description; developing children logical thinking, reasoning skills, their motivation for mathematics, rigor, and precision; developing competencies associated to a scientific inquiry such as observing, selecting of the significant elements of the mass by detaching by the irrelevant elements, generating hypotheses and alternatives, designing and conducting experiments, organizing data derived from observations; all these will be developed within the psychological limits of the age.

(2) **Characteristics of learning situations** able to be turned into **effective learning experiences**, genuinely lived as: (a) opportunities for learning basics of mathematics; (b) opportunities for developing mathematic skills and effective mathematic thinking; (c) opportunities to learn new knowledge, to develop new abilities in the mathematic area; (d) opportunities to develop connections between the abstract world of mathematics and the real life within a real social context; (e) opportunity to develop mathematical knowledge and skills within the context of the other curricular areas; (f) opportunity to develop basic research knowledge and skills.

(3) **Connected knowledge and action domains:** these learning experiences can be lived in the context of: (a) games conducted with materials such as sand or water; (b) activities focused on simulating shopping in stores; (c) specific mathematic activities focused on learning numeracy, mathematic language, and basic mathematic skills; (d) any other activity within a different curricular area that offer possibilities to be fructify from the mathematical perspective; (e) activities with basic scientific content as: observing of beings / plants / animals / objects nearby environment, modeling clay, making and playing simple musical instruments, applying of scientific

²⁸ Adapted and reorganized text

principles in the domestic economy or by comparing the properties of various materials.

Psycho- motor field (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 11)²⁹

(1) **Outcomes:** a proper control of body movements, general mobility and stamina, motor and handling finesse skills; basic knowledge of human anatomy and physiology;

(2) **Characteristics of learning situations** able to be turned into **effective learning experiences**, genuinely lived as: (a) opportunities for developing their body general and sequential coordination (eyes–hands, hands–feet, eye–hand–foot, hand–hand etc.); (b) opportunities for developing the correct perception and use of the body scheme perception; (c) opportunities to learn new knowledge, develop new abilities for playing physical games involving complex moving and cooperation; (d) opportunities to develop important traits of personality: stamina, flexibility, sociability, fair play, strength etc.

(3) **Connected knowledge and action domains:** these learning experiences can be lived in specific psycho–motor activities, sports, physical education, drawing and even man and society activities focused on the perception of self within the social context.

The new official curriculum for preschool education is structured on two levels of age. It encourages heterogeneity (abandoning the system of setting up groups based on chronological age), in the context of child–centered learning. Basically, this statement of curriculum was not put in practice because there are contradictions with other aspects coming from the management perspective.

The text states differences among the defined types of kindergartens without a clear explanation of them. The listed types of preschool institutions are: (a) "normal schedule" - four hours; (b) with extended schedule- involving the eight hours program; and (c) kindergarten with weekly program.

“The Master Plan, as well as the previously presented experiential areas, create opportunities for an interdisciplinary, integrated approach of the proposed contents and provide freedom of the teacher in planning daily activities with preschoolers” (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 12).

. Even if this wording induces a doubt about the correct understanding of terms interdisciplinary and integrated contents, a valuable idea must be highlighted; I am talking about the idea of the interconnection between contents and methods, a relationship stated as a “bi–univocal.” The role of the educator as a resource person is strongly underlined.

I appreciate the core portrait suggested for an effective teacher working in the spirit of this new curriculum. That is why I have started from the text idea and I completed the teacher’s expected way of action underlying the possible effects on the children side (table 1.)

²⁹ Adapted and reorganized text

The authors conclude at the end of the introductory part of the curriculum that: “this curriculum continues previous efforts of the Ministry of Education to combine ideas of traditional pedagogy with ideas of alternative pedagogies from worldwide and try to align the innovative trends in the curriculum” (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 12).

I have realized this introduction as a preparation for a brief presentation of what the authors consider as being novelty in this curriculum. The presentation needs some comments rooted in the observation of what happened along the curriculum implementation process.

Teacher	Educational consequences
Gives information and facilitate the access to information	Child's motivation for information should be develop
Make a diagnosis of child's learning or acting possible difficulties	Child awareness about the own strengths and limits and a reflective attitude against the tasks
Gives support to the child for solving tasks	Child learns that with effort and stamina can overcome obstacles; self esteem improvement and trust in asking and receiving help
Organizes small working group for facilitating children cooperation but being able to support each child if necessary	Child openness towards other children and acceptance for cooperation and receiving help; willingness to give help
Opportunities to internalize moral values and develop moral appropriate behaviors. Open door towards community, valuing the learning opportunities no matter where they appear from	Children 's willingness and ability to make transfers of what they learn in kindergarten to the real life; openness for and what the community (family, street, infomal group of friends/ family friends) offers as fields of practice or of new learning opportunities
Manages in an effective way the teaching-learning materials and the space / learning environment	Child learns to use materials for learning, pick and chose materials for learning purposes, organize and use in a proper fomative way the environment.
The educator does not contradict the child and does not put any labels no matter what level of performance the child reaches. <i>This attitude must be extremely well managed because too much freedom or acceptance can lead to perverse effects on children</i>	Self control, capacity to argue and explain the own view, willingness for challenges, respect for the arguments of the others, accepting the own limits and trying to overcome them by own effort. A bad management of this issue could determine arrogance, daring, negativity, even despotic behavior, in severe cases.

Table 1: *Teaching act and the educational consequences (adapted and completed after Curriculum 2008: 12)*

4. Novelties within the new curriculum

4.1. The first novelty of the analyzed curriculum

Diversifying teaching – learning strategies is considered as a first direction of novelty. This diversification is focused on active and participatory methods by engaging children into a genuine learning experience. The authors stress the necessity to consider that children have different levels of development, different rates of development and learning and different learning styles. *I also stress the necessity to use inter-active methods that facilitate the co-operative learning; this is a very important component of preschool educational level as a preparatory stage for the future school life (the propaedeutics function of the preschool education).*

The **development of a positive motivation** for learning and an increased level of self esteem are considered as an important contribution for children's preparation for school. These are developed if the learning situations designed by the educators are based on children's previous learning experiences, the authors say. They implicitly speak about a double hypostasis of play: as fundamental psychological activity of early childhood and as an educational method/ or designed learning context.

I would present, based on the authors ideas, that these double hypostasis should be understood and used by teachers who design learning situations for children. Thus, firstly the basic form of activity along the early childhood is the play. The ludicrous context must be used for an effective incidental learning. Secondly, the learning force of the child's play must be consciously used by the educator; in this case it turns into a methodological context as soon as it is used as a method for learning; sometimes one finds under the name of "didactic play" a learning context containing playful sequences as methods connected to punctual contents. More than this, two perspectives should be involved: the individual play and the group or social perspective of play. Their careful observation by the educator gives enough information to be used for the individual help and for the design of learning situations for a group of children (Figure 4: Child's (children's) play – sources of information for educators.)

The assessment sequence is considered as another anchor of diversifying the teaching – learning methodology. The authors say that the evaluation process should be focused on the **child's individual progress** and less on reference to group's norms which are not relevant at least for this age. This assessment have to find answers to three major aspects (a) the nature of child's acquisition; (b) the qualitative level of this acquisitions as an expression of the level of the child's preparation for school and for the long process of the ontogenesis development; (c) obstacles of child's development, if they exist (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 13).

4.2. The second novelty of the analyzed curriculum

A second novelty underlined by the authors is represented by the importance of the educational environment. Two traits of this environment are highlighted: its intercultural dimension and the possibility of a free expression of the child. The idea of social inclusion is somehow attached to interculturality but there is no explanation of what the authors intends to express. *This problem is very interesting and may be subject to separate works. The problem of intercultural educational environments has some common elements but also some specific differences from context to context that should be carefully considered.*

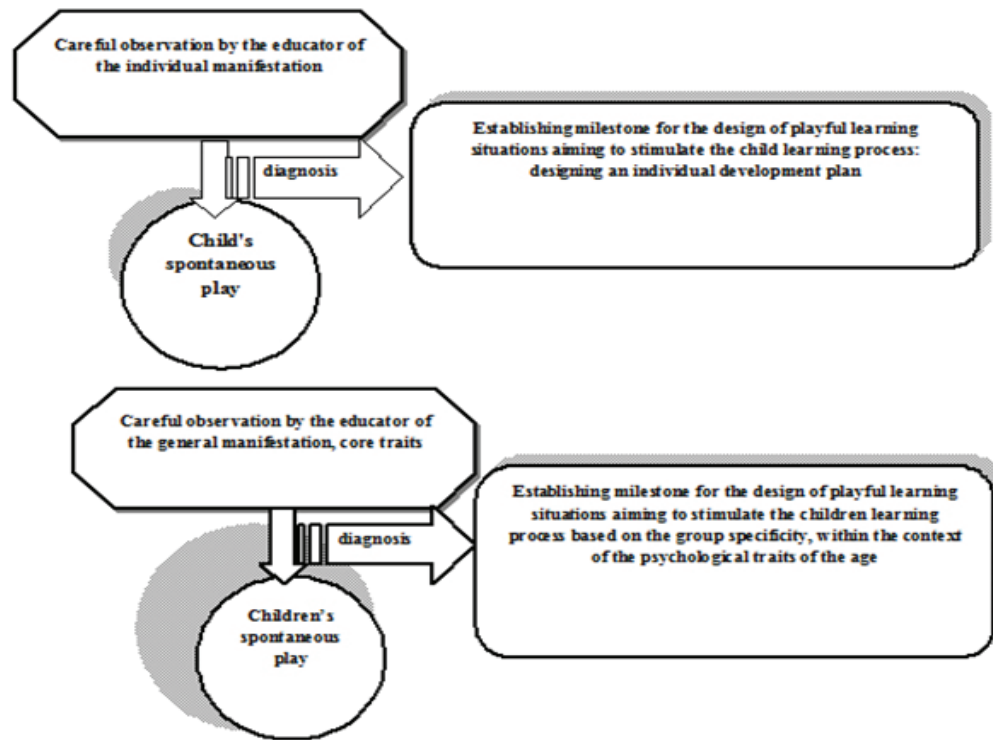


Figure 4: *Child's (children's) play – sources of information for educators*

4.3. The second novelty of the analyzed curriculum

A second novelty underlined by the authors is represented by the importance of the educational environment. Two traits of this environment are highlighted: its intercultural dimension and the possibility of a free expression of the child. The idea of social inclusion is somehow attached to interculturality but there is no explanation of what the authors intends to express. *This problem is very interesting and may be subject to separate works. The problem of intercultural educational environments has some common elements but also some specific differences from context to context that should be carefully considered.*

4.4. The third novelty of curriculum

A third and valuable idea is represented by the parents' role as partners of the educational approach. In fact, it is not a novelty as wording; always it appeared as a wish. Unfortunately, even in this case when the idea is reiterated, the implementation of curriculum only vaguely realized this involvement of parents. The parents' presence in kindergarten's life still remained on a superficial manner; they did not become real partners of the educational approach. *In my opinion, special programs for parents' education should be considered, designed and run.*

4.5. The fourth novelty of curriculum

The focus of curriculum must be on the concept of global development of the child. This is understood as a necessary accent on all the type of competencies necessary both for school and life. Accordingly, the development must be seen on all the involved areas: cognitive, socio- emotional (with moral and aesthetic implications), and physic (psycho- motor). This is the reason of developing the goals of this curriculum based on experiential areas, the authors say (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 13, 14).

The curriculum presents further a number of areas of development without specifying their correlation with the experiential fields, and this has created confusions along the implementation process.

A brief description of the development areas is realized, following the text of the document.

5. Areas of child's development

The new curriculum describes five areas of the child's development considered as being targets of the educational process.

1. **The physical development, health and personal hygiene** are elements of the first listed developmental area. This area refers to the child's body coordination connected to specific skills imply, the child's sensory skills, knowledge, capacities and attitudes on child care and personal hygiene, nutrition, health maintenance practices and personal security. It has two important branches: (a) Physical Development: (a.1.) development of gross-motility; (a.2.) developing fine-motility; (a.3.) sensory-motor development; (b) Health and personal hygiene: (b.1.) promoting health and nutrition; (b.2.) personal care and hygiene promotion; (b.3) promoting personal safety practices (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 14).

2. **Socio-emotional area** – aimed at the onset of child's social life, child's ability to establish and maintain interactions with adults and other children. Social interactions are important for the development of child's self image and the image of people around. Emotional development is especially expressed by children's ability to perceive and express emotions, understand and respond to the emotions of others, and developing self concept, crucial for this area. This self concept correlate with self image and together they have a decisive influence on learning process.

As dimensions of the area are highlighted: (a) social development: (a.1) developing the skills of interaction with adults; (a.2.) interaction skills with children age close; (a.3.) acceptance and respect for diversity; (a.4.) develop pro-social behavior (b) emotional development: (b.1) developing self-concept; (b.2) development of emotional control; (b.3) development of emotional expressiveness.

3. **The development of language and communication** is the third area of development. *In my view the phrase put as title of this area is not correct. The children's communications competencies are to be developed, not the communication as a general category of human actions.* This area is focused on the development of

language (in matters of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and understanding the significance of messages), communication skills (including listening skills, oral and written communication, nonverbal and verbal) and pre- acquisitions for literacy and the accompanying development of each of the other areas. (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 15).

As dimensions of the field are highlighted: (a) *Language development and of communication skills*: (a.1) Developing the capacity of listening and understanding (receptive communication); (a.2) Development of speech and communication ability (expressive communication); (b) *Development of reading and writing prerequisites*: (b.1) Participating at educational experiences with books, aiming to learn about books and to value them; (b.2) Developing the capacity of phonetic discrimination, sound-letter association; (b.3) Awareness of spoken / written message; (b.4) Acquiring writing skills, using writing to send a message.

4. The area of cognitive development- focused on developing children's ability to understand relationships among objects, phenomena, events and people beyond their physical characteristics. The cognitive development includes logical thinking skills and problem solving capacities, elementary mathematical knowledge of children and those on the world and the environment (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 15, 16).

As dimensions of the field are presented: (a) logical development and problem solving; (b) knowledge and basic skills, mathematical knowledge and understanding of the world:

(b.1) elementary mathematical representations (numbers, numerical representation, operations, concepts space, geometric shapes, understanding patterns, measurements); (b.2) “knowledge and understanding” of the world (living world, earth, space, scientific method).

Even if very often used, I do not agree this phrase knowledge and understanding. Going back to Bloom and Lorin Anderson it is easy to understand that they did not use the term knowledge with the meaning of nowadays. Bloom has established six major categories of cognitive behaviors; these are described and presented in relation to the increasing difficulty of the intellectual approach. Six levels of difficulty are presented. Each level prepares the next one and it is indispensable for the building of the next level. The categories that are enumerated by Bloom are the following: knowledge (described as remind data and information), comprehension (described as understanding of the meaning and involves action like: translate, interpolate and interpret instructions and problems; reformulate problems in individual's own words), application, analysis, summary, and evaluation.

In the mid '90s Lorin Anderson, a disciple of Bloom, did a review of terminology and hierarchy, by changing the nouns used by Bloom with words having verbal meanings that express cognitive abilities / capacities; thus it becomes possible to replace the polyvalent term of knowledge with the verb remember (remembering information), its meaning being closer to the nature and degree of complexity of this level of cognitive behavior, as Bloom himself understood it. The next category of

Anderson is expressed by the verbal meaning of understand (understanding information), which also has a closer meaning to the sense given by Bloom to comprehension stage; this level is characterized by focusing on human individual's capacity to decode meanings and to prove that the information decoding process is a correct one, as a proof of understanding.

Beyond the two basic levels (knowledge and comprehension at Bloom, remembering and understanding at Anderson), the cognitive abilities gradually increase in complexity via application, analysis, synthesis up to assessment, according to Bloom's steps. Anderson differentiates the two final levels and establishes as last level to create, based on an assessment that involves synthesis. All these levels express together the complex approach of knowledge as phenomenon. (Niculescu, R. M., 2010: 17).

According to the above comments it is obvious that genuine knowledge (even if considered as internalized information and even less when the term means a human specific phenomenon) cannot exist without understanding. The process of internalizing supposes to decode information and this involves understanding. Only if one considers knowledge in terms of mechanically memorized information the phrase knowledge and understanding could be correct. In my opinion this phrase obsessively repeated in specialty works reveals a symptomatic concealment of an excessive valuing of the amount of information memorized. Scholastic concept seems to still have followers.

5. The last presented area is that of **capacities and attitudes to learning** (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 16). This area refers to the child involvement in a learning activity, child's way of approaching defined learning tasks and context. Children's attitude involved by their interaction with the environment and with other children or adults is also implied. The listed dimensions of the area show the authors focus on the attitudinal aspect of the children's development: curiosity and interest, initiative, persistence in activity, creativity. *In my view, the term capacity in the name of the area has not a right place; in fact the cognitive capacities involved in learning process are developed within all the other domains. This area is focused on the **children's attitudes** and they represent a very important element of the evolving competencies at this age.*

A last explanation tries to make a connection between the previously described experiential fields and this domains/ areas of development with the curriculum authors' mention that it is not necessary a superposition of them but a correlation (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 16).

In fact, children being put into learning experiences should be developed as a whole, as a complex evolving human being. In my opinion, a more clear explanation and even a possible compatibility among these two categories of concepts, very important for the economy of the curriculum, would have avoided a wide number of confusions and contradiction that appeared along the implementation process.

From the document wording presented above, educators can understand that their duty is to pursue the real connections between experiential fields and the areas of development, without seeking their overlap; the aim should be a choice of effective strategies to achieve the overall development of the child and thus the educational aims. It is the authors' advice, but a more clear connection among these concepts

should be provided. I argue this based on the huge number of questions I had been confronted with, which had been generated by the use of two categories of concepts, obviously connected but not in depth understood.

In fact, the very names of these two categories of concepts are significant and make sense of the relationship between them. Development areas as concept are related to the complexity of the personality to which the foundations are put along preschool age. Experiential fields are a result of educational offerings designed to develop each of the components expressed by the areas of development.

The educators are the actors of the design and implementation of learning situations belonging to these five experiential fields: man and society, sciences, language and communication, aesthetic and creativity, psycho-motor. Each learning situation is focused on specific outcomes on the level of the involved children; these outcomes belong to their own learning experiences (the source of the phrase: experiential fields). The outcomes on their turn are expressed by competencies as entities or by the components of these entities: knowledge, capacities and attitudes based on values. These three elements act in a synergistic way and have as results competencies elaborated on a proper level for the preschool age. It was a long debate about the appropriateness of using the term competency when one talks about children.

I consider that a diachronically understanding of competencies development along the ontogenesis process gives the right to speak about competencies at this age as concrete evolving competencies in preschool period. These concrete evolving competencies are progressively developed until maturity and they are qualitatively filtered in what can be named as competence as an attribute of personality. Each adult has his level and a specific nature of competence that is further expressed through concrete competencies in practice (social or professional practice) (Niculescu, R. M., 2010: 103).

The figure 5 shows the place of preschool age within the ontogenesis process and its specific level of developing children's competencies as expression of the experiential fields connected to developmental areas.

Each experiential field expresses the outcomes of an educational process that emerge as consequences of designed and implemented learning situations in specific fields: man and society, aesthetic and creative, sciences, language and communication, psycho-motor, as the curriculum called them. These experiential fields express sets of outcomes existing on children's level because they live their unique experience within the context of the provided learning situations. The outcomes can be represented by new knowledge, new or developed capacities or abilities, developed attitudes based on internalized values. One cannot speak at this age about beliefs. The preschool child crosses over the period of the authority of hetero – morality. But, it is important to use the specific mechanisms of the age in order to help the internalizing process of the moral religious, esthetics, and other categories of values. They are extremely important for the further children's development. Each experiential field adds more elements to the developmental areas that contribute to the global development of the child. The specificity of these elements depends on the experiential field itself.

Thus, man and society field gives knowledge about people, social and natural environment, history of the nearby environment and its geographical traits; it gives knowledge about self, human body, human activities etc. The use of new knowledge determines the development of children’s cognitive capacities and sometimes, psycho – motor abilities, in specific context. Children start to develop attitudes toward life, self, other people, and society. They develop response behaviors and also have a good practice of language by using newly learned words and developing their communication skills. As a consequence, one cannot talk about a strict connection of this experiential field only with one or another of the five developmental areas. There are specific emphases put on one or another accordingly to the contents or contexts of the punctual learning situations.

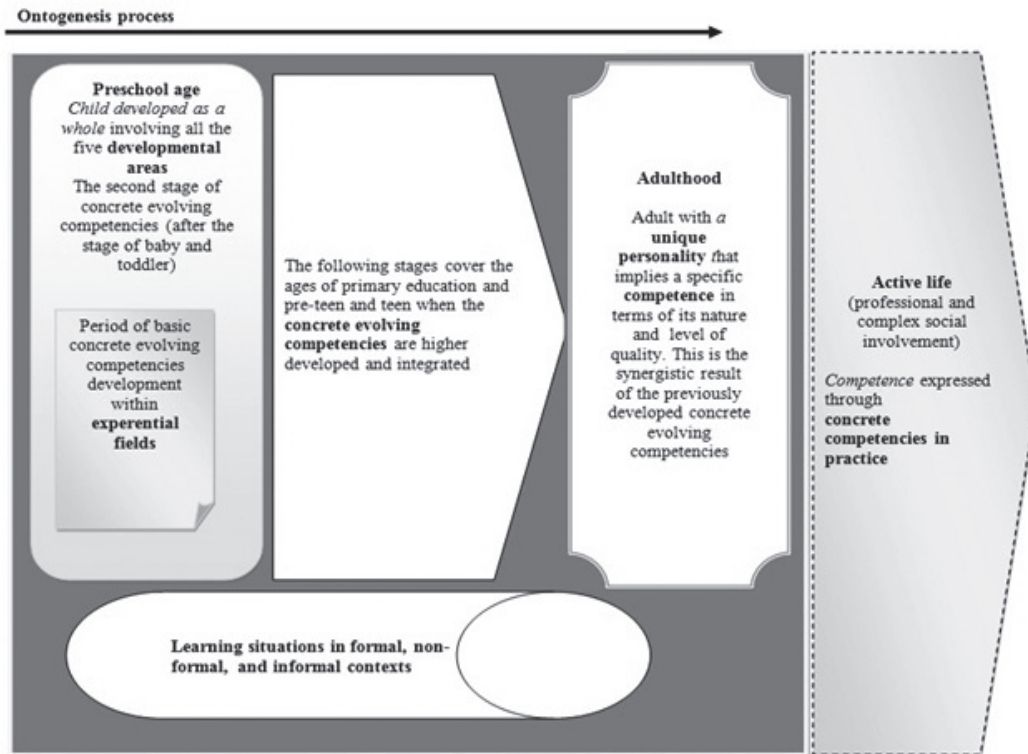


Figure 5: *Preschool age- role and place in ontogenesis. Learning situations – experiential fields and developmental areas*

The science field by its specific has a great contribution to the development of mathematic and scientific knowledge and to the children’s cognitive capacities. But it also involves a specific vocabulary and a specificity of communication itself. Attitudes and feelings are developed, as well. They should be explicitly and carefully aimed by the educators in order to put the bases of a positive motivation for learning science and learning in general.

The psycho-motor field seems to be better connected to the developmental area of the physical development, health and personal hygiene. This is true in terms of explicit goals but all the other developmental areas are more or less influenced. The psychomotor activities involve emotions and social relationships, develop attitudes and imply learning and attitude to learning. A number of rules must be learned, the specific terms determine a richer vocabulary and, finally, a good context of practicing the communication skills; thus even the cognitive area of development is implied. The aesthetic and creative field that is explicitly covered by the drawing, painting activities, music and dance gives more information, and consequently more knowledge in this domains; the practice of a specific language can be noticed and also a rich context for developing emotions. A lot of social skills are developed depending on the effectiveness of learning situations' design. The development of capacities and attitudes is also aimed even if with a specific connotations according to the content. In the same time, this experiential field is subject of an implicit concern of all the other experiential fields in terms of the use of value of beauty and creativity; beauty and creativity can be found and developed in any context if the educator wants and is able to do this. This is only an example of the way of an intimate interconnection among the experiential fields with complex effects on all the developmental areas.

The language and communication field is an independent one even if all the others have a great contribution in the connected developmental area. Specific activities focused on vocabulary, correctness of expression, fluency, logic of speaking are to be explicitly developed. Children can learn that their thoughts can be expressed by signs, drawings with a symbolic value, letters connected in words of mother language or another language. They learn to express their thought in a rational manner, fluently, correctly and with appropriate emotions. This is the subject of specific educational activities and they will determine outcomes of unique and personal learning experience. But this developmental area is specifically completed by all the others experiential areas.

6. Master Plan and types of activities

Curriculum presents the Master Plan with a concrete distribution of hours per week and per categories of activities. *The same lack of consistency and the bushy wording does not help a genuine understanding of authors' philosophy, even if this philosophy, generally speaking, is a very good one and really introduces a new vision.* This is one of the primary reasons of rejection or of an extremely complicated way of implementing the curriculum along the last years. When I say this I refer to the informal opinions I had the chance to meet with, opinions with an extended range. Usually, an interesting set of reasons stop the open expressing of the genuine teachers' thoughts and feelings. But the concrete implementation of curriculum acts under the influence of these genuine opinions. That is why it becomes strongly important to fill the gap between official expression of thoughts and the real level of acceptance.

The Master plan is followed by a so called *Methodology of Implementation*. An in depth analysis of this document is not intended, but several considerations should be done (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18).

Three *categories of learning activities* are listed: (1) *activities on field of “learning”* (which can be integrated activities or activities on *disciplines*); (2) *chosen games and activities*; (3) *personal development activities*. These categories are encapsulated within the mentioned Master Plan (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18).

This presentation and the definitions of these categories include a number of terms that previously were used in another manner. For instance the *experiential fields* phrase is replaced with the term “*activities on fields of learning* “. The listing of activities speaks about activities on fields of learning while the further description speaks about “*activities on experiential fields*” (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18). Even if the two phrases could be synonyms this uncertain manner of using concepts has created confusions and rejections (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18). Another example is the use of the term *disciplines*, a term not usually found in preschool education.

The definitions of the three categories of learning activities imply a series of terms which are not previously treated in any way, and the understanding of the text becomes difficult.

After a careful reading of the definitions, I try to structure the text based on some parameters which make possible both the deciphering of meaning and the correct use of terms in designing activities.

7. Defining and describing learning activities

7.1. Activities on field of learning

The first category of learning activities involves design, formal management, and assessment. They presume specific contents that can be structured in different manners.

The choice of a certain structure requires considering: (1) the six major themes proposed by the official curriculum, (2) the age of children, (3) children's interests (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18).

One says that the suggested number of weekly activities refers to a maximum weekly value of integrated activities. It is correct for curriculum to establish it, but maybe an argument for the chosen figures would have been welcome.

The Methodology states that the teachers can design their planning by structuring contents in two ways: (1) on disciplines (subject, knowledge fields); (2) on integrated contents from more knowledge fields (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18).

In the category of subjects/disciplines (in fact areas of knowledge / action) are listed just in a parenthesis: *language education activities, math activities, learning environment, education to society, physical education, practical training, music education or artistic-plastic activities*.

The integrated contents are seen as a possible alternative of structuring contents, apart on disciplines; the integration can be done in two ways: (a) putting together interconnected knowledge from several domains; (b) considering the

integration between the three listed categories of learning activities, particularly the first two: the activities on experiential fields and the category of chosen games and activities; this can be done under the umbrella of common topics. The concrete manner of integration is a free option of teachers. Unfortunately, the ambiguity of the use of the word interdisciplinary in the original text aggravates the understanding. A staging of activities is introduced with an optional order. The text does not clearly explain the substance and role of this staging (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18).

7.2. Chosen games and activities

The second category of learning activities (chosen games and activities) implies activities focused on consolidation of acquisitions acquired in the first category of activities in the context of a "progressive socialization." They should be organized in small groups, peers, or individually.

Depending on the type of kindergarten schedules 2-3 possible stages of the chosen game and activities are listed (3 activities for kindergartens with an extended or weekly schedule and only 2 for those with normal time.) Suggestions of possibility of organizing centers of interest are done. Examples are listed: Library, Corner of the box / Role Play, Construction, Science, Arts, sand and water, etc., The offer must be as rich as possible; it is determined by the material conditions of space and, not least the age of children (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 19).

7.3. Personal development activities

Personal development activities are detailed on three categories: (a) routines, (b) transitions and (c) activities along the afternoon (for kindergarten with an extended or weekly schedule). They include the optional activities as well (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 18).

The introduction of routines seems interesting; they are defined as anchoring activities, a kind of benchmarks of daily activities within kindergarten: the children's arrival, the morning meeting, breakfast, hygiene moments as washing and toilet, lunch, sleep / time relaxing of the afternoon, snacks, and departure. Their daily scheduling approximately within the same hourly landmarks allows the teacher to use them as formative moments. They can be designed as activities aiming to develop both the children's self-esteem and a number of social competencies, extremely useful for the social life: communication skills, self management, making decisions, solving problems, avoid conflicts etc. Although worded in a bushy form, the offered explanations are however useful. (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 19).

The subcategory called "transitions" includes "short-term activities that are transition moments among categories of learning activities in various moments of the daily schedule. They can be imagined in many ways and the curriculum emphasizes the importance of children's age for the choice of the way of action. The given concrete examples can be useful, but are not suggested as restrictive (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 20).

7.4. Optional activities

The “optional” activities represent another subcategory that includes chosen activities, as well. But this time the parents make the choice from the offers submitted by the kindergarten. These offers can cover a wider area, according to the presumed interests of parents and children's and depending on the human and material resources of the educational institution. The Methodology introduces a restriction of the number of run optional activities in the weekly schedule: one activity for children aged 3-5 years and two for those within 5-7 years. They can be run by a teacher or a specialized professional as a partner of the preschool teacher (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 20).

7.5. The afternoon activities

The Methodology considers the afternoon activities also as learning activities. They can be: “rehabilitation activities” in areas of learning, recreation, cultivation and development of children's interests and children's potentialities. They must meet the child's own pace of learning and individual's skills, and are correlated with the weekly topic / theme of the project and other program daily activities (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 20).

8. The six core topics

An interesting part of the analyzed methodology consists in the introduction of six core topics, as core directions around which is suggested to be "organized the annual program of study" (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 21). They are presented without an intended interconnection even if it exists. Three of them are mainly focused on the child's individual development and the other three refer more to the child's relation with the environment, the world. In the first category can be listed the topics: (1) *Who am I? / Who we are?* (2) *What and how to express our feelings?* (3) *What and how I want to be?* The second category includes: (4) *When, how and what happens?* (5) *How is / was and will be here on earth?* (6) *Who and how plan / organize an activity?* (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 21). Another suggestion appears: the involvement of these topics in educational projects whose number is limited at 7 yearly. The description of themes is an inspired graphics one, but in terms of clarity is still enough space to improve (Curriculum for Preschool Education, 2008: 23).

The document presents the relationship between: (a) each of the six topics; (b) the experiential areas; (c) listed goals (called in Romanian *reference objectives*); (d) children's behavior; (e) suggestions for contents.

Another pedagogical confusion should be highlighted. The goals are worded more in terms of objectives as actions / children's behaviors but not always in a correct way. For instance wording like "children understanding of" is not correlated with behaviors able to demonstrate this understanding.

The *learning time* as a curricular component is placed for the formally organized teaching activities in between 15 minutes for small group (3-4 years) up to 45 minutes at high and preparatory group.

The main emphasizes of preschool education are specified. Thus, for the first interval of ages (3-5 years old) the focused should be on the development of autonomy and integration in kindergarten; the second interval (5-7 years old) aims to train children for school.

The relationship between the recommended six topics and the experiential fields is somehow suggested in the mentioned figure but unfortunately two things stand out: (1) an ambiguous separation of two items: *concepts and knowledge* and (2) the totally neglect of some important relationships. Thus, it is not clear how the authors see the relationship of the topics and the developmental areas at the children's level that, ultimately, are essential reason of everything is being done.

The methodology provides some details for each of the interval of age and for each topic in hand. This is the place where the authors suggest in an implicit manner interesting connection but the necessity to put them into an explicit way appears. The figure 6 shows in a graphic form these connections. This is an alternative figure to that offered by the document.

The figure shows the connection between the six topics – the five experiential fields and the outcomes of educational process expressed by *competencies* developed in specified areas.

The educational approach is exercised in the context of one of the six topics, integrated or not, included or not within wider projects. The topics' approach aims to reach quantitative and qualitative standards within each experiential field.

The first Pentagon represents the five experiential fields meant to help the child's development on the five specified areas of development listed by curriculum (expressed by the second pentagon) This development involves concrete evolving competencies. The central image presents these developmental areas having inside the symbol of the triangle that expresses the three dimensional structure of a competency; its basic components are: (1) knowledge; (2) capacities/ abilities/ skills; (3) attitudes based on values. Thus, the center of the schema (the competencies and the areas where they are to be developed) represents the focus of the entire educational process and consequently the heart of the figure.

Along the history of the Romanian education the concern for early age has manifested in a remarkable manner, as I have tried to show throughout this paper.

A final figure (7) captures the evolution of the early education within the Romanian educational system along the last two centuries.

The future will be the evidence of new dimensions given to this preoccupation. The educational approach has to be clarified and better structured on all its dimensions. A more effective way of teachers training should be designed and implemented. Eventually, the educational practice will be the genuine mirror of how effective is this important approach.

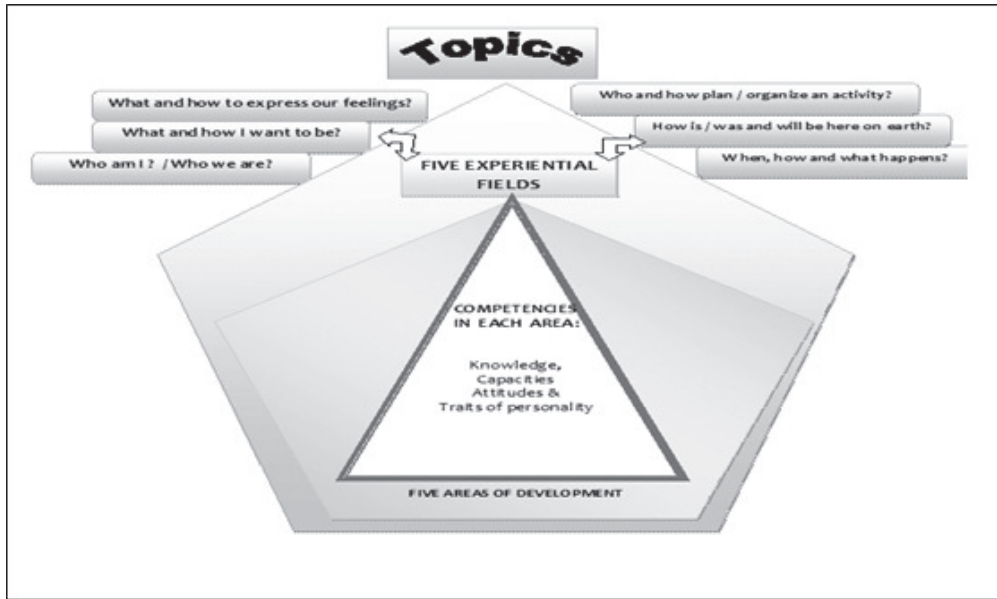


Figure 6: *Topics- Experiential fields and Competencies on Developmental areas*

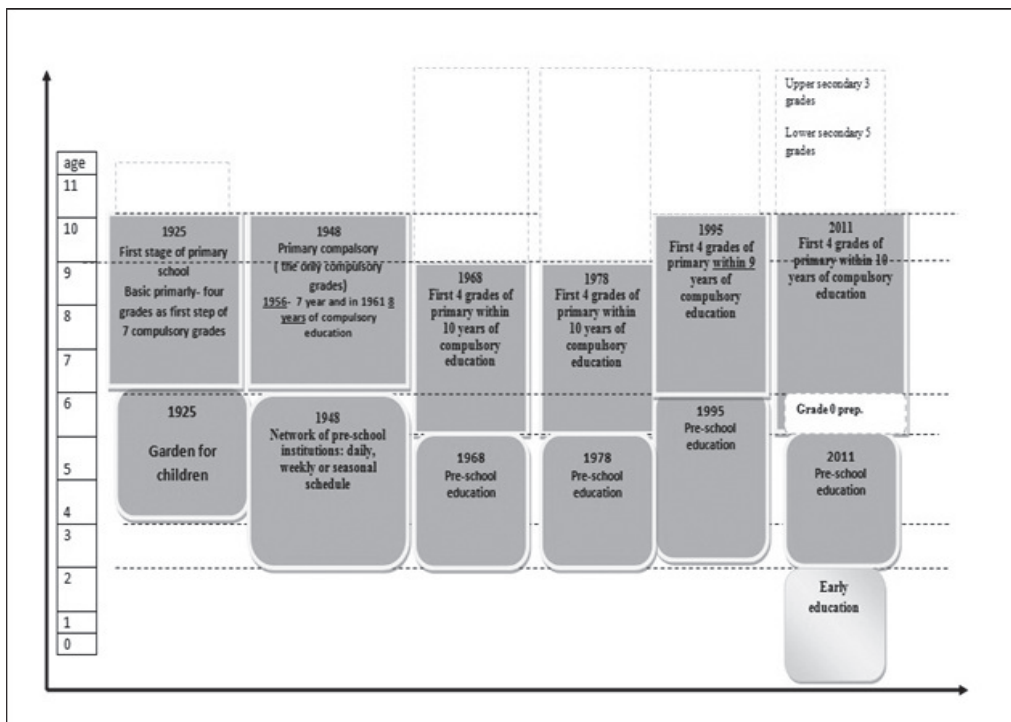


Figure 7: *The evolution of early and primary Romanian education along the last two centuries*

9. FINAL REFLECTIONS

Education is the wind that shapes the rock to reveal the Sphinx from its heart. This is a metaphor of education created by one of my students. He was not a future poet, but a future physician, a young who seems to have understood the essence of what is the miracle of education.

Starting from this wording I tried to establish the mission of the early education (including the formal preschool stage) inside of this complex process of human being's personality creation, with another group of students trained to become future preschool teachers. The number of the answers and their high creativity gave me the measure of the deep understanding of a sacred mission. They have worded the mission of this starting moment highlighting interesting aspects. The type of the wind, the force of its blow, the manner of acting against the stone were landmarks of an impressive set of analogies with the educational hypostasis, contexts, specificities along early childhood. The educational ideal was placed inside the rock symbolized by the idea of the Sphinx but being different from an historical age to another. My students realized an interesting analysis of the different shapes of the final product according to the client's request, the client represented by the society as a whole in its different historical moments of evolution. They said that no matter if this final product, this final Sphinx, as a symbol of value, is a Hercules³⁰, or a Thinker³¹, or a Golden Bird in Space,³² the first moments of the blowing wind against the rock have at least the same importance like the last moments of finalizing the details. This moment of beginning is the big moment of „ the genuine opening the stone's soul towards the modeling action of the wind”. The quality of this opening is determined by the wind itself, and as educators we must be aware about this essential truth.

Acknowledgement

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³⁰ Marble **statue** of a bearded **Hercules**. Roman Flavian period. AD 68-98.

³¹ Auguste Rodin (1879–1889)

³² Constantin Brâncuși, (white marble, 1910? -1912) with its subsequent versions

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