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HOW IS CHILDHOOD CHANGING?

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Abstract

In recent times we have seen the growth of new attention to childhood. Radical questions are challenging long-held attitudes and beliefs about children. This article looks at the way students from the second year of training to become early childhood teachers interpret the way attitudes towards children are changing. The aim of the study is to involve a group of 22 students from the University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu into a practical investigation, in which they analyze the cases of different children. During their practical activities in the kindergarten, each student chose a child of 4 years old in order to study the attitudes held about him from three perspectives: the teacher, the parents and the child perspective about his behavior and educational needs. The methods used during the study were: observation, interviews and study case. The qualitative analyses of the data collected allowed to students to understand what are the use of looking at attitudes towards children. Children are often seen by adults in terms of stereotypes based on them being vulnerable or dependent. If children’s voice is heard, new ways of understanding come to life. Findings revealed that student’s efforts are crucial in order to understand how today’s childhood is changing, in order to become professionals in early childhood education. The change in attitude and practice involves seeing children in their own right and as having rights, and that should be at the bases of any educational modern department that trains future educators.

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1. Introduction

In the last decade, the change has become a constant in everyday life. We are forced to pressure the volume of information and changes, which are very fast. How the child is valued by society is reflected in the concern that children's rights are respected and implemented in all areas of social life, be

they public or private. The education of children implies the need to find solutions adapted to the new current row.

Today's society is different than that of yesterday. Children today need new skills, considered vital to adapt to a world in constant change. Current educational community becomes increasingly larger, more resilient, more fluid, and recompose standing by the interference and new ways to think about the relationships between other people. The classical paradigms of education are about to be again discussed and partly changed (Cucoş, C., 2008, p. 58). The knowledge society requires new and unusual forms of exchange and reproduction of information and new forms of education relate. Interestingly, just those who educated "force" training practice resizing of the teaching staff, in line with these new requirements. It is estimated that many changes will occur in the philosophy of teaching in the millennium we have entered.

In recent times we have seen the growth of new attention to childhood. Radical questions are challenging long-held attitudes and beliefs about children. Recent studies reveal that the impetus for change is energetic and powerful. In this conditions, how should we prepare the next generation of teachers? The ways the adults relate to children and the ways that children see themselves are being questioned by new challenges in today's society.

This article looks at the way students from the second year of training to become early childhood teachers interpret the way attitudes towards children are changing. The significant argument which is the basis of this study is related to the fact that relations should be appropriate and central education rebuilt according to today's child psychology. The changes applied to children should give rise to a change in a positive and constructive way to educational relations with educators, who have a duty to persevere and to deepen the change, so that the results are clearly visible and relevant.

2. Paper Theoretical Foundation and Related Literature

Scientific researchers have established the importance of promoting healthy child development in the early years of his life, demonstrating that programs that integrated attention to early development offers a tremendous opportunity for avoiding or minimizing development, bringing together the sustainable benefits for both the individual and society. Important evidence in the field of physiology, nutrition, health, sociology, psychology and education indicates that the early years of life are crucial for the formation of intelligence, personality and social behavior of the future adult.

Recent studies assert that the healthy development of the child, his mental and emotional balance will depend on the effectiveness of early relations (Cable, C. et al, 2010). Given the importance of relationships in early childhood, extremely rich period in transformations with sustainable impact throughout adult life, they must represent an absolute priority for any company, for parents and for training of those who are responsible for education. Children's rights must be assured from birth, yet their specific needs for development must be understood and satisfied by the way in which parents and educational relations built by teachers during this crucial phase, because the options and the measures taken will affect not only the way in which a child develops, but even the progress of a state.

The theme chosen for this study is relevant and topical for both the theory and practice of education. Well-being of children became the core of recent studies (Collins, J., 2008). Also, a large number of international documents are governing the rights of children. Questions about how wellbeing is

assured and legal rights are respected, implemented and interpreted is the essence of modern research (Evans, J. L., et al., 2000; Johnson, I., 2010). It is felt not only the need to investigate the lives of children by researchers, but also to take into account their critical opinions about their own role. This new vision and changes occurring at the present time around the world requires a reconsideration of the curriculum for early childhood education, from the perspective of ensuring conditions for the normal development of the child, depending on the potential at its disposal.

New research challenges are converted into challenges to the educational phenomenon, which implies new requirements for early education and teacher training. Teachers need to understand and be familiar with the development needs of each new generation of children to help them develop their optimal potential, because the little ones are extremely complex, they have extraordinary powers demonstrated since birth. However, most of the time, parents and teachers underestimate them. It is more unusual that children should be consulted. However, they prove to be much more sophisticated and much more capable than we think.

Most theories have ultra-simplified, thus far, the reality of children's lives and have adequate understanding of the hidden childhood (Cable, C., et. al., 2010). The concept itself of "development" is problematic and controversial in the scientific literature because it produces conflicting arrangements in educational practice. Our perspective on children contribute to oppression and exploitation in various ways, they are judge way too simplistic in terms of incompetence and weakness due to the need to be helped, rather than appreciate the tremendous potential and powers that they have from birth.

Focusing on educational relations to meet specific needs of children is one of the educational principles which must be put into practice. It is necessary to deepen the field of competence of the correlation, to open up new approaches adapted to the current context and explanations of early education. Formation of relationships, skills considered vital today, can no longer be neglected by the initial and continuing training of teachers.

3. Methodology

The aim of the study is to involve a group of 22 students from the Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy academic program from the University "Lucian Blaga" of Sibiu into a practical investigation in which they analyse the cases of different children. The novelty consists in developing competences of future teachers to focus on the well-being of children. Changing traditional mentalities in relation in order to relate with children is the main psychosocial effect and is being pursued through the implementation of this study. Such training is important for the profession of teaching, whereas involves creating new types of educational relationship which requires a learning experience, participation, research and information imparting. It's a challenging that invites each participant to its own change. This collaborative initiative is suitable to a domain based on individual freedoms and competition of values.

During their practical activities in the kindergarten, each student chose a child of 4 years old in order to study the attitudes held about him from three perspectives: the teacher, the parents and the child perspective about his behaviour and educational needs. The methods used during the study were: observation, interviews and study case. Throughout the second semester of the academic year 2015-2016 each student analyzed a child in the classroom, in order to carry out a case study.

The model of the analysis was a case type based on questions and answers. The case study involved the analysis of a concrete problem situation, with the details and particularities of the *child (Who is the child and what are his educational needs? How do you think you can optimize educational interventions according to his individual needs?)*. This case-study had an explanatory role, so that the student to be able to explain who and how that child is in order to develop his power of arguing.

The students followed the next steps: the choice of the case; an analytical study of the problem situation; searching for variants of solving; choosing an optimal intervention. The questions in order to guide the students were:

- *Who is this child* (the original name, surname, age, data about family, living conditions);
- *How is this child* (personality traits-skills and attitudes, character, temperament, behavior);
- *How is this child from his/her perspective;*
- *How is this child from the perspective of the teacher;*
- *How is this child from the perspective of group colleagues;*
- *How is this child from the perspective of the family;*
- *What is unique about the child;*
- *Conclusions* (what the student have learned about that child, what he discovered, what was he surprised by, what impact it had on his preparation as a future teacher);
- *Proposals for optimizing the educational interventions on the part of teachers or family depending on the individual needs of the child;*
- *Choosing the most optimal arrangements of the proposed intervention.*

Each student voluntarily involved used the three methods in order to accomplish their practical activities, with the support off their mentors in order to observe and interview the children, the parents and the teachers during the study.

4. Results

The qualitative analyses of the data collected allowed students to understood what are the use of looking at attitudes towards children. During the seminar activities the students presented their case-studies in front of the class, interpreting with their colleagues the results obtained. They fended this task attractive and useful for their initial training, because they had a true chance to relate closely with a certain child, his family and his teacher, in order to understand how are the children of today.

Students were encouraged to question and reveal children's voice. That was to most powerful engagement during the entire study, because they were able to see the differences between their perspectives and their educator's perspectives towards them. Many case-studies surprised them with very different perspectives on a child development and educational needs. It was a matter of attitude and that was the biggest achievement for the students involved: they could analyze the power of attitudes towards children and the way children are understood and educated. They easily realized that children are often seen by adults in terms of stereotypes based on them being vulnerable or dependent. If children's voice is heard, new ways of understanding come to life.

Findings revealed that student's efforts were crucial in order to understand how today's childhood is changing, in order to become professionals in early childhood education. Here are some important

results that students find presenting their case-studies: the most important expected outcomes were the psychosocial effects which occurred as a result of the students' intervention, the effects that were obvious in all categories of beneficiaries. First children are the main beneficiaries of these case studies based on several observations and interviews. The results aimed were focused on the chance of the students to know and understand better a child of 4 years old, which in his turn improved his social and emotional skills, learned new adaptive behaviors towards his relational environment in kindergarten and in the family.

The second category of beneficiaries was represented by teachers, the outcomes included changing mentalities and traditional attitudes towards how they correlate with the little ones and their parents, practicing emotional education in kindergartens and increasing professional satisfaction. In the case of parents, results aimed at changing mentalities towards networking with their own child and optimizing relations with kindergarten through establishing a working partnership. It is expected that the effects of the study to be felt throughout the community by the changes they cause in the attitude and behavior of the beneficiaries, in their field of knowledge and action, and to have an impact on many others in the field.

The added value of this study lies in the formation of responsible attitudes of students towards the correlation made with the little ones, with respect to the need for children to live a better relationship in their own environment and from the collaboration with parents. The experts responsible for early education need solutions and efficient correlation models to reach a real insight into the world of children today. It is desirable for this study to bring more clarity and simplicity in the system of students training, taking into account the great diversity of today's children.

The present study results can be synthesized in two fundamental findings:

- children tell us what they need at each stage of their development, so it is important to learn to listen and decipher their emotional language;
- students, parents and teachers can understand children and have a correct attitude towards them, if they accept the reality of the present without having to design their past on children and education they have received, in order to relate correctly and efficiently. When the children become too difficult, it means that adults are too involved in their own emotions and they need advice for their remediation.

Training students to explore the emotions of children becomes a real challenge. In this regard, we must take into account a key warning: children don't expect us to be perfect, but only human. Building effective learning relationships, listening to their own emotions, we learn to respect children and ourselves.

The children feel very good if they are consulted, whether their opinions are taken into account. In this regard, we believe that the principle of respect is fundamental in the field of early education: teachers must prove a deep respect for their needs, we must encourage at all times to speak openly about issues that they have become teachers of the adept observation and obedience of children. Teachers and parents also felt the positive impact of their involvement in exploring children's educational needs.

Findings revealed important performances of the students involved:

- students have demonstrated responsible attitude, practical skills and knowledge to relate with preschoolers;
- students' performance was determined on the basis of the results of children and the involvement of parents in implementing the study;
- self-assessments prove an increase in students' confidence in their own powers of correlation and the ability to better understand children during the formative experiment.

The beneficiaries of this study realized that children's emotional health should be supported and strengthened. The development of attitudes towards the wellbeing of children is essential.

5. Discussions

In today's society and even more so in the future, success is based on self-reliance, autonomy and the ease of creating relationships. The skills of communication and control impulses have become just as important as technical skills. To succeed in professional and personal life in the knowledge society, emotional intelligence is more important than ever. It is not enough to develop intellectual coefficient. Today's children need other stimulations. Mastering the emotions and behaviors are considered vital to the correlation in the change. In such circumstances, students, teachers and parents need to learn to trust themselves and to trust their children.

The problem of training educators becomes a central element of social policies in more and more countries. However, we need experts not only in the transmission of specific information, but especially in shaping personality at smaller ages. Strictly disciplinary competencies are not defining for a teacher, but mostly relational, psycho-pedagogical and formative skills (Cucos, C., 2008, p. 84) especially in the field of early education.

Professionals should learn a great deal about the life of children in order to be able to exercise their professional duties optimally. In order to better understand the circumstances of life, researchers need to learn more about children's thoughts, opinions, emotions, reflections and behaviors, by hearing their voices. Knowledge of educational relations are constantly increasing and more in-depth studies are needed, linked to their influence on the development of children.

6. Conclusions

The child's emotions are an expression of life in them, adults are often taken unawares by the intensity of children's emotions and thanks to conciliate, preventing them to express feelings more. But emotional downloads mean very intense experiences, consequences and their suppression is harmful. It is desirable for educators to learn without delay to identify emotions, to understand them and to use them in a positive way for the good of the children and the adults they will become.

Situations in which children are suffering because of inadequate educational relations both in the family and in the school, which teaches an aggressive mindset and pattern correlation is felt like a challenge. In this sense, the educational relationships should be rebuilt according to child psychology of today. The changes applied to children should give rise to a change in a positive and constructive way to

educational relations with educators, who have a duty to persevere and to deepen the change, so that the results are clearly visible and relevant.

This initiative comes in support of future teachers, under the conditions in which the needs to improve their initial teaching activity for the purpose of transformation of children into their training partners are all the more pressing. The change in attitude and practice involves seeing children in their own right and as having rights, that should be at the bases of any educational modern department that trains future educators.

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