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Holistic Approach in Practice from the Perspective of Preschool Teachers²

Extended summary

The holistic approach to early development implies that all aspects and processes that characterize it are considered as interconnected parts of a larger whole. The preferred model of holistic development is based on the need to arrive at a triadic version of the aspects of development – from general theoretical settings of learning and theories of holistic development, to glottodidactic instructions dedicated to practice. This approach stems from the fact that there is no single model that guarantees successful results, it suggests that the professional development of preschool teachers should not offer ready-made “recipes”, but should prepare them to connect strategies and procedures with theories and thus, in an adequate way, encourage the development of all abilities and skills of all children.

In this paper, we present the results of the research carried out with the aim of determining the current situation when it comes to the application of the holistic approach in preschool practice. The subject of the research is the preschool teachers’ self-assessment of their own knowledge, skills, values, and motivation for applying the holistic approach in their work with preschool children. The goal is to determine the current situation when it comes to the application of the holistic approach, as well as individual procedures (*supporting, expanding, modeling, encouraging children’s initiative, consulting*) for early development and learning from the point

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of view of preschool teachers, incorporated in the new program called *The Foundations of the Preschool Education Program – “Years of Ascent”*.

The following tasks emerged from the set goals: 1. to determine the knowledge, skills, and value attitudes of preschool teachers regarding the application of the holistic approach; 2. to determine which procedures, based on the holistic approach and incorporated into the program *The Foundations of the Preschool Education Program – “Years of Ascent”* (2018) – *supporting, expanding, modeling, encouraging children’s initiative, consulting* – are most often applied in direct educational work, and which ones are evaluated as the most significant; 3. to examine the motivation and willingness of preschool teachers to create and implement activities, exchange information, and strengthen themselves professionally in the domain of proper application of holistic learning.

At the same time, attention was also devoted to the examination of preschool teachers’ values regarding the application of holism in practice. The research sample is intentional – a total of 229 preschool teachers from the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina participated in the research. For the purposes of the research, an appropriate online questionnaire for preschool teachers was designed. The research was conducted at the beginning of the winter semester of the 2021/2022 school year. The data obtained through quantitative research were analyzed in the SPSS package, using descriptive statistics and average comparison analysis.

The obtained results showed that preschool teachers mostly agree (87%) that the application of the holistic approach during the early development of children contributes to the well-being of all children - in the category of complete agreement the percentage of the responses is 49% and partial agreement 38%.

When it comes to individual actions (*supporting, expanding, modeling, encouraging children’s initiative, consulting*), the obtained results show that preschool teachers in their direct educational work most often use *supporting* (in the categories *always* and *often* 94.74%), followed by *encouraging children’s initiative* (in the categories *always* and *often* 93.86%), *expanding* through communication and actions (in the categories *always* and *often* 92.99%), and to a slightly lesser extent *consulting* (in the categories *always* and *often* 92.10%) and *modeling* (in the categories *always* and *often* 91.67%).

The results also show that preschool teachers evaluate *modeling* and *expanding* as the most important, and *consulting* and *encouraging children’s initiative* as the least important procedures based on the holistic approach in direct work with children.

The starting hypothesis has been confirmed. It was conceived on the assumption that preschool teachers believe that they possess appropriate knowledge, skills, and value attitudes as well as motivation for the application of holistic learning in early development, but that there is a pronounced need for further professional development, especially in the field of application of knowledge about the holistic approach in everyday educational work. A relatively high level of self-criticism and awareness of preschool teachers about the need for professional and continuous development can be observed.

Bearing in mind that high-quality preschool programs play a key role in forming the foundation necessary for lifelong learning by supporting the development of all the individual’s

potential and their readiness for a productive personal and social life with the goal of achieving the continuity of human culture and social progress, it is essential to further improve the initial education of preschool teachers, their professional development and advancement. We believe that the obtained findings can be a starting point and motivation for further and more comprehensive research in this complex and very important area.

Keywords: holistic approach, educational practice, preschool children, preschool teachers, Foundations of the Preschool Education Program – Years of Ascent

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