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The Basics of Preschool Pedagogy with Methodology

Jesuit Publishing House WAM, Krakow 2011, 392 pages

A reform of educational system, that was enacted in 1999, introduced a number of changes in the functioning of the Polish education. Initially, the reform mainly referred to the transformation from a two-level system of education to a three-level structure.

It also referred to preschool education, emphasising the compulsory one-year preschool foundation for every 6-year-old child. An amendment introduced in 2009 again influenced pre-school education. The lowering of the school-age resulted in several changes in the organisation and functioning of kindergartens and nurseries. Pre-school education teachers now find themselves in a new situation, which may create some difficulties, concerns and questions. Numerous publications on preschool pedagogy may be helpful for the teacher's continual professional development. One of these publications is the book entitled *The Basics of Preschool Pedagogy with Methodology*. Why is it worth reading a book relating to this subject matter?

The book has been written by professionals, people who have direct contact with children, teachers and kindergarten student teachers. Professor J. Karbowniczek is a pedagogue specializing in early childhood education. M. Kwaśniewska, PhD is *inter alia* an author of educational programmes and books for children. While B. Surma, PhD specialises in the pedagogy of M. Montessori. Through their publication, the authors have joined in "the discussion about contemporary problems of preschool education. They have attempted to present their theoretical and methodical point of view on not only recent achievements. but also on the present challenges in this field." (see p. 7).

The launched publication has a synthetic character. However, it contains a compendium of knowledge concerning preschool pedagogy that is much needed for students and teachers. The authors have aptly combined historical knowledge with the contemporary period, presenting changes in upbringing, education and preschool pedagogy teaching programmes. While reading the publication, we can familiarise ourselves with the views and concepts concerning child upbringing of such distinguished figures, such as Plato, Aristotle, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Mikołaj Rej, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and John Dewey. The contemporary representatives of preschool pedagogy have also been mentioned along with their interests and the type of research they are involved in. J. Karbowiczek has undertaken a difficult task to familiarise the reader with the most important events directly or indirectly connected with the upbringing and education of kindergarten-age children (see p. 60). Although the historical dates, which are presented in the chronological order, will definitely not exhaust the discussed subject, they provide general knowledge as well as an opportunity to think about and form personal thoughts and opinions concerning changes in preschool education. The tendencies in preschool education programmes have also been presented from the historical point of view.

Apart from the historical facts, readers may be interested to learn more about the present state of pre-school education in Poland. According to M. Kwaśniewska, we can observe paradigmatic transformations that general pedagogy in Poland is currently undergoing. These transformations refer to the change from the technological orientation to the humanistic alternative, which is also reflected in preschool pedagogy. This peculiar bi-paradigm of preschool pedagogy may become its new integral value leading to educational pluralism. Pluralism, on the other hand, assumes "consent for the variety of theoretical approaches and subsequent various practical applications of the educational process." (p. 104).

The section prepared by B. Surma complements the historical and contemporary knowledge of pre-school education. Parents interested in their children's education will find here information concerning the division of preschool institutions as well as the way in which space should

be organised in these institutions. From these book sections, they will familiarise themselves with a kindergarten's functions, the various ways in which they can be applied, as well as the appearance of the classroom, cloakroom, sanitary rooms, garden and the kindergarten building (p. 189–214). Parents will also find synthetic information concerning M. Montessori preschool education institutions. A parent acquainted with this kind of knowledge will be able to make a more conscious choice concerning the future kindergarten for their child. While a teacher, owing to the sections by B. Surma will find them useful when composing general kindergarten daily schedules. The author notices, however, that the exact daily schedule depends on the opening hours of a kindergarten or another form of preschool education institution, as well as on homogeneous-age group division or mixed-age groups (p. 205).

The greatest strength of the book is the methodology that it employs. The authors have professionally and competently combined theoretical knowledge with its practical application, which is essential for an inexperienced teacher today. The methodology of preschool education can be found in the following sections of the book:

- *Teaching Methods* – the authors have not only contained the description of their various typologies but have also characterised chosen activating methods applied in kindergartens. They have provided a compendium of knowledge relating to innovative methods, which can be applied by teachers in the course of preschool education.
- *Teachers' Pre-school Education Programmes* – it contains a description of the requirements that such a programme should fulfil, as well as its planning procedure. The programmes awarded and distinguished by MEN (Polish National Ministry of Education) in "The Best Preschool Education Programme" contest have been mentioned. They may be an inspiration for teachers' individual work.
- *The Structure of Monthly Plans of the Educational Process* – it contains information concerning the criteria, contents and the structural requirements a correctly constructed plan has to fulfil.

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- *Activity Schedule Constructing* – it presents detailed information that will be useful for students, containing the description of the planning procedure stages as well as the model structure of the activity schedule.
 - *Methods and Diagnostic Tools* – this section of the publication contains a table presenting a classification of techniques and research tools that can be used in the assessment of kindergarten-age children's development. It also contains the diagnostic tools that can be used to assess the current stage of child development and to determine the course of the kindergarten adaptation process, as well as for the school readiness tests.

The language used by the authors is clear and comprehensive, and will be suitable for a wide range of readers. The contents of the book were determined by the requirements of academic teaching, therefore one may have the impression that the book was aimed mainly at students. However, I believe it may be useful for kindergarten teachers as well as parents of kindergarten-age children. The authors themselves hope "the book would help students and teachers working with kindergarten-age children by applying the authors' inspirations in their teaching practice" (p. 392).

The Basics of Preschool Pedagogy with Methodology is a publication that is synthetic in its character, and contains the main issues within the discussed subject matter. The authors describe the issues contained in the seven chapters of the book in a matter-of-fact and, at the same time, concise way. The reader will not be disappointed. Precise and relevant advice, numerous footnotes as well as a rich bibliography will allow the reader to gain further insight into the discussed matters. They can also become the basis for individual research and independent analysis of issues that will be interesting for the reading public.