

Eco Programme as Factor of Socio-emotional Development of Preschoolers

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KLJUČNE BESEDE: ekološki program, socialno-čustveni razvoj, ekološko-humanistične vrednote, predšolski otroci, vzgojitelj

POVZETEK – Izobraževanje za trajnostno družbo bi moralo mladim generacijam omogočiti, da v naslednjih desetletjih razvijejo vrednote, pridobijo znanja in veščine za reševanje okoljskih in družbenih izzivov. Namen te raziskave je bil preučiti, kako sodobni okoljski programi vplivajo na socialno-čustveni razvoj predšolskih otrok, in ugotoviti, koliko ti programi prispevajo k dojemljivosti predšolskih otrok za razumevanje vrednot trajnostne skupnosti. Članek preučuje vlogo vzgojiteljev in njihovih kompetenc pri uresničevanju in uvajanju sodobnih ekoloških in humanističnih konceptov v delo predšolskih zavodov. Pridobljeni rezultati kažejo, da med otroki, ki so obiskovali različne programe, obstajajo razlike v doseganju okoljskih in humanističnih vrednot in vrednot trajnostne skupnosti. Na ravni socialno-čustvenega razvoja ni bila potrjena statistična razlika med različnimi skupinami otrok. Rezultati nadalje kažejo, da je dober učni načrt nujen, vendar ni zadosten pogoj za spodbujanje socialno-čustvenega razvoja predšolskih otrok.

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ABSTRACT – Education for sustainable society should enable young generations to acquire knowledge and skills, and to develop values for solving environmental and social challenges in the coming decades. The aim of the research was to examine the influence of modern ecological programmes on the socio-emotional development of preschool children and determine their contribution to the sensitization of preschoolers to understand the values of a sustainable community. The paper also examines the role of educators and their competences for the realization and introduction of modern ecological-humanistic concepts in the work of preschool institutions. The obtained results suggest that there are differences in the achieved level of adoption of ecological and humanistic values, and values of a sustainable community, among children who have attended different educational programmes. At the level of socio-emotional development, statistical significance was not confirmed between different groups of children. The results further suggest that a good-quality curriculum is a necessary but insufficient condition to encourage socio-emotional development in preschoolers.

1 Introduction

Modern societies rest on communities that owe their existence to a thoughtful attitude towards a variety of current and future resources. Therefore, developing “green” educational institutions has become the moral imperative of the 21st century (Klemenović & Marić Jurišin, 2012). It is believed that the ecological-humanistic paradigm itself carries a blend of society, individual and nature, as well as well-being for all of them. In this context, ecology is not merely a science about the co-existence of plant and animal species and their preservation, nor about the problems of degradation and exhaustion of various planetary resources and finding renewable energy sources or recycling, but it rather represents a concept of living (Potočnik & Hus, 2015). Environ-

mental education is defined as the process that provides the development of environmental awareness in all sections of the society (Gündüz & Erdoğan, 2018).

Preschool institutions and schools are automatically assigned the role of institutions that represent and advocate the moral “voice” of society. Kemp (2005) suggests that nowadays educational system should be considered a failure if the moral voice is not the voice of a citizen of the world. With this stance, Kemp highlights two important points:

- the moral dimension of sustainable development, and
- the invaluable role of upbringing and education in early childhood in the development of global citizenship (Johansson, 2009).

Education that paves the way towards sustainability needs to be based on the following principles and values: integration unity, gender equality, social tolerance, poverty reduction, environmental protection, restoration and conservation of natural resources, and “peaceful society” (UNESCO, 2006).

Preschool childhood is considered a critical period for awakening sensitivity and intuitive connection with the world of nature, and the preschool institution as the first stage of educational system in the society is called to provide working with children based on the general experience of nature and awakening of emotional sensitivity (Markuš & Čagran, 2017). Contemporary preschool institution finds its foundations in contextual learning, social constructivism and ecological-humanistic paradigm. Constructivism places the child in its centre as an active creator and thinker in the learning process, without neglecting the role of the adult/educator. The educator is there to provide support and create an incentive environment for the work and progress of children. The concept of sustainable development assumes a holistic approach in which the individual, his world and relationship towards nature are inseparable and form a unique whole (Hägglund & Samuelsson, 2009; Pearson & Degotaridi, 2009). Hence, there is the need for a humanistic-holistic approach as a strategic priority for the development of ecologically sustainable community.

It is the socio-emotional development which is the most deserving component in adopting prominent human values and acting in accordance with them. “This is an intense period of developing and adopting social values and fundamental moral norms; understanding the world and the our place in it; finding the objective place in social relations; aligning one’s own desires and needs with the desires and needs of others; developing the ability to interact with others; developing the ability to integrate personal goals into group goals; developing trust and confidence in oneself and others; developing awareness of belonging to our culture and tradition, but also of connection with the culture and tradition of other nations; developing the concept and sense for justice; developing emotional stability, empathy, respect and love for all living beings; understanding the human influence on the environment and assuming responsibility for it; understanding the importance of “health” of the planet for all people; building personal attitude towards nature ...” (Kamenov, 2007, p. 92). Facilitating the development of these skills, knowledge and abilities requires engaging the authentic individual life forces of each child (watching, listening, smelling, sensing, observing, thinking, remembering, curiosity, desire, imagination, love). This means that during the process of learning at preschool age, the eyes should be enabled to see, the brain to think, the heart to feel, the ears to listen, fingers to sense, touch (Slatina, 2005 according

Kostović & Marić Jurišin, 2011). Among the most important characteristics of socio-emotional development, from the perspective of sustainable community, the following stands out: relationship with peers, relationship with adults, rules, cultural awareness, play, communication, emotional awareness, self-management, social awareness and socio-emotional balance (Goleman, 2008; Petrović, 2006; Brajša-Žganec & Slunjski, 2007; Slunjski, 2012). An appropriate socio-emotional development requires knowing and understanding the norms, rules and values of the community from which the child originates and in which he/she lives, as well as mastering the skills necessary for effective interaction within the given community. A socially competent child can use incentives received from his/her milieu as well as his/her own personal incentives, and achieve good developmental results that enable satisfactory and competent participation in the community to which the child belongs to (Brajša-Žganec, 2003). Furthermore, the child's emotional competence is considered to be essential for successful interpersonal relationships with peers (Petrović, 2006). Emotions as a result of social experiences received from the environment motivate cognitive processes and behaviours, and regulate physiological, cognitive and behavioural aspects of behaviour of individuals in the community (Brajša-Žganec, 2003).

In order to encourage the ecological way of thinking and acting, in recent years, an increasing number of ecologically-oriented programmes has been implemented in educational practice (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2014; Ardoin et al., 2018). Given that "returning" to humanization certainly does not mean the renunciation of individuality, but only individual's inclination to change the notion of the self, emphasizing the significance of such programmes for the development of both the entire society and the individual (De Groot & Steg, 2009; Kaiser & Byrka, 2011), it would be important to examine whether there are differences in the level of socio-emotional development among children of preschool age who attended ecological kindergartens, children included in ecological-humanistic programs and children who attended regular preschool programmes.

There are a number of environmentally oriented programmes in the world (Earth Child: Games, Stories, Activities, Experiments and Ideas About Living Lightly on Planet Earth in the United States; Education for the protection of the environment of Nordic countries, Finland; National Strategy of Environmental Education in the Russian Federation, the programme of humanistic and ecological education of preschoolers called "We are earthlings", Russia; programme of ecological education in kindergarten about national parks "Rila" and "Central Balkan", Bulgaria) (Marić Jurišin, 2015). The programme that emerged in some kindergartens in Serbia is the ecological-humanistic programme created by Veresov "We are earthlings". It is intended for the ecological upbringing and education of preschool children aged 5 to 7 years, and is based on a holistic approach to the world, the educational philosophy of "cultivation", method of "meaningful dialogue" and modern humanistic psychology (Klemenović, 2009). This programme emphasizes that before children are asked to learn about nature in order to prepare to become her guardians, they need to be able to develop love for their own home, planet Earth. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to provide children in kindergartens with a complete picture of the world in which they live, instead of teaching them how certain natural phenomena look (Veresov, 2002 according to Marić Jurišin, 2015).

2 Method

Aim and hypothesis

Based on the above stated facts, the goal of this research is to examine the influence of contemporary ecological programmes on the socio-emotional development of preschool children and determine their contribution to making preschoolers sensitive to understanding the values of a sustainable community (taking responsibility, empathy, care, tolerance, belonging) and acting in accordance with them. The framework of the research problem and goal, based on the concepts of biophilia and ecophilia, specifically imposed the question of the role of educators and their competences in the realization and introduction of modern (ecological-humanistic) concepts in the work of preschool institutions, aimed at empowering a sustainable community (Marić Jurišin, 2015). Children have innate affinities and genetic predispositions to explore and develop love for nature (biophilia) and the environment. A new ecological culture of a holistic, all-encompassing moral view of the world is born from love (ecophilia). In order to develop this innate affinity in children, it is necessary to meet a series of conditions, which is the responsibility of pedagogues (White & Stoecklin, 2008). The basic hypothesis of the research is that there are differences in the achieved level of socio-emotional development between children who were included in educational activities created within the ecology programme “We are earthlings” and their peers who attended regular preschool programmes and children who were included in educational programmes of ecological kindergartens.

Sample and instruments

Starting from the set goal, the research was carried out on a deliberate sample of 190 children attending preparatory preschool programme (so-called preparatory groups; 5.5/6.5 years old) of preschool age (N = 190), from six preschool groups (Table 1). This is an ex-post-facto study in which two groups were control groups, i.e. groups that worked according to the regular preschool programme provided in the Republic of Serbia, while the other four groups were experimental, i.e. groups that were already influenced by the ecological factor (two groups attended an ecological kindergarten and two worked based on the humanitarian-ecological programme “We are earthlings”). All children attend the public preschool institution “Radosno detinjstvo” in Novi Sad, Serbia. The total sample in the first and the second group consisted of 64 children each, while the third group included 62 children.

Ten educators working in these kindergartens also participated in the research: four from the first group, two from the second group and four from the third group. In groups where both educators participated, educators were asked to jointly fill the descriptive scale of assessment of socio-emotional development and jointly realize this activity in order to obtain the most reliable results.

The methods of collecting research data in the empirical part of the research included surveying, scaling and systematic observation. Since the field of pedagogy lacks

any standardized instruments for measuring socio-emotional development which would suit the needs of this research, the following instruments were constructed for this purpose: descriptive scale of assessment of socio-emotional development of children for educators, ecological story for children and educators, and protocol for the observation of children's reactions during the focused thematic activity.

Table 1. Research sample

Subsamples		Children	Gender		Educators
			Male	Female	
Group 1	Children covered by upbringing / educational activities created within the ecological programme "We are earthlings"	64	32	32	4
Group 2	Children included in the upbringing / educational programme of ecological kindergartens	64	32	32	2
Group 3	Children attending regular preschool programme	62	24	38	4
Σ		190	88	102	10

The descriptive scale of assessment of children's socio-emotional development consists of ten variables across five modalities with a growing frequency of positive responses, of which six variables relate to the social (relationship with peers, relationship with adults, rules, play, cultural awareness and communication) and four to the child's emotional development (emotional awareness, self-management, social awareness, social and emotional balance). This scale was developed on the basis of the scale used in the PIPS test for educators – PIPS Baseline on Entry Assessment for use in the Netherlands – Performance Indicators in Primary Schools. The test was constructed by the CEM Centre at the University of Durham, England (Marić Jurišin, 2015). Analyzing the reliability of the constructed scale, a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.924 was obtained, which implies a high degree of reliability.

The ecological story "Laza and the Gray Smoke" for children and educators was also designed for the purpose of this research in order to gain insight in the level of development of ecological and humanistic values in children, i.e. sensitivity for understanding the values of a sustainable community (taking responsibility, empathy, care, tolerance, belonging) and acting in accordance with them. While involving cognitive, emotional and behavioral spheres, i.e. integrating various activities, literature is an inspiring stimulus, which may contribute to shaping an individual who is conscious of and responsible for the natural environment both in personal and social dimensions (Papuzińska, 2007, Ungeheuer-Gołab, 2009). The story was conceived based on similar stories used in working with children of early ages (*Earth Child*, Sheehan and Waidner; *Living and Learning Rights*, Maleš, Milanović and Stričević; *Learning to Live Together in Peace from Early Childhood*, World Association of Early Childhood Education AMEI – WAECE according to Marić Jurišin, 2015).

The protocol of observing children's responses and reactions to the story, as well as the questions and activities arising in the process of storytelling, emerged in line with the ecological story. The teacher read the story to children; after that, they were placed in a problem situation during which the teacher was asking them the prepared questions, which gradually led to the essential question, i.e. "Why is it important to preserve our planet?" Then, children presented their solutions of the problem through productive drawing activities. Their responses were recorded and classified into nine observed categories:

- While answering and commenting, children confirmed that they acquired the knowledge about environmental protection;
- They were aware of what could be done about this issue, and they made suggestions and offered possible constructive solutions (critical thinking);
- They displayed positive emotions and feelings regarding nature protection;
- They needed assistance while explaining and describing what was required of them;
- The children had the opportunity to talk about this topic with their parents as well;
- In productive activities (drawing), they confirmed that they understood the message of the story;
- In productive activities (drawing), they expressed a sense of care towards nature;
- The children understood that the world consists of a series of relationships between humans and nature;
- The children understood the message that the planet Earth is our only home – they accepted the responsibility, and expressed affection and empathy).

3 Results

Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between groups at the overall level of socio-emotional development of preschool children ($F = 9.275$; $p = 0.000$).

Table 2. Statistically significant differences in the level of socio-emotional development

<i>Socio-emotional development</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Among groups	1196.23	2	598.11	9.27	0.000
Within groups	12058.94	187	64.48		
Σ	13255.17	189			

A statistically significant difference was found between the first and the second group of children ($p = 0.013$), and the first and the third group of children ($p = 0.000$) (Table 2.1), while there was no significant difference between the second and the third group ($p = 0.076$).

Table 2.1. Statistically significant difference in the level of socio-emotional development among groups

Group (I)	Group (J)	Difference between the AM pairs of groups (I-J)	Standard error	p
1	2	-3.57*	1.41	0.013
	3	-6.12*	1.43	0.000
2	1	3.57*	1.41	0.013
	3	-2.55	1.43	0.076
3	1	6.12*	1.43	0.000
	2	2.55	1.43	0.076

At the level of overall socio-emotional development, children of the third group received the highest scores from their educators, that is children attending kindergarten that lacks ecological status and ecological programme as well (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2. Arithmetic means in the component of Socio-emotional development

Group	AM	N	SD
1	35.98	64	9.58
2	39.56	64	8.09
3	42.11	62	5.92
Σ	39.18	190	8.37

By monitoring the educator's elaboration of the ecological story with the children, the researcher recorded and classified the children's responses. By analyzing the collected data, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference among the three groups of children (Table 3)

Table 3. Statistically significant difference in the component of Ecological value

Sum	Sum of squares	df	Variance	F	p
Among groups	44.33	2	22.16	66.50	0.003
Within groups	1.00	3	0.33		
Σ	45.33	5			

Table 3.1. Statistically significant difference among groups in the component of Ecological value

<i>Group (I)</i>	<i>Group (J)</i>	<i>Difference between pairs (I-J)</i>	<i>Standard error</i>	<i>p</i>
1	2	4.50*	0.57	0.004
	3	6.50*	0.57	0.002
2	1	-4.50*	0.57	0.004
	3	2.00*	0.57	0.041
3	1	-6.50*	0.57	0.002
	2	-2.00*	0.57	0.041

Based on Table 3.1., it can be concluded that a statistically significant difference exists between all groups in the following frequency: between the first and the second group ($p = 0.004$), the first and the third group ($p = 0.002$); and the second and the third group ($p = 0.041$). In contrast to the previously analyzed aspects of socio-emotional development, the children from the first group have the highest scores, $AM = 33.00$, followed by the children from the second group, $AM = 28.50$, and finally the children from the third group, $AM = 26.50$ (Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Arithmetic means within the component of Ecological-Humanistic Values

<i>Group</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
1	33.00	2	0.00
2	28.50	2	0.70
3	26.50	2	0.70
Σ	29.33	6	3.01

In an attempt to synthesize the results obtained on the scale of socio-emotional development and the scores of observed behaviours, which represent the values of a sustainable community, it can be concluded that no correlation between the scores on the scale of socio-emotional development and the observed behaviours were shown to be statistically significant (Table 4). In addition to the correlations between the overall socio-emotional development and the scores on observed individual behaviours (Table 4), the study also analyzed the correlation of this construct with the sum of average scores on all observed behaviours taken together, whose descriptive characteristics are shown in Table 4.1. Pearson's coefficient of correlation between these two constructs was not proved statistically significant, $r = 0.85$, $p > 0.05$.

Table 4. Correlations on the scale of socio-emotional development (SED) and scores on observed behaviour (OB)

	<i>SED</i>	<i>OB1</i>	<i>OB2</i>	<i>OB3</i>	<i>OB4</i>	<i>OB5</i>	<i>OB6</i>	<i>OB7</i>	<i>OB8</i>	<i>OB9</i>
<i>SED</i>	1									
<i>OB1</i>	-0.92	1								
<i>OB2</i>	0.38	0.00	1							
<i>OB3</i>	-0.92	0.99**	0.00	1						
<i>OB4</i>	0.60	-0.86	-0.50	-0.86	1					
<i>OB5</i>	-0.93	0.72	-0.69	0.72	-0.27	1				
<i>OB6</i>	-0.12	0.50	0.86	0.50	-0.86	-0.24	1			
<i>OB7</i>	-0.60	0.86	0.50	0.86	-0.99**	0.27	0.86	1		
<i>OB8</i>	-0.83	0.98	0.18	0.98	-0.94	0.57	0.65	0.94	1	
<i>OB9</i>	-0.60	0.86	0.50	0.86	-0.99**	0.27	0.86	0.99**	0.94	1

Remarks: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4.1. Descriptive indicators of summarized scores of observed behaviours and socio-emotional development

	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
OB	3.92	4.21	4.03	0.16
SED	2.94	3.72	3.29	0.39

Analyzing the first matrix (socio-emotional development), the highest scores were achieved by the children from the third group, while in the analysis of the second matrix (values of sustainable community), the situation is different, and the highest scores were achieved by the first group of children. We think that the key role in achieving this result was played by the intervening variable – the educator.

The next item that was analyzed on the overall level of socio-emotional development was the scoring of educators.

Table 4.2. Statistically significant difference in the scoring of educators at the level of Socio-emotional development

<i>Educators</i>		<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Socio-emotional development	Among groups	2135.65	5	427.13	7.06	0.000
	Within groups	11119.52	184	60.43		
	Total	13255.17	189			

Table 4.3. Distribution of statistically significant difference among educators

Analyzed components	Educator (I)	Educator (J)	Differences between AM in pairs of groups (I-J)	Standard error	p
Socio-emotional development	1	2	-0.86	1.97	0.661
		3	-0.07	1.88	0.967
		4	-7.55*	1.84	0.000
		5	-5.70*	1.89	0.003
		6	-7.21*	1.86	0.000
	2	1	0.86	1.97	0.661
		3	0.79	2.06	0.703
		4	-6.68*	2.03	0.001
		5	-4.83*	2.08	0.021
		6	-6.34*	2.05	0.002
	3	1	0.078	1.88	0.967
		2	-0.79	2.06	0.703
		4	-7.47*	1.94	0.000
		5	-5.62*	1.99	0.005
		6	-7.13*	1.95	0.000
	4	1	7.55*	1.84	0.000
		2	6.68*	2.03	0.001
		3	7.47*	1.94	0.000
		5	1.84	1.96	0.347
		6	0.33	1.92	0.861
	5	1	5.70*	1.89	0.003
		2	4.83*	2.08	0.021
		3	5.62*	1.99	0.005
		4	-1.84	1.96	0.347
		6	-1.51	1.97	0.446
	6	1	7.21*	1.86	0.000
		2	6.34*	2.05	0.002
		3	7.13*	1.95	0.000
		4	-0.33	1.92	0.861
		5	1.51	1.97	0.446

Table 4.2. provides evidence of the fact that there is a statistically significant difference in the overall level of socio-emotional development ($F = 7.06$; $p = 0.000$), while Table 4.3 indicates the distribution of this difference among educators. A statistically significant difference exists between the first and the fourth educator ($p = 0.000$), the

first and the fifth educator ($p = 0.003$), and the first and the sixth educator ($p = 0.000$); between the second and the fourth educator ($p = 0.001$), the second and the fifth educator ($p = 0.021$), and the second and the sixth educator ($p = 0.002$); between the third and the fourth educator ($p = 0.000$), the third and the fifth educator ($p = 0.005$), and the third and the sixth educator ($p = 0.000$), and vice versa. There is no statistically significant difference between the first, the second and the third educator, as well as between the fourth, the fifth and the sixth educator. This confirms that the individual results are in a coherent relationship with the overall result. In particular, this means that the children from non-ecological kindergartens achieved the highest level of socio-emotional development, followed by the children from kindergartens with ecological status and, finally, the children from kindergartens that implemented ecological-humanistic programme. The obtained results can also be considered in the following way. Sorting kindergartens by grading their awareness in the ecological-humanistic aspect, from the first group consisting of children attending the programme “We are earthlings”, then, the second group consisting of the children from the kindergarten with ecological status and finally the third group of children attending regular kindergarten that lacks ecological status, proportionally opposite results would be obtained, i.e. the highest scores would be mostly achieved by the children from the third group, followed by the children from the second and finally those from the first group. These results can potentially be attributed to the abilities and awareness of educators, that is, the higher their awareness of the ecology of human development, the more they themselves are critical, but their sensitivity to working with children is also important, as well as the ability to create an incentive socio-emotional climate in the group (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Arithmetical means by educators

<i>Socio-emotional development</i>	<i>Educator 1</i>	<i>Educator 2</i>	<i>Educator 3</i>	<i>Educator 4</i>	<i>Educator 5</i>	<i>Educator 6</i>	<i>Total</i>
AM	35.63	36.50	35.70	43.18	41.33	42.84	39.18
N	38	26	31	33	30	32	190
SD	9.39	10.02	8.05	6.34	4.32	7.10	8.37

4 Discussion

Studying the issue of the implication of ecological programmes, which are based on the values of a sustainable community, on the socio-emotional development of pre-school children is aimed at determining the presence or absence of certain value concepts in all participants in this process, and their role and significance as well. In other words, whether and to what extent ecological programmes influence the development of values of a sustainable community in children? The research was primarily aimed at monitoring possible deviations in the various dimensions of social and emotional development among the children who attended preparatory groups within the same preschool institution in which educational work is organized according to the instructions of the

ecological-humanistic programme “We are earthlings”, ecological kindergartens, and according to the general guidelines of a regular programme document.

The obtained results point to the existence of a difference in the achieved levels of adoption of ecological and humanistic values and values of a sustainable community between the children that were included in educational activities created based on the ecological and humanistic programme “We are earthlings” and their peers who attended regular preschool programmes, and children included in educational programmes of ecological kindergartens. As expected, the difference was in favour of the first group of children who attended the programme “We are earthlings”.

By analyzing the overall level of socio-emotional development, a statistically significant difference was found in favour of a group of children who attended a regular preschool programme, but it was not confirmed in the correlation which included the aspect of development (i.e. ecological-humanistic values). That is, at the joint level of socio-emotional and development, the statistical significance of the observed advantage of this group of children in relation to their peers was not confirmed. This result was not expected, but it just pointed out the importance and the role of educators in the upbringing/educational process.

The results of this paper further suggest that a valid curriculum is a necessary but insufficient condition for fostering socio-emotional development in preschool children, which is equivalent to the fact that a competent educator is also a necessary but insufficient condition for achieving the same goal. It is evident that the upbringing and education influences are directly dependent on the educators’ willingness and motivation to be professionally trained, and the bearers of change, in addition to a valid (ecological-humanistic) programme. Namely, educational institutions operating in sustainable communities count on the synergy of various factors and influences. The quality of programmes is valued parallel to the competence of educators enabled to act on a daily basis in accordance with the educational philosophy that emerges from the system of values of a sustainable community. In practice, even the “best” theory depends on the educator’s competence, the way he/she understands and perceives it, and then modifies and applies in practice. The educator’s value orientations fall into basic predictors, directly affecting their work and success in achieving high-quality upbringing and educational practice.

It can be concluded that a well-founded ecological-humanistic programme has a significant role in the realization of new educational paradigm aimed at developing a sustainable community. The prerequisite for introducing such programmes is a continuous and updated work with future educators and other professionals who prepare for working with children of preschool age, but also with practitioners in educational institutions of all levels whose professional development needs to be facilitated, bearing in mind that true changes need time. In line with the above, the first step on the path towards a sustainable community is the adoption of mutually harmonized laws, regulations and strategies at the national and local level that would be in line with the current legislation of countries that are successfully coping with this issue, and taking the responsibility and initiative for introducing true changes in the spirit of a sustainable community that needs vision, perseverance and continuity.

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Ekološki program kot dejavnik socialno-čustvenega razvoja predšolskih otrok

Paradigma okoljskega izobraževanja in vzgoje se kaže kot mehanizem za oblikovanje in razvoj ekološke kulture. Njena temeljna načela so prizadevati si za razumevanje celovitosti in enotnosti sveta, za odgovornost človeka za usodo Zemlje in vzpostavitev dialoga med človekom in naravo. Vzgoja za zeleno, trajnostno družbo se je razvijala s pomočjo izobraževanja za varstvo narave, izobraževanja za varstvo okolja, izobraževanja za trajnostni razvoj in izobraževanja za trajnostno družbo. Trajnostna družba bi si morala že po svoji naravi prizadevati za tak napredek, ki ne bi nadalje škodoval naravnim in človeškim virom. Simbolično predstavlja obdobje, v katerem je družba dozorela in sprejela, da bo postala trajnostna. Govorimo o izobraževanju, v katerem lahko vsak posameznik pridobi znanje, razvije veščine in potrebna stališča ter vrednote, da lahko sooblikuje trajnostno prihodnost. Tako zasnovano izobraževanje izvira iz humanistične paradigme, saj prav humanistični pristop temelji na ideji, da sta človek in svet en sistem. Gre za sistem, ki hkrati vključuje tako okolje kot človeka in v katerem so bistveni odnosi ter povezave med njima, ne pa človek in okolje kot sestavna dela sistema.

Pomen izobraževanja za razvoj trajnostne družbe je bil v središču že v okviru svetovnega vrha Organizacije združenih narodov leta 2005. Poudarili so, da je treba vzgojo za trajnostno družbo pospešeno razvijati že v zgodnji mladosti. Glede na to, da predšolska vzgoja in izobraževanje predstavljata prvo stopnjo izobraževalnega sistema posamezne družbe, je razumljivo, da je treba že na tej stopnji storiti prve korake za vseživljenjsko učenje in trajnostni razvoj družbe. Predpogoj za to so učni načrti in programi, ki morajo zagotavljati tudi intelektualni in socialni razvoj otrok. Praksa je pokazala, da učni načrti, ki razvijajo zgolj kognitivne in intelektualne potenciale otrok, nimajo trajne vrednosti. Trajnost zagotavlja ravno socialno-čustvena komponenta, ki pri otrocih vpliva na usvajanje vrednot in oblikovanje stališč ter nato na razvoj samodiscipline, etike in morale. Če bo otrok že v najzgodnejšem obdobju deležen vzgoje za trajnostno družbo, lahko upravičeno pričakujemo, da bo zrasel v osebo, ki se bo znala soočiti s kompleksnimi in resnimi življenjskimi resnicami in se prilagoditi spremembam ter tranzitnim procesom sodobne družbe.

Izobraževanje bi moralo ljudi opolnomočiti in jim omogočiti, da sprejmejo in razvijajo vrednote in veščine, s katerimi bodo znali kritično razmišljati o resničnosti in sprejemati prave odločitve o miru, socialni enakosti in pravičnosti. Izobraževanje tako pomaga tistim, ki so izkoriščani, da znajo braniti svoje interese in tako ustvarjati boljšo družbo. Če želimo, da bo izobraževanje pot do trajnostne družbe, mora nujno upoštevati naslednja načela in vrednote: integracijsko enotnost, enakost spolov, socialno strpnost, zmanjšanje revščine, varstvo okolja, obnovo in ohranjanje naravnih virov in "miroljubno" družbo.

Članek izhaja iz spoznanja, da so v vzgoji in izobraževanju nujno potrebne spremembe na ekološkem področju, zato preučuje vpliv sodobnih predšolskih programov, katerih značilnost so vrednote trajnostne skupnosti, na socialno-čustveni razvoj predšolskih otrok. Ta vidik razvoja je izpostavljen zato, ker je izjemno pomemben za razvoj

vrednostnega sistema in oblikovanje vrednostne matrice. Pri tem načinu razvoja gre za prenos kulturnih vrednot skozi družbeno-generacijski vidik vzgoje. Tako usvojene vrednote prispevajo k uveljavljanju trajnostne skupnosti in trajnostne družbe. Vse, kar se otrok v zgodnjem otroštvu nauči ali naredi, sproži in obarva neko čustvo, čustva so torej gonilna sila vsake aktivnosti, končni rezultat pa je odvisen od njih. Pri trajnostni vzgoji zato ni pomembno le to, kaj se bo otrok naučil in usvojil na kognitivni ravni, temveč tudi, kako se bo počutil in kakšne vrednote bo v družbenih interakcijah pridobil. Tu se porajata filozofski vprašanji, ki sprašujeta, na kakšni vrednostni matrici je sploh zasnovan naš vzgojno-izobraževalni sistem in katere vrednote želi prenesti na mlajše generacije.

Na svetu obstaja veliko okolju prijaznih programov, za katere so značilne vrednote trajnostne skupnosti, kot so prevzemanje odgovornosti, empatija, skrb, strpnost, priпадnost, pravičnost, spoštovanje, poštenost, človečnost, morala, etika ... Taki projekti so npr.: *Earth Child: Games, Stories, Activities, Experiments and Ideas About Living Lightly on Planet Earth* v Združenih državah Amerike; vzgoja za zaščito okolja nordijskih držav (Finska); nacionalna strategija ekološkega izobraževanja v Ruski federaciji, predšolski humanistični in ekološki izobraževalni program *Mi smo Zemljani* (Rusija); program ekološke vzgoje v vrtcu o nacionalnih parkih Rila in Srednji Balkan (Bolgarija) ...

Projekt, ki je zaživel tudi v nekaterih vrtcih v Srbiji, je ekološko-humanistični program *Nikolaja Nikolajeviča Veresova Mi smo Zemljani*. Poseben je zato, ker izhaja iz spoznanj razvojne psihologije. Gre za program ekološke vzgoje in oblikovanja osebnih spoznanj kot osnove ekološke zavesti, namenjen pa je otrokom, starim od 5 do 7 let. Celotna teza izhaja iz filozofske zasnove vzgoje in izobraževanja kot procesa kultivacije, ki v kulturo vključuje osebnost. Ne prinaša samo novih znanj, ampak sooblikuje tudi sistem osebnih lastnosti, na katerih temelji ekološka zavest. V središču programa je teza o humanističnem pristopu k ekologiji, ki izhaja iz ideje, da sta svet in človek elementa istega sistema tako, da ta sistem vključuje človeka in okolje, ni pa sestavljen iz njiju, temveč iz odnosov. Če želimo, da otrok uspešno obvlada ta sistem, ga mora najprej odkriti. Veresov meni, da je odnos do sveta odvisen od stališč, ki jih oblikujemo in pridobimo v otroštvu. Zagovarja tudi mnenje, da je človeška zavest del sveta pomenov, svet pomenov pa je kultura. Skozi odnose med osebnostjo in kulturo se oblikujejo stališča in sistemi osebnih spoznanj.

Poleg programov smo analizirali tudi vlogo in pomen vzgojiteljev pri izvajanju in uresničevanju sodobnih ekološko-humanističnih konceptov dela s predšolskimi otroki. Ne glede na to, da so programske aktivnosti ali sredstva, s katerimi se izvajajo, pomembni, je oseba, ki je posrednik med okoljem (programom) in otrokom, vsekakor najodločilnejši faktor pri otrokovem učenju in razvoju. Dober program je nujen, vendar ne tudi zadosten pogoj za ustrezen razvoj in napredek otrok. Tudi najboljši programi, pripomočki in materialni pogoji ne morejo zmanjšati vloge vzgojitelja in njegove osebnosti, predanosti in samozavesti.

V študiji je sodelovalo 190 predšolskih otrok iz pripravljalnih skupin in deset vzgojiteljev. To je "ex-post-facto" študija z dvema kontrolnima skupinama (skupini otrok, ki sta vključeni v redni program v vrtcu v Republiki Srbiji) in štirimi eksperimentalnimi skupinami (skupini otrok, ki obiskujeta ekološki vrtec, in skupini otrok, ki sta vključeni v humanistično-ekološki program *Mi smo Zemljani*). Vsi deležniki, ki so sodelovali v raziskavi, obiskujejo javni državni vrtec ali v njem delajo. Raziskovalne tehnike v empiričnem delu so bile: anketiranje, lestvičenje (skaliranje), sistematično opazovanje

in intervjuvanje. Ker na pedagoškem področju ni standardiziranih instrumentov za socialno-čustveni in duhovni razvoj, ki bi jih lahko uporabili za to raziskavo, so bili ob tej priložnosti izdelani naslednji instrumenti: opisna lestvica ocene socialno-čustvenega razvoja otroka za vzgojitelje; okoljska zgodba za otroke in vzgojitelje; protokol za opazovanje otrokovih reakcij med usmerjenimi tematskimi dejavnostmi; vprašalnik za izvedbo poglobljenega intervjuja z vzgojitelji.

Pridobljeni rezultati raziskave so deloma potrdili hipoteze, še pomembneje pa je, da so opozorili na dileme v ekološki vzgoji in izpostavili nekatere pomanjkljivosti v organizaciji samega vzgojno-izobraževalnega procesa. Rezultati dokazujejo, da obstajajo razlike v stopnji doseganja ekološko-humanističnih vrednot in vrednot trajnostne skupnosti med otroki, ki sodelujejo v programu *Mi smo Zemljani*, in njihovimi vrstniki, ki so vključeni v izobraževalne programe ekoloških vrtcev, ter tistimi, ki obiskujejo redni predšolski vzgojni program. Najvišjo stopnjo vrednot so opazili v skupini otrok, ki so bili vključeni v humanistične in ekološke programe. Na področju socialno-čustvenega in duhovnega razvoja pa med skupinami otrok ni bilo statistično pomembnih razlik.

Čeprav nepričakovano, so ta spoznanja neposredno opozorila na pomen in vlogo vzgojiteljev v vzgojno-izobraževalnem procesu. Rezultati, pridobljeni z raziskavo vzgojne prakse, nakazujejo trenutno stanje v predšolskih zavodih v Srbiji in kličejo k spremembam, katerih cilj je približati se ekološko-humanistični paradigmi. Očitno je, da so vzgojitelji, ki so pripravljeni in motivirani, da se poklicno in strokovno izpopolnjujejo poleg veljavnega (ekološko-humanističnega) programa, glavni nosilci sprememb. Dejavnost izobraževalnih ustanov v trajnostnih skupnostih namreč vključuje sinergijo različnih dejavnikov in vplivov. Ocenjevanje obsega kakovost programa in kompetence vzgojiteljev, ki lahko vsakodnevno delujejo v skladu z izobraževalno filozofijo, ki je zasnovana na vrednostnem sistemu trajnostne skupnosti. Taka vzgojno-izobraževalna ustanova pa je možna le v skupnosti, v kateri vsi prebivalci enotno delujejo in so ekološko ozaveščeni in ki se ne zanašajo samo na prizadevanja strokovnjakov. Predpogoj za uvedbo okoljsko-humanističnih programov je stalno delo z bodočimi vzgojitelji in drugimi strokovnjaki, ki se pripravljajo na delo s predšolskimi otroki, z upoštevanjem sodobnih smernic pri delu.

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