



Finding Balance in Pre-Primary and Primary Education

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*P*re-primary and primary education represent the basic pillars of education systems and their quality is, to a large extent, the basis of successful lifelong learning. With a changing society in the age of globalisation and its demands and expectations, new questions arise that need to be answered. Tradition, cultural specifics, and historical experience are reviewed in relation to new challenges. For this purpose, a call for submitting articles to the monothematic issue of the *Pedagogika* journal was made. The fact that pre-primary and primary education is a focus of expert interest is evidenced by the number of texts sent to the editorial office. Those that were recommended for publication on the basis of the review procedure may be found in this issue.

This monothematic issue includes theoretical studies and research studies which address current challenges at various levels. It contains contributions which deal with the impacts of school policy measures, curricular policy, and curriculum design and the introduction of innovations into pre-primary and primary education. It also contains research reflection on these innovations, as well as analyses of the relationship that the individual participants in pre-primary and primary education have with important phenomena of the changing world and the measures being implemented. Additionally, models of support for future and current teachers, as well as reflections on the teaching profession by teachers themselves, are included.

The contribution by Branislav Pupala and Ondrej Kaščák discusses the effects of the current “neoliberal” politics on various school systems with different traditions and levels of early childhood education and care. It shows, among other things,



that under the strong influence of the neoliberal economy, there are richer and poorer countries, countries with a traditionally established system of pre-school care and countries which are still building this system. Using the examples of five countries, the authors illustrate different examples of the adaptation of the individual systems to changed conditions. It is clear that each country seeks a balance between global and local interests and tradition and the influence of supranational institutions. They also seek a balance between political interests and the best interests of the child, and find different paths in this search.

The contribution of Eva Koželuhová, Barbora Loudová Stralczynská, and Milena Lipnická refers to one of the illustrative pieces of evidence showing that finding a balance between routine and innovative procedures, this time in the field of curriculum design, is a complex and long-term process. The article is based on an honest comparison of school educational programmes and reflections on them performed by the teachers who use them. It is also based on the analysis of interviews with students of pre-school education at two universities, one Czech and one Slovak.

Through the example of primary social studies and the humanities, Zuzana Danišková describes in her article the challenges in the field of curriculum innovation in Slovakia.

It is clear that some of the emphases of contemporary pre-primary and primary education are a response to the complex-

ity of today's globalising world and the search for the above-mentioned balance. Jane Jones discusses one of them, the emphasis on wellbeing, which stems from the need to focus on mental health. Her contribution uses case studies to present the measures implemented in two English primary schools to support the wellbeing of children and their teachers.

The contribution by Ioannis Papadopoulos, Darina Jirotková, Jana Slezáková, Esperanza López Centella presents a case from a Czech primary school class which deals with another important aspect of primary education, namely openness and respect towards differences. It illustrates the need for "openness" in mathematics classes, not only for the sake of the pupils' emotional wellbeing in the classroom, but also for the sake of the effective use of established learning opportunities for learning mathematics based on a social constructivist approach.

Another important aspect that deserves attention is certainly the relationship of contemporary children with nature and their learning in this area. In the journal, this aspect is represented by a study by Kateřina Jančaříková, Roman Kroufek, Martin Modrý, and Karel Vojíš. The authors performed a meta-analysis of the articles from the last 20 years which deal with the topic. In their article, they refer to the types of research that have been carried out and to the areas covered by the articles and their most important findings. What is also interesting is the tension felt by contemporary children between connectedness and their rela-



tion to nature, fear of animals and disgust aroused by them.

What remains, and should remain, valid in today's globalising world is an emphasis on the best interests of the child. Zora Syslová and Lucie Grůzová carried out a survey which was based on interviews with mothers of children and which their article refers to in this monothematic issue. They found out that contemporary mothers have different reasons for using facilities for children under three years, among which economic reasons may not be the main ones. On the contrary, what is essential to them is the best interests of their children.

When observing the best interests of the child, it is also necessary that we learn about the best interests of the pupils directly from them. A research plan with this aim was monitored by Alena Seberová, Taťána Göbelová, Ondřej Šimik, and Zuzana Sikorová. They asked primary school pupils what helps them learn and they generated four key categories of learning support resources that highlight the importance of emotional support, the repetition and practice of subject matter, the social context of learning, and demonstration.

It ensues from all the previously mentioned articles that the main participants in the changes to pre-primary and primary education are teachers. Manuela Keller-Schneider explains in her article what requirements challenge beginning teachers most, and how teacher education can foster student teachers to be prepared to deal with challenging situations. This

was done, among others, on the basis of her research and teaching at a Swiss university. She presents a model in which student teachers build up their adaptive knowledge and reflective competences.

The importance of teacher reflection is also emphasised in the contribution by Jana Poche Kargerová, Petra Vallin, Kamila Etchegoyen Rosolová, and Kristýna Bajerová. The contribution presents a group reflection tool designed for teachers in pre-school education, which is also used in professional teams of teachers. It covers the research into the use of this tool with the aim of finding out what is most challenging and most helpful for teachers' knowledge and skills.

Just as with pupils, it is also important to ask teachers themselves about their experiences and satisfaction. The article by Jana Stará, Radka Wildová, and Šárka Popelková presents the results of a questionnaire survey focused on the perception of the teaching profession among graduates of a Primary School Teacher Training study programme. The title of the article reflects the main findings of this research, which are the hope for the future of primary education.

We believe that the mosaic formed by the individual contributions of this monothematic issue gives the reader an insight into the complexity and diversity of pre-primary and primary education in today's world and points out the importance of research into curriculum design and the implementation of ideas inspired by such research into school practice and teacher education. The articles presented in this



monothematic issue show, among other things, the importance of finding a balance between the demands and expectations of individual participants, between traditional and innovative procedures and

approaches, between the emphases of current education policy and curriculum, and the needs of pupils and teachers. In which case this search, this path, is more important than the goal.