

**PROBLEMS OF INDIVIDUAL PLAN OF CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT
(METHODOLOGY OF CENTER EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT “THE BLUE
HOUSE”)**

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**ПРОБЛЕМИ НА ИНДИВИДУАЛНИЯ ПЛАН ЗА РАЗВИТИЕ
В ДЕТСКА ВЪЗРАСТ
(МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ НА ЦЕНТЪР ЗА РАННО ДЕТСКО РАЗВИТИЕ „СИНЯТА КЪЩА“)**

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ABSTRACT

В статията се разглежда експерименталния опит на Сдружение „Родители за Варна“, България, за разработка и приложение на методика за ранно детско развитие със специфична постановка на център за ранно детско развитие „Синята къща“ – Варна, България. Методиката се основава на принципите на метод „Монтесори“ и приложение на оригиналните програми на „Синята къща“ - „Логоритмика“ и „Социален свят“. В изследването участват деца от 1 до 7 години, техните родители и специалистите, работещи в центъра. Резултатите от едногодишния експеримент показват, че адекватната психодиагностика и педагогическа преценка, следването поставените в индивидуалния план на детето цели и партньорството с родителите дават положително отражение върху когнитивните способности, личностното развитие и социалност на детето.

***Key words:** Individual plan, Montessori Method, Early childhood, Parents activity, Pedagogical experiment*

Actuality of the problem

The article examines the problem of content and application of individual development plans for children raised by their biological family in a group day care. The study is based on experimental experience of the Center for Early Childhood Development (CECD) named "The Blue House" founded by Association "Parents of Varna".

Montessori Method is considered to be an alternative educational method in Bulgaria par with the Waldorf pedagogy, democratic education, home schooling and other [Дамянова, 2008; Алианс от НПО, 2008; Гюрова, 2012]. In Central and Western Europe and in the world practice, Montessori schools and CECD are widespread and are considered traditional. In foreign experience opens discussion on individual planning aspects of child development in terms of the Montessori method by suggesting that it is a delicate process that requires excellent interaction between the head of the group of children and parents of children [Каргапольцева, 1999; Rathunde, 2003, Lillard, 2005; Lillard, Else-Quest, 2006, Хилтунен at. all, 2014 and etc.]

In Bulgaria programs for early childhood development performs in nurseries, kindergartens, centers for social rehabilitation and integration (CSRI), day care centers (DC) and private CECD

like “The Blue House” in Varna¹. In most of the cases the child first gets into the nursery, then the municipal kindergarten. In kindergartens the educational program must meet state educational requirements for pre-school education [Ordinance № 4 of 09.18.2000 on pre-school education, art. 4]. Since the beginning of the XXI century in Bulgaria attempts to organize different from "traditional" type places for breeding and specialized work on the development of children. At the beginning of 2016 are based and operate five types of private centers that applied separately or together an integrated approach to early childhood development, which includes some of the health-oriented and training classes or socialization and training classes or health and socialization classes, and individual planning with diverse content.

Individual development plans are being developed for children with special educational needs in kindergartens and social services - CSRI and DC. In the nurseries usually one educator works with all small children who need some special attitude and performs by schedule with group leaders. In the same period, from birth to the third year it is fundamental in terms of cognitive development. Additionally, the individual child develops is very specific and different, and criteria for early childhood development are indicative, but not binding². In mainstream nurseries and kindergartens relationship between staff and parents is everyday based, but often superficial. The main problem is not the lack of interest of both sides about the development of the child, but the divergent daily schedules of parents and nursery staff. Parents receive concise information on how the child has experienced the day (eating, sleeping, toilet, play). Guidance and direction can be received on demand or on schedule by the educator. Often, parents have no idea of the complexity and relationships in child development or the different practices of their support and encouragement. Many parents would not have recognized the problem child for which they need to consult a specialist. Heretofore the author has presented the research on the content of individual planning³

To create a methodology of early development which overcomes all these problems, it is necessary to ask different environmental conditions such as:

- Reducing the number of children in group up to 5 to 8; The ratio of the number of the children to the number of specialists must be 4: 1, and non-specialists 6: 1
- Creating a physical environment that is diverse and intense to cause interest and actions of the child to learn through discovery. The area should be of "open space" with places for rest, play and nutrition;
- Access to toys, household items and resources for creativity should be free;
- Individual planning is happening in partnership with parents. All results, observations and intentions are discussed and adopted together with parents;
- The preliminary psychological and pedagogical diagnosis is performed using standardized methods for Bulgarian population. (Methodology of the CECD "The Blue House" applies

¹ CECD “The Blue House” was a project of non-profit association “Parents for Varna”, Bulgaria, which lasted September, 2015. The total budget of the “The Blue House” was 22,000 Euros. The funds were provided by the board under the Fundraising. The number of children (cared for by their biological family) who participated in the activities of the center was 25 for period July 2014 – September 2015.

² The Bulgarian standards and ladder of Early Childhood Development of prof. V. Manova-Tomova (1974) and evicted standards for children's development and learning in project «Age validation and empirical study" of a consortium between UNICEF and Institute for Population Studies and Human Bulgarian Academy of Sciences 2012- 2013

³ Ставрева-Костадинова, П. (2012) , Концепция за центрирана върху семейството социална работа срещу изоставянето на деца, сп. Наука и технологии, ISSN 1314-4111, 2012 and

Ставрева-Костадинова, П. (2015) Проблеми на подготовката на специалисти в областта на центрирания върху семейството модел на социална работа, сборник „Трудове на научно практическа конференция „Социална работа, социален мениджмънт и социално развитие“, 2015 and

Ставрева-Костадинова, П.,(2015) Специфика на индивидуалните планова за ранно детско развитие, сп. Наука и технологии, ISSN 1314-4111, 2015

collection "Age dynamics and diagnosis of psychological development" by Violeta Borisova and Raina Arnaoudova [Борисова, Арнаудова, 1999]

- The team should be specialized in social work with children, special education, psychodiagnostics, method "Montessori", and family counseling
- Drawing up an individual plan happens after psychological and pedagogical diagnostics and its sections are as follows:
 - Areas of Training and Development
 - Learning Objectives
 - Developmental tasks
 - Results (dynamics of development)
 - Time (period)
 - Responsible team member

The pedagogical experiment was based on the following sequence of actions: initial assessment of the situation of development in the child by administering standardized for Bulgarian population methodologies for diagnosis of psychological development⁴, creation of individual plan with the participation of parents, application of the plan at the Centre, and at home, annotation of the plan after a period four working months, actualization of plan after six months. The application sequence of actions is monitored by a supervisor, who is specialist in special education and social work.

Numerous studies published in different languages studied the way the Montessori Method affects the cognitive development of the child. In 1999 N.A. Kargapoltseva reported the positive results of educational research in term of personality development and sociability in her monography [Каргапольцева, 1999]. Later, (2003) K. Dohrmann reports results of longitudinal study observed better resistance attention, promoting creative thinking, improves the memory and motor skills, develops autonomy of children [Dohrman, 2003]. K. Rathunde made a comparison of Montessori and traditional school over motivation, quality of experience and social context, and received fact that in Montessori school the children are well influence, motivated and sociable the children in traditional schools [Rathunde, 2003]. In a series of studies on the impact of the Montessori method on the development of children, A.S. Lillard presented the relationship between freedom child choose activities in the enriched environment and its ability to independently solve logic problems [Lillard, 2005, Lillard, 2006, Lillard, 2012]. Donabella and Rule reports similar results during overview of four – seven grate students in term of digital training and mathematics education [Donabella, Rule, 2008]. Diamond and Lee reported in 2011 positive influence of Montessori Method over aid executive function development in children 4 to 12 years old. Hiltunen, Borissiva and Mihaylova developed exemplary basic educational program of preschool education "Kindergarten in terms of system Montessori" in which they recommend comprehensive complete system of organization of group care for children from 2 to 7 years, based on previous evidence-based Russian experience in Montessori Method applications [Хилтунен, Борисова, Михайлова, 2014].

Study settings

New standards for early childhood development have been developed under the project of UNICEF in 14 countries and in Bulgaria the project is carried out and reported the Institute for Population Studies and Human Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 2013. The starting point is the development of standards is the standardization of the ladder to study the mental age of children from 0 to 1 and 1 to 3 years of prof. Manova-Tomova.⁵ Areas of specific research and development in the new standards are: health, physical and motor development, social development, emotional

⁴ See. Борисова, В., Р. Арнаудова, Възрастова динамика и диагностика на психичното развитие, С. 1999г.

⁵ Institute for Population Studies and Human Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,
<http://www.iphs.eu/n/index.php/sabitiya/2013-05-08-13-13-57>

development, self-knowledge and self-development, approaches to learning, cognitive development, language development. In the current study was elected CECD "The Blue House" in Varna, as the principles of inclusive education, early learning oriented approach and active participation of parents available. Thus it was possible to implement and longitudinal study of the effectiveness of the implementation of individual plans for working with children.

Based on the new standards mentioned above and thus separated areas of childhood development team of CECD "The Blue House" developed a system for individual development planning for children 1 to 7 years, planning and implementation is done on average Principles based on the ideas of Maria Montessori pedagogy:

- Following the child;
- Respect of the child's interest;
- Freedom the explore the, independence of choosing;
- Prepared Environment: to give the child as many opportunities for hands-mind-on learning as possible; accessible environment (small size equipment as possible)
- The child determine the duration of the activity or rest
- The group leader demonstrates how to explore the item or to do the activity;
- The group Lidl offers a new activity if the child is done with previous.

The study conducted by the team of the CECD "The Blue House" took 14 children aged 1 to 7 years. Six of the children have a history of developmental disorders, but only for three of them have documentation of studies or clinical examinations and present opinions from medical professionals. All the children use the space together; it is no matter of the developmental specifics of some of them. This underlines the importance of the preliminary psychological and pedagogical diagnosis; the results are tentative in the preparation of individual development plan. The survey was conducted with the consent of parents and their active participation. The total study period was 8 months, in this period included two new children with the respective individual plans that take the total number of children studied.

Individual plans to children contain the following sections:

- Details of the child: name, years of age, date of inclusion in the activities of the CECD;
- Results of diagnostic card of the child: physical development (estimate of the total motor skills and fine motor skills), health, cognitive development (intellectual potential, thinking, memory, attention, imagination); development of speech (typical of the child); social development; emotionally volitional sphere.
- Working timesheet, working period, areas of training and development⁶, training objectives, tasks of development⁷, results (dynamic development over the specified period), and period of realization of the objectives responsible specialist.
- Guidelines for social, pedagogical and psychological work with the child after the initial individual plan.

The individual plan is a table, each column reflects studied or seen element of child development, which significantly shape exists or is in a period of formation. The document with the developed plan will be discussed with parents - their task is to examine the plan to obtain additional information, to agree with its elements or to reject it on the ground. Regardless of the reasons for rejection, the team of "The Blue House" assumes that parents are responsible persons who have the right to decide the future of their child. The team wants permission and consent to work with the family. As a result of negotiations with the parents it could be argued that all families being interested of child development and motivated to seek individual work with the child in optimal

⁶ Application of standards for early childhood development of a consortium between UNICEF and Institute for Population Studies and Human Bulgarian Academy of Science, 2013r.

⁷ Application of standards for early childhood development, and compliance with specific data from the psycho-diagnostic map of child.

conditions of care, agreed to work on individual plan at home following its objectives and fulfilling tasks extent possible.

Results of applied value and discuss

With regard to data from the performance of individual components in individual programs can draw the data. Obvious progress in the development of general and fine motor skills was observed in all children covered by specialized courses on development of motility. Obvious progress is emerging and developing emotional and the voluntary sector, especially for children from the age two years. The child independently "solve" their emotional experiences already beginning to understand the value of autonomy and began to make attempts to negotiate (rather than having to physically) if it does not agree with a given situation. Progress seen in cognitive development in children with mental retardation, as well as two children diagnosed with autistic spectrum.

The highest value of achieving the objectives as a whole across individual plans show children from 1 to 3 years: 80% of them there are covered individually set training goals through the implementation of tasks for development. The explanations for this result are as follows:

- Children up to one years old absorb information and environment extremely comprehensive;
- Children under 3 years of age do not need "lessons" to learn, they just absorb everything from the environment, through experimentation, when part of that environment (the place, the stuff, other children).
- Impassable and toddlers require individual home care and thus individual plan of the child is much more systematically and at home. The special tasks during the games is individualized and focused on pursuing concrete targets
- Moderate value in achieving individual targets showing children aged 4 to 5 years.
- A child of four years has already established habits of "correction of his/her own curiosity", if such an approach is applied at home. Subsequently it difficult to restore the situation of intuitive learning environment and communicating with others.
- The child of four and a half years distinction between work and play. Activities that the children performed are "working" as it builds them through it and it's not just a game and requires more effort and perseverance, so is achieved more slowly.
- The child already understands when making mistakes, especially if it has been disturbed and frustrated in the early years, it is "ashamed" of his mistakes and tries not to be allowed, but run slower, respectively curiosity typical of age outweighed tenacity.

The research found moderate value in achieving the objectives of individual planning show children after reaching the fourth year. Often parents say that after the fourth year the child shows some persistence and a willingness to continue chaotic in terms of the environment. This happens in conditions of unorganized environment. Accordingly, the pedagogical approach is changing to setup the environment in the interests of the child. It must be discovered through their own senses without interference, but this approach difficult to follow at home. Parents perceive their children as naughty if they create chaos around them and aggressive if they resist. Changing environment with open space and adequate access and movement changes the child's attitude to it - parents start opencast that their child wants to arrange your belongings, knowing where leave them and look for them to designated areas. Parents very difficult absorbed approaches to interaction with their children if they are not familiar with the pattern of child development in general and not intuitive. So, the child gets autonomy in CECD "The Blue House" and tries to follow it at home.

With regard to data from the performance of individual components in individual programs can be displayed following data.

- An obvious progress in the development of general and fine motor skills were observed in all children covered by specialized courses on development of motility

- Obvious progress is emerging and developing emotional and the voluntary sector, especially for children from the age two years. Child much alone "solve" their emotional experiences already beginning to understand the value of autonomy and began to make attempts to negotiate (not to show dominance) if it does not agree with a given situation.
- Progress was seen in cognitive development in children with mental retardation, as well as two children diagnosed with autistic spectrum.
- Progress can be reflected in terms of language, speech development, children with autism attend additional sessions with a speech therapist, and general afternoon classes on the program "Logo-rhythmic" also led by a speech therapist.
- Progress is observed in the process of adaptation of children with and without impaired development together. Children play together and interact with each of their level of development.
- The disadvantage was reported in the planning of individual care at home. Some parents have difficulty mastering of parental behavior, encouraging the autonomy of the child. Some of parents have lack of patience.
- The disadvantage may be noted in respect of the formation of stable teams, as this kind of centers involve multidisciplinary approach should accordingly provide a significant volume of resources (training, virtual and financial) to carry out a qualitative idea of application programs ECD in a private initiative.
- The disadvantage is the low popularity of ideas about early childhood development among young parents.

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Conclusions

Individual development plans for children from 1 to 7 years must include specific goals and objectives in the five areas of development: motor, cognition, socialization, emotion and will, behavioural autonomy that wide, but very specifically to discuss with parents.

The contribution to the development of the child is shared between the child, parents and staff specialists (speech therapist, head band, children's social worker)

To create institutional sustainability initiatives for early childhood development with the active participation of parents it needs a lot more popularity in society and among educators.

To make the volume national longitudinal study of planning and efficiency in terms of centres for early childhood development.

To develop partnerships between non-profit organizations and cooperatives who practice programs for early childhood development and relevant specialized university departments, both locally and nationally.

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