

PRESCHOOL CHILD IN SOCIALLY EXCLUDED ENVIRONMENT

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Kolaříková, M. (2015). *Dítě předškolního věku v prostředí sociální exkluze. [Preschool Child in Socially Excluded Environment]*. Opava: Silesian University in Opava.

The "Preschool Child in Socially Excluded Environment" publication is focused on a relevant topic that has not been paid sufficient attention by the existing epistemology of socially oriented sciences. The monograph presents, through applied qualitative research strategy, the issue of children in a given ontogenetic environment, whose development is significantly determined by the environment of social exclusion. It emphasizes the need of creation of adequate conditions for their preschool education. In view of frequently insufficient preparation of those children, their successful starting of the first class of the elementary school is considerably complicated. The crucial tasks of our education systems include the prevention of initial failures of Roma pupils from the first year of the elementary school, caused by their general social situation (Kaleja, 2015) and insufficient knowledge of the language of instruction (Šotolová, 2011; Zezulková, 2015). This fact and the categories of barriers of preschool education both on the side of the education institution and on the side of the socially excluded families, presented in the book, become an argumentation verbiage whose contextual framework relies on real empirical findings acquired by Marta Kolaříková through participation in the research project called "Sociological monitoring of educational inputs and outputs of children and pupils, including children and pupils with special educational needs in the Czech Republic (CZ.1.07/1.2.00/47.0009)".

The present Czech education system is characterized by the declared trend of inclusively oriented education, but the particularities of the Roma are only exceptionally respected in the approaches to education. They are rather provided with the majority model. Thus the principles of social integration are pushed to the background. In recent twenty years, quite little has changed in the area of preschool education of the target group in question. We can find confirmation in the "Rómovia Cigáni Kočovníci" publication that states: "*For the educational methods at schools to be efficient, the surroundings must perceive the child as an individual, with all related originality and cultural wealth. But the current education system is very far from such approach.*" (Liégeois, 1995, p. 179)

A great number of Roma children keeps finishing only the elementary education. Former studies (Bartoňová, 2009, Petrasová, 2012, Portik, 2001, and others) show that in the past, the Roma children were often wrongfully sent to practical elementary school,

formerly called special schools. To stop the slump of the Roma communities, a high quality preschool preparation must be consequently observed. Therefore affirmative events must be implemented in the main education stream; such events are called compensatory procedures (Strategies.....) by the Czech government. They are allowed by the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and by the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The approaches are aimed at integration and inclusion of the Roma, which is to be achieved primarily by activities focused on upbringing and education.

The monograph constitutes one of the outputs of the ESF OP VK project. It presents the results of the republic-wide study focused on the barriers of preschool education. In the theoretical part, the author summarized the essential characteristics and needs of a preschool child from the perspective of developmental psychology. She dealt with the assessment of school maturity and the degree of school preparedness with emphasis on children from socially excluded environment. Her theoretical foundations were based on a sufficient set of the sources used, as well as on practical experience. The research part of the monograph describes the basic categories that complicate the children's school attendance from the perspective of the parents. The selected methodological procedure complies with the purpose of the study. Based on semi-structured interviews with 105 respondents from socially excluded environment, the basic obstacles of the children's participation in preschool education were investigated, including: lack of places in kindergartens, the methods of admission of children to kindergartens, the level of information of the parents about the enrolment to kindergartens, financial demands, accessibility of kindergartens from the perspective of transport, insufficient appreciation of the importance of preschool preparation by parents, the teacher's personality, bad personal experience with kindergarten, underestimation of the importance of kindergarten, separation from own family, and other indicators. We see one of the primary reasons for the educational problems of the Roma pupils their unpreparedness with respect to language. The current Roma generation speaks better Czech than the past generations, but the influence of the Roma ethnolect survives. The author's study emphasizes this fact; some parents – respondents were fully aware of the importance of improvement of language competence of their children.

The author also emphasizes the contribution of non-profit organizations, which close the gap of the governmental sector. The low-threshold preschool preparation reacts to different reasons of the families resulting in non-admission of the children to kindergartens or preparatory classes. The preparation is primarily intended for children from socially disadvantaged environment.

In the final chapter, the author summarizes the results of the study, i.e. she describes the barriers preventing the parents of the children from socially excluded environment from participation in preschool education. They include the unavailability of kindergartens in the place of residence, their fullness, language barrier, insufficient activity of the parents in searching educational opportunities, resulting from lack of knowledge and distrust (the Roma learned to distrust institutions in the past), but also from the system of preschool preparations, etc.

Conclusion

The study focused on statements of predominantly Roma national minority when investigating the barriers of the children's kindergarten attendance or other forms of preschool preparation, and has a greater information value than a study of this area based on statements of members of the majority society.

People living in a socially excluded environment will not be able to break out of their situation without an efficient help of the majority in cooperation with the Roma intelligentsia. An intervention from outside can be implemented through those who don't have any prejudices and see a meaning in what they do.

Mgr. Marta Kolaříková, Ph.D., relying upon practical experience and extensive theoretical knowledge, emphasizes timely and systematic preschool preparation of children. She does not see a sufficient solution in compulsory preschool preparation of children from five years of age.

The "Preschool Child in Socially Excluded Environment" monograph is a contribution for teachers, special teachers, psychologists, social workers and other expert public.

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