

# Current Problems of Preschool Education

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The paper deals with early childhood care and education (ECCE) issues to be discussed at the UNESCO World Conference on 27–29 September 2010. The authors recognize and analyze key trends in the development of preschool education in different countries and offer a well-substantiated approach to the related issues.

The paper studies two opposite models of education in early childhood and shows major implications of each of the existing approaches. A special emphasis is laid on the development of a unified comprehensive system of preschool and primary school education. The authors firmly believe that the “junction point” between those two education stages is a critical and, in many respects, a testing element for the entire national system of early childhood education in different countries.

A general analysis of current preschool education programs is provided and their impact on the age-specific development of children is discussed. The authors emphasize the significance and a special role of child-centered interaction between adults and children as well as play as a part of the development-oriented preschool education. The training of teachers for early childhood education is also discussed.

**Keywords:** preschool education; two models of early childhood care and education; continuity of preschool and school education; “frame” and “prescriptive” programs; development-oriented program of early childhood care and education; play; training of preschool teachers.

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On 27–29 September Moscow will host UNESCO World Conference on Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). As follows from the name of the conference, it will deal with the education of preschool children (from birth to age 7 or 8). Early childhood development issues have recently aroused keen interest throughout the world. Per The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, early childhood development is a multidisciplinary science. It embraces health care issues, nutrition, education, social sciences, economics, children advocacy and their social well-being [10].

Per UNESCO definition, “Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) supports children’s survival, growth, development and learning – including health, nutrition and hygiene, verbal and cognitive, social, physical, esthetic and emotional development – from birth to primary school in formal, informal and non-formal settings<sup>1</sup>.”

ECCE approach calls for an adequate standard of life for children of early age; it is also important for the development of adults. It helps them become healthy, socially and ecologically responsible, intellectually competent and economically efficient<sup>2</sup>.

In this connection, the efforts of the international community to make the implementation of an early-age child’s right for a structured, comprehensive education acquire a high priority<sup>3</sup>; these efforts are aimed at creating a system of ECCE in the developing countries. Current research has shown that the implementation of educational projects in such countries, even without noticeable social and cultural changes, may significantly affect the potential development of early-age children (See, for example [25]). It is worth noting that developed countries are not free either from problems related to building of a preschool education system; some of them will be discussed further on.

It is not merely incidental that the first ever World Conference on the education of children at early age will be held in Russia. Comprehensive education in the majority of developed countries (mainly, European countries and the US) traditionally began at the age of 7 or 8; early education has never been considered as something warranting a deliberate governmental effort. Rather, it was viewed as a family concern. As a result, until recently, a systematic preschool education was absent in the education systems of the majority of developed countries; at best, a family was offered a choice of certain education services available in the market. In recent decades, a concept of isolated, segmentary education services mostly related to care and supervision is gradually replaced by an understanding that this period is crucially significant in the development of a child and, consequently, that it is necessary to incorporate preschool education into the national education system as its important part.

Russia, traditionally, starting from the 20’s of the last century, has had a government-funded system of public (though not mandatory) early childhood care and education, that same system that now many of the developed and developing nations are planning to establish.

Recognizably, preschool education in the USSR was mostly oriented towards the interests of the Soviet system rather than towards the interests of the child; therefore, it had to be reformed, especially in terms of its content<sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, an unquestionable advantage of preschool education at that time lay in its systematic, continuous character as well as in its genuine accessibility based on governmental funding. Russia’s experience in building such a system with an updated content might be useful for the international community. Besides, the priority of early childhood education in Russia is supported by the **Educ***ation*, a national project of the Russian Federa-

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<sup>1</sup> Global Monitoring Report. Strong foundation: early childhood care and education. Global Report on Monitoring of *Education for All*, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For more detailed information on early childhood rights refer to: General Comment 7. Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood (Fortieth session, 2005), U.N. Doc. CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1 (2006). [http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/crc/crc\\_general\\_comments.htm](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/crc/crc_general_comments.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Certain steps towards such reformed content were made in the post-Soviet period; from our point of view, many of them could be considered successful.

tion. A current trend of a greater attention paid by the government to the early childhood education has set up favorable conditions for creating and promoting the innovative mechanisms of preschool and primary school education as well as for sharing the experience of these reforms with the countries interested in them.

**Current preschool education: assigning priorities**

Current education systems in the majority of developed countries have been recently paying more attention to the early childhood education. The importance of consistent education of children, starting from the earliest age (of several months) to 7 or 8 years (usually this is the age when children go to school) is substantiated by numerous studies and practice in many countries. In particular, this assumption is supported by very popular data related to the efficiency of the High/Scope international education program [22; 23] (See Chart ).

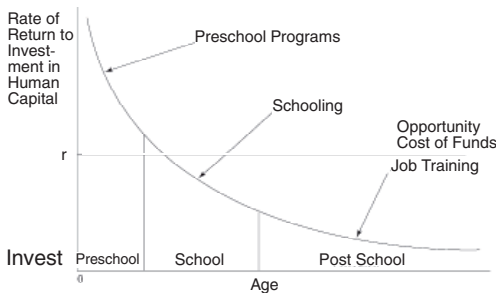


Figure. Rates of Return to Human Capital Investment Initially Setting Investment to be Equal across all Ages.

These data show the efficiency of the financial investment into different education stages in terms of its rate of return for the society and for the individual; the measurements were made through the entire human life cycle. The chart indicates that the efficiency is highest for preschool education programs, i.e. the better is preschool education funding in the country the higher are life achievements of the people throughout their lives. These results had a global resounding effect and became an almost mandatory topic in any education-related discussion.

These are certainly impressive data: a current study substantiates in financial terms (one of the authors is a Nobel Laureate in economics) the facts that progressive Russian and foreign psychology always maintained, namely: it is in the preschool age that all major parameters and characteristics of the human personality and mentality are formed, and the direction and quality of an individual's intellectual, emotional and physical abilities, as well as interests and potentials are determined. Ignoring the issues of early childhood development is fraught with grave, profound problems in child's further life, including schooling immediately after the child's preschool years.

**Current status of the preschool and primary school education (international context)**

Looking at the approaches to building early childhood education systems, we can clearly see two opposite trends, made obvious in response to the questions: "What kind of education for children at early do we need? What should they be taught before they go to school?" These trends are currently present in the majority of developed countries and lead to two opposite models of the preschool education in relation to schooling. It is the "junction point" between those two education stages – preschool and primary school – that is a critical and, in many respects, testing element for the entire national system of early childhood education in different countries.

The first model is a direct and formal consequence of a changing attitude towards early childhood education: it is viewed as the first priority. Different studies (including the one cited above) indicate that in the course of development up to the age of 7, a child is extremely receptive, interested in and open to any new experience, to the exploration of the world. Today's dynamically changing reality dictates a high-speed education when every year counts; therefore, there exists a temptation to use the child's preschool time for intensified education.

Proponents of this approach try to "shift" the start of schooling one or two years earlier by enforced "drilling" of children, systematic and ever earlier learning of reading, writing,

counting and so on. There is an illusion that such kind of teaching children at early age will ensure their subsequent successful mastering of the school program and their professional advancement. However, multiple Russian and foreign studies show that, on the contrary, enforced teaching of knowledge, skills and competencies to the children too early inevitably eliminates learning motivation and, as a result, leads to school disadaptation and school neuroses. Psychologists know how difficult (and sometimes impossible) it is to resolve these problems once they have been formed.

Under such an approach, the content of preschool education starts to include whole fragments (often big enough) borrowed from the school curriculum. However, the primary school program and training of the teachers usually do not change, thus the children often have to study twice the program of the kindergarten/first grade.

In this case, the teaching methods also are of a "schooling" character: classes in different subjects, verbal methods of teaching, systematic control over the acquisition of knowledge and skills, etc., i.e. child's development is artificially accelerated and the preschool education is made more "adult". This practice of development acceleration then continues during school years. The intensity of the teaching process in the primary school, premature teaching of some learning skills (e.g. cursive handwriting, fluent reading, etc.) do not facilitate the true mastering of these basic school skills but instead hinder the child development or lead to acquiring non-rational ways of their implementation. In addition, meaningful efforts of developing learning activity (which should be the leading one<sup>5</sup> in the primary school) are seldom in the focus of attention of the authors of school programs or school practitioners.

As a result, early childhood education misses its initial goal of intensification; moreover, the education slows down significantly and brings about a slew of negative side effects, among those the child's loss of interest to schooling is not the worst in terms of child's

further development. A true continuity and a potential development of the education system suffer a serious blow, because in this case, the continuity between preschool and early school age is determined not so much by whether the future school student have the abilities (or competences, in today's lingo) necessary for his/her new activity or whether the pre-requisites for this new activity have been developed, but by whether the child has a certain knowledge in school subjects.

Admittedly, this approach – it could be tentatively designated as narrow-pragmatic, oriented towards the needs of the system rather than the needs of the child – to early childhood education is widely spread in many countries. It is also worth noting that this approach is a subject of constant massive criticism from the scientific and educators' community in these countries.

Major arguments of this criticism are accumulated in the fundamental Russian school of cultural-historical (socio-cultural) psychology developed, most of all, by L. S. Vygotsky and then by D. B. Elconin, V. V. Davydov, A. V. Zaporozhets, A. P. Luria, A. N. Leontiev and many others. In particular, D. B. Elconin mentioned, in this connection, back in the 80' of the last century:

«A transition to the next, higher level of development is prepared and determined by whether the previous period was fully lived through, whether the internal contradictions that can be resolved by this transition have fully matured. If the transition takes place before the contradictions have fully matured, i.e. if it is artificially enforced ignoring the reality factors, it will significantly damage the development of a child's personality, and the damage can be irrevocable» [14, p. 98].

Cultural-historical psychology has recently become a focus of interest of the international scientific and education community [7; 17; 18; 19; 26; 27 and others]. Studies carried out by this school as well as many years of practical application of research results in education demonstrate that the knowledge per se does

<sup>5</sup> The notion of leading activity is used in cultural-historical psychology. According to the notion every age has its own main activity and the major psychological abilities that a child develops in the course of this activity. The leading activity for the early school age is the learning activity.

not determine successful learning; it is much more important that the child can independently obtain and apply the knowledge.

The school of cultural-historical psychology puts a special emphasis on the child acquiring, in the process of education, culture-generated tools that organize and regulate the entire process of child development [1; 2; 14 and others]. The child should master these tools independently and creatively but this process should be organized in a specific way. A very important argument of Vygotsky's school psychologists indicates a specific character of preschool education and certain requirements towards the education process for this age. There are certain age limitations, and when they are trespassed we, volens nolens, subject the child to a psychological violence incompatible with today's concept of education.

Does it mean that a preschool child should not be taught at all? Does it mean that the essence of the preschool childhood lies in living it outside the organized education system? The response is: certainly not.

From the point of view of cultural-historical psychology, education in general and the continuity between preschool and early school education, in particular, require a completely different approach. It offers a principally different model of preschool education. This approach, as contrary to the one mentioned above, does not focus on the interests of the education system, the interests of the teacher or even of the student in some remote future as understood by the system, but rather on the specific, real interests of the child and his/her family. This approach is sometimes termed personality-oriented or child-centered; since it targets age-specific development of each child, it ensures a development-based education built in accordance with age-specific education laws.

Development-based education takes into account age-specific and individual features, interests and predispositions of each child; relies on mastering of the culture-generated tools of activity, different for different ages. Therefore, the understanding of the laws regulating child development in each age period is also based on the understanding which

tools and what activity are appropriate for a given age.

#### **Development-oriented education program in preschool age**

The term «**developmental education**» is quite common in Russia's education discourse; nevertheless, we believe its content requires some comments. Without aiming at full explanation of this complicated term, we would like to point out its one important aspect: education practitioners, school and preschool teachers, have difficulty discriminating between development-oriented and any other type of education. Despite a sufficiently large body of publications where the notion of **developmental** education is discussed [3; 4; 5; 11; 13 and others], practice shows that for teachers who work with children this difference is rather vague. At the same time, it is these teachers that can implement development-oriented education of each child in a preschool facility or at school.

To answer the question – what makes development-oriented education different from other types of education – it is important to define the development-oriented education as the type of education which not only has a development effect (this may be true for any kind of education) but, being targeted on each child, sees its goal in child's development and real advancement. In the developmental education system, the knowledge, skills and competences are not the goals per se but rather tools in the process of child's development. Thus, a teacher's objective is not to train a child in knowledge or skills but rather to ensure the child's development with the help of these skills and knowledge.

The above does not mean that preschool children should not be taught. Russian education is strong in its tradition of early childhood education, mostly based on profound teaching. However, the efforts of educators should be honed on ensuring that the knowledge acquired by a child has a developmental effect, and specifically for this particular child. A sincere interest, initiative and involvement of the child as well as his/her intellectual curiosity are obvious markers of the development process in place rather than mere "drilling" in certain knowledge and skills.

Consequently, development as goal in contemporary education systems implies a special emphasis on **individualized** education, which is one of the main principles of a developmental preschool program. On the other hand, it is equally important to ensure the variability of education and provide an adequate psychological and pedagogical context for the development of children and for the creative work of teachers. Adequate psychological and pedagogical conditions for the development of children in accordance with their abilities and interests call for a wide choice of activities and subject areas available for them. Therefore, the second principle of a preschool education program lies in offering a real **choice** for children. This leads to the third principle: the absence of rigid subject areas (curriculum), since the integrated content (e.g., implementation of projects) allows children to exercise a free choice and develop their not-yet-structured interests and creativity.

Individualized education necessarily leads to the problems related to **age-specific** education at different stages. Of great significance here is the principle of **inherent value of each age period**, defined by a dual requirement towards the education content and techniques:

- To ensure that the child fully realizes his/her age-specific abilities;
- To base current development on the achievements of the previous development period.

#### **Specific character of the early childhood care and education (ECCE)**

The principle of each age inherent value makes it possible to understand a specific character of preschool education. The attempts to incorporate school content into preschool education in early 21st century is ever more puzzling given the fact that back in the last century Russian and foreign scholars [2; 3; 4; 14; 21; 24 and many others] convincingly showed that the acceleration of the child development is both inadmissible and inefficient. However, it is important to keep school program objectives separate from the preschool ones without underestimating the ability of a preschool child; it is critical to avoid both artificial acceleration and artificial slow-down of the

child development. Thus, to generate a developmental age-appropriate preschool education program it is necessary to have a precise knowledge about:

- 1) what are the main age-specific objectives for early childhood development?
- 2) what are the real potential and interests of a preschool child?

Classical psychological research as well as most recent studies provide an answer to the first question. The main achievement of the preschool age lies in the development of the **basis of the child's personality culture, his/her emotional well-being, development of individual abilities and inclinations**, independence, initiative, creativity, self-sufficiency, curiosity, responsibility, communicative and intellectual competence [6; 14; 16 and others]. These and other personality qualities make it possible for the child to enter the next age group – early school age – as an interested and cognitively motivated individual, and to avoid stresses and devastating disappointments of the transition period.

As to the real potential and interests of a preschool child, they obviously vary depending on the child's individual inclinations (which should be, of course, recognized) but also demonstrate age-specific features, which are dependent on the fact that the main (or "leading" in the terminology of the Russian psychological theory of activity) activity of a preschool child is **play**. On the one hand, this fact is well known to teachers; on the other hand, it has a specific interpretation in the present day education.

#### **Play as a context of development in the early childhood**

Preschool play can be subdivided into two types: play for learning and free play. In terms of the child development and his/her genuine (rather than artificially enforced) learning, it is hard to choose between those two. Free play (free for the child but not for the teacher who must skillfully organize it keeping it free) is certainly of no less importance, to say the least, than "play-to-learn" teaching methods. It is common knowledge that the context of a free play is conducive for all major achievements of the

preschool age to emerge and develop: imagination and creativity, recognition of the rules that subsequently will allow the child to control him/herself [2; 9; 15]. Free play helps develop communication among children and gives them basic communication skills: discussion, resolution and prevention of conflicts, competent negotiation and many other skills (See, for example, [20] and others). Child play gives a boost to self-regulation and meta-cognitive abilities of a child (which are pre-requisites for the development of reflection). But what is most important, the children *love* to play. A developmental program of preschool education should take into account the importance of the free play.

The importance of play for the development of children at early age has been proved long time ago; among other studies, cultural-historical psychology carried out extensive research into this problem [8; 12; 15 and others]. Nevertheless, in current education science, the first approach described above often treats child play as something not serious enough, on a "leftover principle". i.e. good only when there is some time left after schooling. With this approach, there is usually no time left for play.

This is one of the gravest problems in the current national education systems for children at early age in many countries. The adults treat child play as recreation or entertainment; they do not understand that if a child is robbed of a possibility to play, an irreparable damage will be done to the development of a child's personality and intellect. We are facing the situation when the fundamental law of child development in this age group, the law that has been proved long ago and repeatedly confirmed in the last century, today is not even refuted but is simply ignored. This tendency is encountered both in Russia and abroad; however Russian preschool education exhibits certain specific features.

Russian pedagogy emphasizes "learning through play" forms and methods of teaching rather than free play. This phrase alone shows that the children do learn in play, but the development-oriented program requires that the child

should play, not the teacher. It is also important that play should be genuine and not its imitation (a "play impostor") when a play form is used by the teacher as a kind of incantation. Developmental preschool program usually instructs how to organize a free play and play-to-learn activities.

#### **What preschool education programs are there?**

Preschool education programs, as opposed to the school programs, usually include not only learning processes but also describe, in great detail, the entire life of a child in a preschool facility. Therefore, a concept of "education content" for a preschool age covers a much larger volume (in a logical sense of the word) of activities than at school and includes such seemingly value-only aspects as the type of interaction between a child and a teacher. Moreover, a specific nature of the preschool age makes the type of child-teacher interaction, rather than a certain set of knowledge and skill, one of the key components of child development in this age group. Therefore, in our opinion, a process of adult-child interaction is of utmost importance for the evaluation of the quality of preschool education programs<sup>6</sup>.

The analysis of preschool programs should hone on their content; in Russia, in particular, preschool education content is differentiated not by academic subject areas but rather by child development directions:

- physical development
- cognitive and language development
- personal, social and emotional development
- artistic and aesthetic development.

With this differentiation, the programs may be based on specifically preschool content technologies, project- or topic-related rather than tied to a subject matter. Such programs first emerged in Russian in the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century and continue to be regarded as up-to-date and innovative by the educators' community, though foreign education system included them since the beginning of the last century. At the same

<sup>6</sup> Education quality assessment is an extremely important element of the current ECCE systems in different countries. Obviously, the approach to the evaluation of the system determines the orientation of the ECCE system and the goals it pursues. Limited space of this article precludes a profound analysis of this problem which it certainly merits; we will only indicate that it is the key priority element of the current early childhood education system.

time, some preschool education programs are based on an academic principle which, from the point of view of its authors, also ensures all the development directions cited above. Among the latter, traditional Russian preschool education programs; some foreign education systems also use the same approach.

Within the context of two approaches to preschool education discussed above, there are various education programs whose essence reflects the difference between those two approaches. Above all, it means that preschool education programs in different countries may be **teacher-oriented** or **child-oriented**.

The latter of the two was already described above (development-oriented or developmental programs, in our terminology). On the flip side, the teacher-oriented education program puts a teacher in the center of the process. It is the teacher that comes out with an initiative and activity; the education is based on the example demonstrated by the teacher. The child plays a role of a "tabula rasa" that the teacher fills in, as a rule, using one and the same method for all the children despite their individual differences. Education content is fixed and does not depend on child's aptitudes or the situation in the group.

World practice has yet other differences between the education programs, and some of them are more relevant to preschool programs than to others. In particular, there are so called "frame" programs and programs that contain detailed skills and knowledge description and rigid forms and methods of teaching those. These latter programs can be tentatively called "prescriptive" programs because, first, they are accompanied by detailed outlines of classes and methods of schooling and, second, they guide the teachers towards reproducing (in the extreme case, step-by-step) these guidelines and the compendium of methods. Planning of classes within these programs also reflects their "prescriptive" nature, is tied to subject areas and reiterates each year for a given age group. Children are defined by their "passport age" rather than psychological age, and education results are assessed by the reproduced sets of knowledge and skills in the form mandated by the program.

"Frame" programs got their name from the fact that they only provide the "framework" of the education process by introducing some significant principles and foundations for the development of an education process. They may also be accompanied by guidelines and recommendations for the teachers but these recommendations are usually much less structured and rigid and can be used as a "repository" of possible approaches and techniques relevant for education objectives the teacher wishes to accomplish. These programs focus on planning since it should be adapted to a specific situation in the class and targeted on each child. The plan reflects the developmental objectives set by the teacher and specific steps to accomplish them; these steps are based on observing the children and monitoring the development of each child. Such programs easily allow groups of different ages and follow not the "passport" age of children but rather their actual interests and abilities.

True, extreme "prescriptive" programs are not very often encountered in today's preschool education. Usually, in reality, a preschool program hovers in between the frame and prescriptive. However, there is a historical evidence of a teacher-oriented prescriptive program in Russian preschool education.

"Standard Program for Training and Education at a Preschool Facility", mandatory for all Russia's preschool institutions up to 1991, is an example of such a program. At that time, this was the federally-approved unified comprehensive education Program. Today this program, with some modifications, is still used in Russia's preschool facilities.

The Standard Program included guidelines and recommendations, calendar schedule of education sessions, detailed syllabus-outlines of each session mostly in the form of a school class. All these recommendations completely ignored children's individual characteristics and targeted on storing of subject knowledge or skills and inclinations necessary in every day life (e. g. self-care skills). The program was very rigid in style and prescriptive: small children were called by their last name, emotional support depended solely on the teacher's personality, daily schedules were firmly structured



for different age groups. This program called for a corresponding system of education planning – detailed, structured, based on the knowledge to be acquired during each class.

The main criteria in assessing the work of an individual teacher and the preschool facility as a whole is the volume of knowledge and skills that the children had to demonstrate during inspections, for instance, reading fluency, counting to ten or twenty, knowledge about domestic and wild animals, etc. It is worth noting that a tradition of testing children for such knowledge and skills is still alive in Russia and is often used at transition to primary school. Usually, it is the schools that now replace official inspectors in making this assessment; but this practice certainly affects preschool programs as well, mostly, through the demands of parents to get their children ready for school, i.e. “drilling” them in the required knowledge and skills.

Teachers’ training system followed the suit: students in colleges and universities were taught to implement the Standard Program. True, the implementation of the program depends, to a large extent, on the teacher who follows it. This is hard to dispute for any program. It was always possible to find fragments of Standard Program where children interests were taken into account because the teacher believed in it. Nevertheless, it is absolutely clear that the program and teachers’ training for it greatly affect the selection of the education process to be triggered off.

It is worth noting that teacher-oriented programs undoubtedly have certain merits. In particular, the Standard Program for Preschool Education had as its goal (often attained) that children should accumulate a sufficient volume of knowledge and skills. As a side effect of this accumulation, the children received cognitive education, especially those who belong to the so-called “cognitive” type. Nevertheless, personality development of the children – their initiative, independence, responsibility, preparedness for independent decision-making – which was shown to be the main objective of the preschool period was lagging behind.

A teacher-oriented program can be both prescriptive or frame-based; on the other hand,

the child-oriented program can hardly be accompanied by a detailed mandatory-to-implement content. This is impossible by definition: child-oriented education process is designed “here and now” depending on a specific developmental situation of each child. Therefore, personality-oriented program is of a frame nature and is based only on recognized age characteristics of preschool children. Some of these programs offer a huge inventory of educational methods and techniques, and the teacher can make a selection depending on a specific situation. Other programs call for the creativity of the teacher who, together with the children, invents the educational content. In one way or another, child-oriented programs cannot have a rigid structured curriculum mandatory for all children.

#### **How should we train teachers for the early childhood developmental education?**

As it was shown, within the developmental education system, knowledge, skills and aptitudes represent **tools** in the child development process rather than independent **goals**. Developmental education places special demands on the teacher: the teacher becomes the main player in the education process. His/her role in the education of preschool and early school children dramatically changes: instead of teaching the child certain knowledge and skills, the goal is to ensure child’s development using this knowledge and skills.

The teacher, depending on the individual character of each child development, selects educational material and gives it to the child using this or that situation for child’s further advancement. The teacher designs individual curriculum for each child and together with the child in the process of individual interaction. It is during this interaction between the teacher and the child that the child personality development takes place, as well as competence building in different areas. Knowledge and skills, in a certain way, serve this interaction to ensure its adequacy to the child development situation.

With this approach, preschool and school teachers, to a great extent, determine both the immediate development environment for a child and his/her family but also the child’s further life. This requires a sufficiently high compe-

tence level of teachers and other practitioners of preschool and primary school education in the area of age-specific child developmental psychology, as well as in personality-oriented developmental education techniques, specifically, in techniques providing an individual approach to each child.

At the same time, teachers and practicing psychologists in our country (and, as many studies show, in many other countries as well) do not meet such requirements. They lack solid knowledge about age-specific features and psychology of children development and often fill the gap with myths about children development. It is necessary to establish **professional training** based on promotion of theoretical ideas and education techniques developed within the framework of cultural-historical psychology.

Of great theoretic and practical interest here is the Federal State Standard developed by Moscow State University of Psychology and Education<sup>7</sup>. Training of a preschool teacher who is capable of organizing the “zone of proximal development” of a child, incorporate child development features into interaction with the child, who is competent in forms and ways of interaction with different categories of children, from infancy to school, is an extraordinary task and scope of work towards the development of this standard.

Goals, objectives and requirements of the early childhood developmental education<sup>8</sup>.

Psychological parameters of preschool child development outlined above help formulate the **goals** of education in this age:

- to protect and improve children’s physical and psychological health (including their emotional wellbeing);
- to preserve and support children’s individuality;
- to prepare a child for entering into relationships with other people, with the world and him/herself;

These goals can be attained under certain psychological and educational conditions:

- Personality-oriented interaction between children and adults.
- Full-fledged interaction of a child with peers, younger and older children.
- Developmental age-specific education technologies based on acquisition of cultural tools of age-dependent activity.
- Age-specific curriculum and spatial environment that stimulates communicative, playing, cognitive, physical and other types of child’s activity.
- For all education stakeholders (teachers, children and their parents), a possibility to choose an educational program, schooling technology, materials and culture-generated tools of activity.

We have demonstrated major trends of early childhood education in different countries. For lack of space in one article, we cannot provide a detailed analysis of all ECCE-related important problems or even list them; we only tried to give an outline of urgent issues in this field. It seems obvious that many of these problems are international in character; they are mostly connected with assignment of priorities in the ECCE system rather than with country-dependent specific features of national education systems. A glimpse towards classical works in Russian and foreign psychology easily shows that many of the problems listed above were discussed in those works decades ago. We can conclude that some of these issues belong to the category of “eternal” problems, which, nevertheless, does not indemnify the international community from the necessity to resolve them “here and now”. The First World UNESCO Conference on ECCE is a sign of a growing attention towards this area of education and promises an interesting discussion on the topics of this presentation and on many other important subjects.

<sup>7</sup> Federal State Education Standard of Higher Professional Education Project for the development of a program for Psychological-Pedagogical Education developed in Moscow State University of Psychology and Education.

<sup>8</sup> This section is largely based on “The Concept of continuous education content (pre-school and primary school levels)” // Education Curriculum in a 12-year School. Moscow, 2000 [6]. This text was written by a group of leading specialists – psychologists and teachers – as a basis for specific practical guidelines for building continuous pre-school and early school education. Some of the materials included into this concept were subsequently used to resolve certain administrative issues, however, the concept still awaits its full use. From our point of view, it contains theoretical approaches and a description of practical steps towards a system of developmental continuous preschool and school education.

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