

## ***Psycho-Pyramidal Assessment of preschooler: A guide to developing a balanced curriculum in Albania***

*Suela NDOJA<sup>1</sup>*

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### **Abstract**

This study addresses preschool education with three primary issues which constitute a guide for the development of a balanced curriculum for a well functioning in the future of preschoolers. It focuses on the difference of the psychological assessment from testing and general/specific issues related to the assessment of preschooler.

The research argues for the use of a balanced curriculum formatted as a “living document” in Albania to help and inspire parents, educators, psychologists and policy-makers to accept, use and include “psycho-pyramidal assessment” as a primary component not just to diagnose developmental delays and talents in certain areas, but also to design intervention programs to prevent mental and behavioral problems in the future and for a better functioning of the Albanian education.

### **Context**

During undergraduate studies in psychology, I enlarged the knowledge of the fact that education is the comprehensive development guide to the main formation of personality. From a personal point of view derives the meaning that *education* means attempt to make people *people*.

Therefore, the role of education is important for the growth and development of all aspects including psychological ones so that people become balanced individuals towards a positive direction. Education starts at *family* which philosopher Heidegger defines as *a primary group that builds enterprise of life*, then the following when going to kindergarten. The first educator and natural one of the child is the mother. *The kindergarten can not replace family and mother, but must integrate work to bring the child into a world of more rich experience.* Therefore the kindergarten is *recognized as an educational institute closely related with family, from which the child is inseparable.*

It is here that I would like to focus, as being driven by the interest in early childhood development, a year after my undergraduate studies, in 2008, I was closely acquainted with the Croatian educator M. Dinner ZIMAJ who spoke enthusiastically about the

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1. PhD cand. Suela NDOJA, Lecturer at “Luigj Gurakuqi” University, Clinical Psychologist at Institution of Non-Public Education “Nena Franciska”, Hot i Ri, Shkoder-Shqipëri; [suoloprospe@gmail.com](mailto:suoloprospe@gmail.com)

developmental stages of three to five years old then more specifically for preschoolers. Among other things, she introduced the idea that preschoolers need not only for capacity testing in daily activities but also a psychological evaluation before they enter in the first grade. This idea pushed me toward a new approach since the preschoolers present a developmental architecture in various aspects including talents, certain malfunctions or disorders. The truth lies somewhere between. We need to know it.

In addition, this overview on education pushed me towards thinking that the most important element in education is the type of *curriculum* as it is the order of a detailed outline of education goals. Laeng M. (1995) speaks of education as a phenomenon of experience, as *a fact*

As a result, I think the word *education* has no meaning without *curriculum*. Because of the importance of the role and function of such a curriculum, the attempt to design a curriculum is a creative and dynamic step to progress in line with the increasing demands and progress of human civilization itself. Each developmental level requires special program and attention to address to progress, needs, and malfunctions of preschoolers, therefore requires *balancing*. Thus, to evaluate the developmental performance is necessary making a psychological assessment as a part of *balanced curriculum*, which must be addressed to a lot of issues.

As a result, starting by this context, the aim of this paper is: *addressing to educators, parents, psychologists and policy makers who go through the spectrum of preschoolers education with three primary issues which constitute a guide for the development of a balanced curriculum for a better functioning in the future of preschoolers.*

## **Introduction**

*“The best investment we can make is in early childhood as what it happens in the first six years of life substantially builds our coping skills and competence for life”. (J.Fraser Mustard)*

The impact of early childhood experience has long been a historical, theoretical and clinical interest. Then how we can be helpful during the critical period of development without having research and contemporary approach specifying developmental expectations for building healthy educational and psychological bases of this age? How can we appreciate what pieces of development road map are needed taking into account all aspects of their lives?

The issue of preschooler assessment is not something new. For egg, Ministry of Education that recognizes its mandate to human development and the impact of early childhood in later life, is building and invited ideas to improve the quality of preschooler programs. This represents a major step in the process of education inviting any professional in the field to build basic blocks associated with pearls of education: philosophy and educational goals, ideals and aspirations, pedagogical and psychological basis for all children including those with anormal development, with talents of those with disabilities, psychological disorders or learning.

Given my experience at Non-Public Educational Institution *Nene Franciska* and taking into consideration the above aspiration, in my cognitive map, I have designed a scheme which crosses border visas and liaison with each other which reflect learn, to know, to do, to live together, to be and to appreciate adequately, because in this way we create and maintain a humane and democratic system of education for the survival of our democracy.

The nature of problems or educational development is not only in child itself but also to the parent and also educator, problems that go hand by hand to the psychologist who must intervene to prevent and in the worst case to alleviate the problem or malfunction and after to policy makers to build new education strategy. Therefore is obvious that it comes to a great and valuable investment; is therefore necessary to assess the overall dimensions in contributing to the Albanian futurism. It's impliedly that no evaluation method and certainly no test or battery unit is suitable for all. However, it can be encouraged the use of typical assessments as may be set in this case the *psycho-pyramidal assessment*. Let's see below..

### **The difference between psychological assessment and testing**

Referring to the above map, I begin to explain partitions visas and liaison of psychological assessment and testing. In the subject *Psychological Assessment* developed during the course of psychology, the term psychological assessment of preschoolers refers to: *an assessment process that uses a combination of techniques to help arriving at some hypotheses about a child, his behavior, personality and capacities*. It is as well as *an ongoing global assessment that involves figuring out the level of development of the child in order to improve and identify success or failure at the end of the implementation of a part or all set program in curriculum* as well as to help developing further educative individual or general plans.

While *psychological testing* is a form of assessment *that measures several aspects of a child's knowledge, skills, attitudes, or personality development*. While it does not provide a complete painting, testing is an important tool for efficiency and to obtain certain results related to the change of many different aspects of the physical and social world of the child....

Making a *comparison* of them both: psychological assessment is more valuable because it goes beyond measuring the progress or regress of children in the evaluation of programs, including identifying the needs of parents, staff and the planning of the future education. Also it never focuses on a single test score or number. Every child has a set of competencies that can be assessed through a number of methods

### **General issues for the assessment of the preschooler**

On the basis of theoretical perspective any formal assessment instrument must meet the criteria for validity and reliability; among which *validity* refers to the consistency or validity measurement reproducibility and *reliability* refers to the degree to which an assessment measures what it is supposed to measure, including quality of content and appearance.

In assessment of preschoolers there are of particular importance two aspects which are *developmental reliability* meaning that measured performance units are suitable for the valued development side. While *predictive validity* is the correlation between test results and the next performance in a relevant criterion. Valid and reliable criteria of preschoolers assessment should not make children feel anxious, information should be obtained from various sources, the length of the assessment must be sensitive to the interests and the extent of children's attention, testing should be done in accordance with the program using appropriate methods

Basic areas of knowledge for efficient methods of preschoolers assessment.

In an article *Preschool Policy Matters* (2004) was written: *"The quality of assessment depends in part on decisions made before administration of any test. Before choosing an instrument to be used for*

a certain population of children, the designers of the project should be able to explain why a particular instrument is being used and what they hope to learn from results. The selection of instruments is guided by the aims and purposes of evaluation. Strategies of assessment range from formal and informal continuity. Essential difference between formal from informal assessment is the set scale on a child's behavior or level of intervention in their lives. Selection of a valuation strategy is also affected by available resources. Methods such as authentic observation, interviews with parents, child labor analysis (portfolio) or the evaluation of educators and parents can guide us in collecting authentic data that reflect an approach of the "whole child" for assessing the competence and needs. "A comprehensive assessment normally requires a multi-methods approach in order to merge the multiple dimensions of children skills and capacities. So a method that merges or balances the weaknesses and strengths is more similar to evaluate children during cognitive development, emotional, social, and biological and needs."

Specific issues of preschooler psychological assessment during my five-year practice including *psycho-pyramidal assessment*.

It was May of year 2008, a year after I graduated from the University *Luigj Gurakuqi-Shkoder*, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Branch of Psychology and I was conducting a voluntary mini-project together with the Franciscan Sisters of *Mother Teresa* Parish, for the social integration of children and young people in the area, when the Croatian educator M. Dinner Zimaj spoke of passionate about her goals in preschooler education. Driven by the idea and my interest for this age, to my surprise, no training program for psychological assessment specifically for preschoolers' was available in Albania, although it was already opened the Branch of Psychology.

Taking this step ahead required a motion, which professionally seemed impossible. But thankfully with the help of the field of basic theoretical knowledge that I had studied, along with 16-year expertise of this educator who brought herself a rich Croatian experience, I found myself as a very engaged investigator as Rik Little, Founder the International Youth Foundation claims: "it is easier to act on your way to a new model of thinking than to think by your manner on a new model of action." Basic theories of child development, such as referring to assessment tests of psychologist Binet Simon and Theodore Simon (2002) or modes of assessment Jean Piaget (1961), were for me as a strategy and reference approach to design preliminary the assessment. In this way I started first hand experience. My steps in relation to psychological assessment have been growing from time to time.

## **Acquisition of clinical experience**

Having fulfilled the first assessment, I was offered the opportunity to be part of inter-disciplinary team; to do *authentic observations* of observations and interacting with them in a variety of development issues and observing that preschool child is really a universal "*blotting paper*", with an unimaginable power pin and patronizing. (Zimaj D. & Ndoja S. (2009).

Benefits of being a part of the team gave me the opportunity to experience their power and how the other disciplines saw development and the time to formulate an understanding of complex painting to every preschooler, educator and parent. For egg working with educators, illustrated the impact of motor development in socio-emotional aspects and typical or atypical preschoolers behaviors. Also from parents or representatives of preschoolers the illustration of behavior problems or performance respect to the developments during the stay at home. I can mention the cases of parents who have given further information on the progress of their children in school, confirming data from

the results of psychological assessment and areas which are working with children. It can be also considered the fact that through the experience of this nature, is enriched area of emotional and volitive life of these preschoolers. Every year is attended by a number of children from 22-27 who posed different experiences. All this presented to me a considerable challenge.

I say this based on the fact that most of the children have been waiting for assessment under the influence of a “good stress” in the sense that “*let us know this*” ... “*I wish to take part*,” “*I know why I stand here today*,” etc.... We are talking in general because we have to take into account that there are different temperaments of children who (*a small part*) have experienced it as anxiety and has affected to their emotional state, but it was only to those children who have demonstrated these features during the kindergarten. (Zimaj D, & Ndoja S. 2009).

Doing further, it became clear to me that I was not simply related to an intelligence assessment, but also to develop and integrate more underquestions of development including understanding how various issues affect or dominate each other. I realized that contributions of discipline’s psychology were only part of the complex picture that builds the range of work with preschoolers because basically the picture involves understanding how the current behavior is influenced by many factors: genetics, lectures and language development, information processing, gross/fine motor skills, kognition, affective development, cultural performances, socio-economic conditions and environment. With other words, a normal accordance or malfunction of the child is not alone or isolated from others.

Therefore, based on both my practice and clinical psychologist’s perspective, it is somewhat easier to start a psychological assessment, focusing on authentic preschooler’s assessment. Perhaps many practitioners or practicing psychologists do not have determinated time to their curriculum to develop expertise in psychological assessment in this manner.

It should be noted that significantly psychological assessment has benefits and disadvantages too. Here, it comes to 5-6 years old group preschoolers and comes to a *conclusive assessment* of preschooler education and transition to first grade; this mean we should assess the full development which implies the administration, tabulation and interpretation.

So for practitioners who are interested in working with preschoolers, as has been the missionary *Mother Franciska* who cited: *Where there is noise, there are children*; primary focus should be on the jamming that are buzzers of developmental characteristics, typical and atypical behavior. Among other things, it also allows a specific knowledge about learning a number of assessment instruments designed exactly just for preschoolers. For egg, two years after I completed Master of Science in Clinical Psychology, I am as well based on Primary Scale of Preschoolers Intelligence Assessment by Wechsler ..

Since childhood is a time of rapid change, based on my experience, should be included best practices assessment models, to design programs according to the level of needs or to do psychological intervention, and to consult with the new policies for a better functioning in Albanian education. Instead of selection theory, I bring the application a trilateral psychological assessment in the form of a pyramid comprising three major issues of preschoolers defined in the purpose of the paper.

Introduction: In what consists the psycho-pyramidal assessment?

Referring to the goal of developing a psychological assessment as appropriate

to preschoolers, I created in a harmonious interaction of two operational components *psychological* and *pyramidal*:

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia a pyramid (from Greek: πυραμίδας Pyramis) is a structure whose shape is pyramidal in geometric terms, which means, on the outer surfaces are triangular and converge at a single point on the top. Base of the pyramid may have different forms. The explanation is as following::

- At the apex of the pyramid. (P) - is major issue: the identification of children with talents, developmental delays, deficits in certain areas disorders
- At the rib of pyramid on the left (Y) – is set the design of intervention programs for the prevention of mental and behavioral problems in the future
- At the rib of pyramid on the right. (R) - are set the prerequisites for a good functioning in Albanian education.
- At the path of pyramid (A) - are set the parents and families
- At the steps of the pyramid (M) - are set all developmental stages to child
- At the ledge steps of the pyramid (I)- are set the educators
- At the threshold door of the pyramid (D) - are set the psychologists
- At the door of the pyramid (A) - are set the policymaking
- Inside the pyramid (L) - is set the *balanced curriculum*



## Psycho- pyramidal stages

Stage 1 – authentic assessment – along time alignment are performed *authentic observations* from psychologist held on note cards or individual protocols.

Stage 2 - bulletin of preparing educators - together with educators are held at least three quarterly meetings to review the core assessments on estimates made by the educators.

Stage 3 - informational meeting with parents – with the presence of educators is developed the preliminary meeting with the parents to be known on what consists psychological assessment. Once parents are informed, are offered the opportunity to direct questions about doubts or further about the decision to continue or not with the evaluation.

Stage 4–inclusive meeting between parents and child-educator-psychologist - when observed parent, the child and parents together, practitioners can learn about their relationship. Are the interactions synchronous? Does the child seem safe with parents, educator? Does he/she feel protected? What makes it possible for parents, child and educator progress?

Stage 5 – confirmation meeting with parents – with the presence of educators is conducted the confirmatory meeting with parents in which is held the preparatory work how they should prepare their children for assessment given that the focus is to gather information to help them make decisions about the child's readiness to enter first grade. Finally is signed the act-approval by them.

Stage 6 – children's emotional preparation – initially with the educators presence or their absence then, the psychologist follows a special psychological program for children emotional preparation of children to participate in psychological assessment.

Stage 7 – preparation of psycho-pyramidal assessment based on curriculum– is

described in more detail below ♠.

Stage 8 –development of psychological assessment- according dates and previously defined timetables are developed psychological assessment sessions with each preschooler individually.

Stage 9- final meeting with parents – with the presence of the educators is developed the meeting at which is given the communication in a common group parents or individually. There are also provided individual consulting sessions.

What should be taken into account in Psycho-pyramidal assessment of preschoolers?

Should be taken into account a variety of issues when performing a psycho-pyramidal assessment:

*First:* the clinician must be qualified and implement the Professional Ethic.

*Secondly:* must get critical information of assessment to measure cognitive level which includes family strengths and risk factors, characteristics and beliefs of parents and children's psychological health issues, neurodevelopmental issues, temperament, regulatory behaviors, behavioral issues, language skills, developmental levels in all areas, relationships with peers, siblings, community stressors and economic resources available to the family. (Finello M. K, 2005).

*Thirdly:* must learn to evaluate the ability of child as operationalized by a formal assessment tool, not testing, the child's ability to ignore distraction in the environment and interest. Such factors can provide a more comprehensive picture of the child functioning and can provide a greater insight to intervention plan.

*Fourthly:* should build a cooperative relationship as a context for personal and professional development and conduct detective conversations with parents and caregivers of children to detect beta, alpha, theta conditions of child as evidence of mental models. (Markova D. 2005)

*Fifthly:* must have the ability to develop psychological assessments contained three parts: *pre-assessment phase* that has to do with the development of mini-talk detection, *evaluation phase* which includes all cognitive components and *closure phase* that includes the impact of being evaluated.

*Sixthly:* it is essential to create a warm atmosphere in a suitable environment in which it is prepared every necessary tool as teaching tools, clinician assessment cards, ecc.

*Seventhly:* is very important for a child to build a relationship of trust and not feed fear; special here is that the clinician must maintain a child service role, not just someone who is carrying out an assessment.

*Eighthly:* while conducting a formal evaluation, the clinician should read the body language of the child, the parent and educator on relevant issues to assessment. Keeping kids as purpose, learning to move at the pace of each child and paying attention to emotional state as *frequent movement of the chair* should be considered in order to assess their performance.

*Ninthly:* abruptly, the clinician should be able adapting to unusual situations that may occur during the assessment. Here the assessment must currently be in second place. Furthermore there should be a clinical fit between the clinician and the preschooler child's personality and individual comfort zone in this area. (*egg, the use of tone of voice, being less authoritarian but also flexible, etc.*)

*Tenthly:* it should be kept in mind the time of the assessment, for example, I've evaluated a child for 20-25 minutes, as qualitative assessment takes considerable time. The

time of a case management assessment can take 30 minutes depending on the rate and time needed to warm the child. There were cases when assessing a child very drawn to herself, has taken up to 45 minutes and at the end I pretended to have realized a comprehensible assessment.

*Lastly:* must understand how assessment data will be used for the issuance of recommendations and treatment plans. Interpreting of complex data and writing a clearly report does not happen very soon as it occasionally need to move from assessment to diferential diagnosis. Attention and special sensitivity should be given to the communication of the results that are given to parents individually or in the presence of educators.

## **Mirror of Balanced Curriculum**

When we stand in front of the mirror, reflects to us the complete image. If the mirror is small, we see only a part, whether it is complete, we come to see ourselves fully. As a result, I think that a complete education must be combined from many components together in a balanced form.

- A balanced curriculum reflects the philosophy and belief of educating the whole child by enabling the child to take an active role in constructing meaning from his own experience.
- It is a basic program, not one-dimensional, that addresses all aspects of a child's development, from kindergarten to high school or otherwise can not be called *basic*.
- *One size fits all* is not the motto of a balanced curriculum because does not mean to insure everyone the same way of learning, at the same time. Children come to the educational table with different skills, talents, and needs.
- *Providing* a balanced curriculum means to meet *the needs of all children*, and assuring everyone the opportunity to develop and demonstrate their strengths and weaknesses, talents, and skills to identify and improve delays or dysfunctions in certain areas of development.

Suggestions:

*“Together by the application of current practicing in further practice“*

*“As a rule, we feel so comfort of our own worldview; as we tend to confuse it with reality”* (Lieberman 1990, at Finello M. K, (2005)

My cognitive map built a pyramidal scheme which consists of the apex and two ribs, which contain three fundamental issues that build a guide to develop a balanced curriculum in Albania. Also in my schemes I built a road, two ledge steps, a few steps, a threshold door, front door and the interior of this pyramid. The above citation defines the mission of my suggestions by which I hope not to confuse reality but to have really extracted some vital points.

The first: *self-awares* that is the parent who paves the way for the child to move in an orderly manner, educators reinforce the pillars of education tending to his developmental stages, that stairs be climbed in accordance with age. But we should note that there are many disorganized families willing to stand aside on the grounds that would work himself with the child. In pending developmental issuance to those pathological signs is the psychologist who stands at the threshold, identifies, advises, designs programs and interferes. Policy-makers are those who open their doors to allow changes to programs and curricula to enter inside as may be *balanced curriculum*. So let's think about this and realize our values and beliefs in order to know how to really recognize our personal worldview from

the confusion of reality.

The second: is the *meaning of reality* as two-partly exercise (inattention-growth); Entry into first grade is a confusing situation, anxiety-provoking for the child and should not be taken lightly. Early school experiences form the self-confidence and affect at children for the rest of their lives. Entering first grade must not be reduced to the question “*Can a child succeed in school?*”. The real issue may be the cost of success. This is a serious question facing parents making decisions for better functioning of their children in future education in Albania.

Therefore, at the end of this paper I suggest that the guide for a balanced curriculum can be formatted as a “*living document*” in Albania to help inspire parents, educators, psychologists and policy-makers to accept, use, and include “*psycho-pyramidal assessment of preschooler*” as a primary component:

- 1- not only to diagnose developmental delays and talents in certain areas
- 2- but also to design educational programs but also intervention for the prevention of mental and behavioral problems in the future and
- 3- for a better functioning in Albanian education; spiritual, intellectual and human

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