ASSESSMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: COMMONLY USED CURRICULUM MODELS AND TURKISH CURRICULUM

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Abstract: Assessment is an important part of early childhood education system. Changes in theoretical issues, increasing emphasis on interventions in early childhood and growing influences of parental concerns foster early childhood educators to use more trendy assessment techniques in early years (Gredler, 2000). In the current paper, assessment strategies of four early childhood education models including High Scope, Montessori, Waldorf and Project approach are reviewed. In addition to this review, Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE) Curriculum is also examined in order to determine similarities and differences among these different curricula. A review of the different curriculum models revealed that apart from High Scope curriculum model, other three curriculum models and MONE curriculum do not provide well defined guidelines to assess development of young children.

Keywords: assessment, early childhood education, curriculum models

According to Wortham, (2007) due to its importance, assessment in early childhood education should have some principles. First of all, assessment should use many sources of information and learning measures. Furthermore, it should improve learning of the child and/or it should be beneficial to the child. The third issue mentioned is about its fairness. All the techniques used should be fair for all children. The last issue mentioned on the principles of assessment is that it should involve both the child and his/her family.

Today, assessment is the crucial part of early childhood education system because the changes in theoretical issues, increasing emphasis on interventions in early childhood, increased focus on assessments on determination of at risk children, growing influence of parental concerns and legal decisions foster educationalists to focus on more trendy assessment techniques in early childhood years (Downs & Strand, 2006; Gredler, 2000). There are various methods to use to accomplish this goal. Assessment methods can be used in formal and informal ways (Wortham, 2008). Both formal or informal, measurement and evaluation of young children's development require well defined criteria since using only one method may sometimes not draw accurate picture of a child. It is also difficult for teachers to decide on behaviors, skills or activities to assess in forms of either observation or documentation or other methods of assessment (Gober, 2002).

In early childhood years the most commonly used assessment ways include norm referenced standardized performance tests and teacher ratings. Standardized tests aim to measure children's performance differences on tasks which are considered as representing important theoretical construct (Bagnato, 2005 as cited in Downs & Strand, 2006). Standardized tests are generally conducted two or three times in a year, with limited capacity to provide continuous information supply. Another assessment technique is called as authentic assessment. In this method an individual's growth and development is evaluated by using real life events (Taylor & Nolen, 2008). Some examples of authentic (informal) assessment techniques are; observation, teacher designed measures, checklists, rating scales, rubrics, performance and portfolio assessments, interviews, directed assignments, portfolios, narrative reports and technology based assessments (Wortham, 2008).

The results of assessment, regardless of the type of method used, can be used in variety of ways while planning for instruction, reporting progress or evaluating instructional program (Wortham, 2008). To exemplify, a form of authentic assessment technique used in fields of early childhood special education and psychology is curriculum-based assessment (CBA). CBA is assessing mastery of specific skills leading a desired outcome. This approach does not directly rely on teacher ratings. It relies on repeated direct performance assessments of skills of young children. CBA provides educators with continuous formative assessment of child's mastery of skills which help them to develop important outcomes (Downs & Strand, 2006).

Assessment is to be considered as a process and each child should be followed in this process, not in a form of product. In Turkey, assessment is done in a structured way, in predetermined times to learn about the development of an individual. A number of studies are conducted in Turkey related to assessment and evaluation techniques used by teachers. The results revealed that the teachers face with problems in implementing new assessment and evaluation techniques in their classrooms (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007). These problems might emerge due to teachers' lack of knowledge about implementation of these new constructivist assessment techniques. As a result of their lack of knowledge, they mostly prefer to use the most familiar assessment technique for them as exams or face to face interviews. For instance, in the study conducted with elementary school students, researchers investigated assessment strategies used by primary school teachers (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007). Teachers stated that they mostly prefer to use traditional assessment techniques while assessing their students' progress. The least likely used method is students' self-evaluation. However, in constructivist education teachers can use various assessment and evaluation techniques (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007). In line with the findings of the previous study, according to the study conducted by Karakus & Kösa (2009) teachers find constructivist assessment tools time consuming and leading to extra effort. However, the findings of the study showed that although the teachers face with problems in using new assessment strategies, they also believe that these new techniques are helpful for them to learn about characteristics of children and the program used in their schools (Karakuş & Kösa, 2009).

The major purpose of this review is to provide detailed information about the assessment strategies used by different curriculum models and MONE curriculum. Under this goal, brief information is provided for each four widely known early childhood education curriculum models including High Scope, Montessori, Waldorf and Project approach. Then information about their current early childhood education curriculum assessment strategies are presented along with information related to MONE curriculum.

Curriculum Models and Assessment

High Scope Curriculum Model & Assessment

The beginning of High Scope model goes back till 1960's to Ypsilanti, Michigan, USA. The model is a mixture of traditional teacher experience and Jean Piaget's constructivist theory of child

development (Wortham, 2006). The curriculum aims to help children gain knowledge and skills in the areas of literacy, initiative and social relations, movement, music and classification. The model has a major goal of helping an individual to be able to think independently and be a good problem solver. That is why assessment, adult-child interactions, daily routines and learning experiences are considered as the crucial parts of the curriculum in addition to helping children to be active learners (Peyton, 2005).

After implementing the curriculum model many years, the High Scope research foundation created an assessment model of High Scope curriculum. The assessment tool is called as High Scope Child Observation Record (COR). COR aims to help teachers and administrators to do their best in their program to support each child's developmental needs. The model has got three assessment tools. The first two of them, Infant Toddler Child Observation Record and Preschool Child Observation Record are developed for infants and toddlers; whereas Early Literacy Skills Assessment (ELSA) is developed for measuring literacy skills of children who enroll in preschool programs (Highscope, 2009).

Montessori Curriculum Model and Assessment

Montessori curriculum model, emerged in the early 20th century, divides education into three main parts: motor, sensory, and language or intellectual education. The classroom is a prepared environment with materials that are carefully sequenced and structured. Materials are introduced by teacher and also children can select materials freely during their independent work projects. One of the major principles of the curriculum model aims to promote self discipline in children. Montessori education's another key aspect is its use of hands. Throughout the day children use their hands and this supports their sensory development (Blount, 2007; Wortham, 2006).

In Montessori schools assessment is done through teacher observations, anecdotal records, and parent-teacher conference forms. The results of Roemer's study (as cited in Dunn, 2000) indicated that besides those methods, 90% of Montessori schools of her sample used some form of standardized tests. In the Montessori early childhood education settings, anecdotal records, informal conferences with students, observation of students, one-to-one interviews with students, checklists of lessons, demonstration of skill mastery and standardized achievement tests are used to assess each child's development areas independently (Dunn, 2000).

Waldorf Curriculum Model & Assessment

The first Waldorf schools were founded in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1919 (Ashley, 2008). The major goal of Waldorf schools was to help young children to adjust to both physical and spiritual facts of their existence and use them in the best way. In Waldorf curriculum, a teacher is seen as a gardener of the child's soul and cultivator of environment (Ogletree, 1996).

According to Rudolf Steiner, who is the founder of Waldorf education, human being is composed of threefold being which are spirit, soul and body. The capacities of these three mechanisms are unfold in early childhood, middle childhood and adulthood. In the early childhood years, which are considered as from birth to age of seven, the educational focus of Waldorf model is on play, bodily intelligence and oral language (Schimitt-Stegmann, 1997). In this process imitation is the crucial aspect of life which will help to identify the self with the environment by the help of active will. Therefore, environment of child should provide opportunity to imitate in a meaningful way. In Waldorf curriculum, standardized tests that are used to assess children's educational progress are problematic because they generally present an incomplete picture of student's abilities. On the other hand, children's products or three dimensional paradigms help adults to recognize emotional, physical, cognitive development of young children. Because of this reason Waldorf teachers assess the development of young children in many ways to understand their balanced whole development.

Consequently, portfolio method (teachers observe, describe and characterize a child's school performance) is found to be more appropriate for Waldorf curriculum's assessment (Petrash, 2002).

Project Approach & Assessment

Project approach was the central of progressive education in 1960s and 1980s. In today's early childhood education system, it is used by many schools as a way of curriculum. Projects are defined as in depth investigation of a topic which is undertaken with a small group of children or as a whole class. A main focus of the project works is finding answers for the questions which are proposed by teacher, children or both the teacher and the children (Helm & Katz, 2001).

In the project approach, a topic, learning process and results are parts of a whole and indispensable. Moreover, children focus on many skills of themselves in forms of selecting a topic, investigating questions, characterizing findings and contributing to others (Schuler, 2000). Because of this reason active learning of children should be fostered through helping them to use their own questions and directions used as steps for learning. Therefore, in order to be able to understand the functions of the objects, an individual should have hands on experiences with various objects (Feng, 1989).

Assessment in project approach is done through informal assessment techniques. In detail, individual portfolios and observations are done by the teachers through use of developmental checklists and anecdotal notes. Children's self-reflections based on understandings of their own and narratives of learning experiences of whole class, individual or small groups are the major forms of assessment methods used in project approach classes (Helm & Katz, 2001).

Assessment in Turkish Ministry of National Education – Early Childhood Education

Curriculum

Assessment in the system of Turkish Ministry of National Education (MONE) Curriculum is divided in three basic headings; assessment of child, assessment of program and self assessment of teacher.

According to teacher handbook of MONE curriculum in an early childhood setting, a child is to be known by a teacher very well. For this reason, the teacher is to know the developmental characteristics of each child in reference to concrete tools. Teachers can use observational forms, anecdotal records, developmental checklists, standardized tests, portfolios and developmental reports. In the booklet of MONE curriculum, an example of each tool is provided for teachers.

In the MONE curriculum, assessment of a program is done through analyzing the objectives and goals of activities done in the classroom. Teachers are advised to plan the objectives and goals of their activities by considering each child's reflections to activity. Teachers can also asses yearly or monthly program by using their own reflective viewpoint. Moreover, they are also advised to assess their own effectiveness by considering both child's and program evaluation results in the MONE curriculum. Indeed, by analyzing development of their students and the effectiveness of their program, teachers assess their own progress in an informal way.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Assessment might give dangerous results under two mismatch conditions (Taylor & Nolen, 2008). The first one occurs when there is a mismatch between a school and the world beyond the school. The second one emerges when there is a mismatch between assessment tools and instruction. The curriculum models in early childhood education consider education from different perspectives. Since the models reflect different viewpoints towards education, as a result, they might

have different assessment strategies. Because of this reason, mismatches between the world beyond the school, assessment tools and instruction can be seen.

In the current paper, mainly four models which are High Scope, Montessori, Waldorf and Project approach are analyzed in relation to their cores and assessment strategies used. Except from High Scope curriculum model, the other three curriculum models have authentic but not standardized system of assessing the development of young children, curriculum or teacher. Indeed, the assessment system of the High Scope curriculum seems informal but it has a standard, some of which are open ended rubrics to be completed at all High Scope schools.

In addition to the models mentioned above, the MONE curriculum is also analyzed in terms of assessment strategies used. The MONE curriculum teacher handbook provides some information for teachers about assessment methods that can be used in classroom settings by providing examples of them. Yet, studies conducted with teachers in Turkey related to assessment issues indicate that teachers still need detailed information and evaluation guidelines about different types of assessment and evaluation techniques (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007; Karakuş & Kösa, 2009). Especially in 2006, educational system of early childhood years in Turkey has changed. A new model of curriculum developed based on constructive perspective. It is, however, still missing some of the requirements of constructivist education in terms of assessment techniques.

Assessment is to be considered as a process and in relation to development of a child at any age should not be considered in a form of product. The studies conducted in Turkey on this issue indicate that assessment is done in a structured way, in predetermined times to learn about the development of an individual. However, it is important to know the process of that development and use appropriate constructivist assessment techniques (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007; Karakuş & Kösa, 2009; Kan, 2007; Öncü, 2009; Ünver, 2007).

In order to have a balance between the goals of education and ways of assessment that can be used throughout the process, teachers are to know assessment and evaluation techniques in accordance with the curriculum models they are implementing. At this point, it is important to consider their viewpoints, needs, and deficiencies related to assessment and evaluation methods they use (Karakuş & Kösa, 2009). Also, it is important to reconsider the issue that through traditional methods it is difficult to assess development of each child in the classroom environments where constructivist education techniques are implemented. Teachers should use different assessment and evaluation techniques. To reach this goal, it is important to provide some in-service training sessions or some other types of professional development activities for teachers to help them to be able to use different assessment and evaluation techniques in their classrooms effectively (Gelbal & Kelecioglu, 2007).

Limitations

In early childhood years development is so rapid therefore it is very difficult to assess development of young children appropriately (Gober, 2002), and because of this reason assessment in early childhood education is different from the concepts of education in older ages. Finding out appropriate ways to assess development of young children might be very difficult for both teachers and researchers. As a result while preparing the current paper, it was difficult to find out resources on assessment strategies used in early childhood education especially about the stated curriculum models. In the paper the references found mainly focuses on giving information about the curriculum models and do not go into detail about assessment in the curriculum models used. Even in the MONE curriculum, it was difficult to get detailed information about concrete assessment strategies to be used in early childhood education. Because of these reasons, it is very important to focus on comparing and contrasting detailed characteristics of curriculum models in terms of assessment in order to provide resources for teachers and researchers.

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