

Chapter 51

Performance–Based Assessment Evaluated by Croatian Preschool Teachers and Students: Implications for Study Program and Practice Modifications

Sanja Tatalović Vorkapić
University of Rijeka, Croatia

Vesna Katić
University of Rijeka, Croatia

ABSTRACT

Performance-based assessment strongly relies on the observation of children's behavior, preschool teachers' objectivity and accuracy, and presents a significant part of documenting children's development. Therefore, the main aim of this chapter is to analyze the PBA-use and its evaluation by Croatian preschool teachers and students from the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka. 60 undergraduate students and 64 preschool teachers participated in this empirical research by filling out self-rated questionnaires. As it was expected, students and preschool teachers demonstrated positive attitudes toward PBA and its documentation in general and if it is applied (will be applied) in practice. However, the students' positive attitudes, satisfaction and perceived usefulness of PBA are significantly higher than those of preschool teachers. These last findings definitely imply the need for modifications of the policy of the preschool education system, as well as significant changes that should be done in practice and relevant study programs.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-political changes that have marked the last two decades have significantly influenced the education system as a part of the social structure whose activity is focused on the common good of all stakeholders and the society at large. This is a radical change of the entire socio-political discourse within which to

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affirm the new principles or value orientations such as: democracy, autonomy, pluralism, globalization as total interdependence among countries (Spajić–Vrkaš, et al., 2001). The reform of the European education system started in the 1990s is directed toward raising the quality and efficiency of education. Access to education, both as a factor and as a means of developing human capital, should achieve three main goals: development of individual potential, development of socially reduced disparities and inequalities between individuals and groups, and development of the economy by providing usable skills on the labor market. The EU educational policy option to achieve the goal sees the curricular approach to the development of study programs based competencies and standards whose explanation associated with learning viewed as a process independent of content and context (Babić, 2007; Budić, 2008; Vizek Vidović, 2009).

With that intention, the reform of the initial teacher education began in the mid-eighties. Although the reforms of education systems in developed countries started from their different traditions and research of school effectiveness, it was reinforced by empirical evidence that the effectiveness of any reform depends on appropriate professional preparedness and motivation of teachers (Budić, 2008; Domović, 2009; Nixon, 2011). The basic context of changes in initial teacher education makes the universally accepted assumption of the educational policy in the European Union, and the Bologna process as a higher education reform is directed toward promoting the mobility of students and teachers by establishing the European Higher Education Area. Croatia has been involved in the process since 2001. The universally accepted assumption of the educational policy of the European Union aims to recognize education as a generator of the quality of human and social capital, as a function of economic competitiveness and social cohesion in the society. Teachers are seen as key factors of the overall effectiveness of the education system, which in turn affects the quality of their education (Domović, 2009).

Changes in the initial teacher education in accordance with the guidelines of the Bologna process aim to change the educational paradigm. In the center of the educational process is the student. The educational process is seen as an active participant educational process, which takes the responsibility of developing the students' competences described in the learning outcomes. Learning outcomes express *"what a student should know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after they've completed a learning process"* (Kovač, 2008, p. 12). Performance-based assessments *"represent a set of strategies for the... application of knowledge, skills, and work habits through the performance of tasks that are meaningful and engaging to students"* (Hibbard et al., 1996, p. 5, according to Brualdi, 1998).

The only accurate way to really know and understand the child and his behavior is to carefully observe him. Various developmental psychologists and pedagogists have demonstrated the utility of observation method within numerous theoretical models and practices. In addition, the observation method presents the basic method of learning; therefore, it is widely used as the main learning means within teacher education (Tatalović Vorkapić, Vujičić & Čepić, 2014). Performance-based assessment strongly relies on the observation of children's behavior, preschool teachers' objectivity and accuracy, and presents a significant part of documenting children's development and well-being. For a better understanding of performance-based assessment, it is necessary to access the ontological, epistemological and methodological aspects, and as participants of the entire process both subjects and objects of the social, historical and cultural context (Vujičić, Tatalović Vorkapić & Boneta, 2012; Vujičić & Miketek, 2013). Educational psychology has revealed many years ago a very high ecological validity and reliability of running performance-based assessment in an authentic setting (Vizek-Vidović, Vlahović-Štetić, Rijavec & Miljković, 2003). Giudici, Rinaldi and Krechevsky (2001) described pedagogical documentation, which relies on the performance-based assessment results, as *"visible learning"* – a process in which a

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