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FACULTY OF EDUCATION
BITOLA**

**Third International Conference
EDUCATION ACROSS BORDERS**

**EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
ACROSS TIME AND SPACE**

(1100th Death Anniversary of St. Clement of Ohrid)



**6-7 October 2016
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Conference Proceedings

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Third International Conference “Education across Borders”
Education and Research across Time and Space
(1100th Death Anniversary of St. Clement of Ohrid)

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SPECIFIC FEATURES OF STUDENTS' ACTIVITIES PLANNING

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Abstract

When planning¹⁴⁴, organizing, conducting, and evaluating the class instruction, the teacher starts from the curriculum that – along with the planning and organizational guidelines, each school is provided with by the relevant educational institutions. Accordingly, a very specific aspect of the teacher's daily planning are students' activities that should be selected and recorded within the very phase of the said preparation for realization of the class teaching. Therefore, bearing in mind that students' class activities proceed from the set course objectives and content, the aim of this paper is to provide an insight whether those activities are really planned on a daily basis in the lesson operational plan and to determine whether the students' activities performed in class have really been recorded in the teachers' daily lesson operational plans as well as how the said situations reflect on the teaching process and on students' learning.

Being set as explained above, the research of this problem is empirical and of descriptive characteristics. As components of a broader research problem within a doctoral thesis¹⁴⁵ qualitative research methods have been used: analysis of the pedagogical documents, records, and the daily lesson operational plans and preparations; non-directive interview with the teachers about their views on the planning of the teaching process; and participative (descriptive and focused) observation of the entire planning and realization of students' activities in the educational practice.

Keywords: Daily planning, students' activities

Theoretical justification

The daily activities plan encompasses the data relevant for each of the lessons in the workday and – above all, for the students' activities in each phase of the lesson realization (introductory activities, instructional-and-learning activities, and the end-of-class reflective

¹⁴⁴Terminological equivalents in the new curriculum following the Cambridge Elementary Education Curriculum are long-term; middle-term, and short-term planning (see Pejchinovska, 2015: 78). In this paper the focus is placed on students' activities planning in the daily lesson operational plans. In addition, with the concept "planning" we refer not only to selecting concrete students' activities for each stage of the lesson but to the recording of those activities in the teachers' daily lesson plans and preparations.

¹⁴⁵ „Активностите на учениците и процесот на учење во природонаучното и општественото подрачје“, Педагошки факултет – Битола (ПФБТ), Универзитет „Св. Климент Охридски“ – Битола (УКЛО – Битола), 2015. / ("Students' Activities in the Learning Process in the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences Courses", Faculty of Education – Bitola (PFBT), University St. Clement of Ohrid – Bitola (UKLO – Bitola), 2015.

activities); it is projected on the bases of the specific aims and the content being taught, with all the skills of the teacher applied in the design of concrete, authentic, precise and intelligible activities which would enable optimal realization of the instruction objectives and best results of the educational process. In order to fulfill this purpose, the teacher is bound to primarily have a good insight into students' perceiving characteristics, their cognitive learning styles and the options for developing their motivation to perform the planned activities, and to make much of the didactic-methodological and communication-and-interaction structure of the instruction.

In line with all of the said, there are highly important issues that each teacher has to take care of when planning the lesson and when operationalizing the planned lesson activities: whether the specific objectives are practical, realizable, and corresponding to students' individual characteristics; which activities to be planned for the students to perform; whether there is cognitive, psychological, logical, and structural relation, correlation, and conditionality between the specific features and the designed activities; whether the activities have a clear structure i.e. beginning, progress and end; whether the specific objectives are realizable in a single school day or their fulfillment requires more days; whether the load of the designed activities is acceptable for slow-progress students; what the teacher expects from the realization of each of the posed specific objectives and from each of the students of the class; which instruments and techniques the teacher applies to monitor students' achievements; which stage of the class is used for formative assessment and what form of feedback information on students' achievements.

When operationalizing the lesson objective activities it is always advisable to start from the elements of active instruction model design – the interactive learning. Namely, in this relation, Adamčevska points out the necessary aspects that the teacher must take into consideration when making a lesson plan: the reasons underlying the planned steps (for instance, opting for one method over another: the descriptive method over the demonstrative one or the demonstrative one over the field observation, etc.); whether the activities planned can sufficiently stimulate students learning involvement; the extent to which the planned activities can instigate the process of students' learning; whether the warm up activities and end-of-class activities will be adequately and correctly understood by all of the students; whether to require from students to adapt their activities to the spirit of the objective guidelines and whether those specific objectives would serve the purpose of the plan and process of students' learning; whether it is possible to precisely determine which activities correspond with the interests, abilities, and affinities of each of the students; whether the daily lesson plan would consist of an outline of activities to be performed by the overall class or it would contain a detailed list of activities designed for each micro group and each macro group member to perform in class?. (Adamčevska, 1996:35 – 36).

The successful operationalization of the activities objectives entails that teachers comply with the so-called *Mager's Principles* such as use of action verbs which describe students' activities; adequate selection of questions to elicit students' knowledge, competences, and skills (with regards to the realization of the set objectives); description of the criterion applied in students' achievement assessment (De Zan, 2005: 65).

Some of the action verbs used in operationalization of activities objectives are listed here to suffice the illustration: insert, fill in, embed, add, prove, find out, name, omit, measure, design, inform, express yourself, state your opinion, retell, calculate, be more specific, measure, model, colour, draw, write, make, state, give an order, grade, explain, answer, determine, mark, tag, underline, line up, set, search, match, spot, recognize, convert, translate, display, read, segment, differentiate, distinguish, develop, solve, classify, compose, sketch, realize, put together,

compare, use, and etc. In addition, aside from mapping out the course content and determining and operationalizing the objectives, before plunging into selection of lesson activities to be included, the teacher must identify the level of students' knowledge (their abilities to recollect, recognize, reproduce, create, and etc.), that is, the degree to which skills and competences have been developed with the students, via activities correspondingly designed for this purpose (De Zan, 2005: 65).

The differentiation of the activities is another complex issue. It refers to the determination of the type and number of activities in accordance with the individual student's characteristics in a way in which they would make their learning process agreeable to their individual abilities, affinities, and interests. The situations identified in our educational practice denote that teachers instruct students who differ in their potentials, intellectual capacities, abilities, and etc., a fact that has to be taken into consideration when planning students' activities on a daily basis. In order to satisfy the needs of all of the students taught, the individualized instruction approach is increasingly becoming the core issue in education regardless of the obstacles in its way, especially those arising from the number of students attendees in a single class, which is very high in some schools and which makes it a quite demanding task for a teacher to organize and realize the instruction, requiring numerous competences¹⁴⁶. Furthermore, on the grounds of identified flaws or any inarticulateness, teachers make changes, adaptation, and modifications of the instruction plan, which again supports our previously stated claim that optimal planning of the teaching process in schools is a highly complex issue¹⁴⁷, (Janusheva, Pejchinovska, 2011: 72).

Bearing in mind the background as described above, we tend to point out that the key determinants – the curriculum objectives of both the Natural Sciences field and the Social Sciences field; the specific instruction planning features; the concrete objectives of the courses instructions; the types of the courses content taught; students' age characteristics, and the teacher's role and characteristics¹⁴⁸, although not discussed here in this paper, are the most significant ones for quality instruction planning of students' activities that each teacher has to address as the principles to start from when planning the overall course realization.

Methodological frame

This research has been conducted with the application of the qualitative methods: analysis of the pedagogic records and the daily operational lesson plans; non-directive interviewing teachers and identifying their stands regarding lesson planning; and both descriptive and group focused participant observation of the overall students' activities planning and realization within the educational practice.

The non-random sampling rested upon deliberate sampling technique drawing sample representatives from class communities in which active teaching method is employed with at least two running projects for active students' learning involvement in class. The deliberate sample consisted of two subsamples: a *subsample of schools* and *interviewees* from the schools researched – 6 elementary schools from the country, out of which 16 teachers of each grade between first grade and fifth grade, and a *subsample of classes* – 2 classes in the elementary school "Todor Angelevski" – Bitola, in which the realization of more than half of the teaching

¹⁴⁶ For more flexible modes of planning the students' learning as well as about teachers' involvement in planning the lesson objectives see Vilotijevic, 1999: 54 – 56, *Didaktika* 2.

¹⁴⁷ Possible fluctuations in number of classes given on certain course content/unit set with the course plan can largely affect students' achievements; however those are not in the focus of our research analysis.

¹⁴⁸ See Pejchinovska, 2015: 83 – 100.

content was recorded via participant observation and pedagogic records along with the daily lesson & operational plans and students activities effects were analyzed.

The research sample was examined over the period between September 1 and June 30 of the school year 2012 – 2013.

Results and discussion

The curricula for the first and second cycle of elementary education are *integrated*. The contents of different areas are integrated into thematic units, most often the integration being started with the Natural Sciences courses (such as introducing the environment and nature). The planning of the school educational work (the global – yearly plans and the thematic ones) is performed within common areas teaching groups through which teachers take part in the overall planning of the educational work, each assigned with separate tasks.

Actually, in the non-directive interview the teachers stated that the global and thematic planning were worked on in joint collaboration within the common areas teaching groups in which they were assigned with tasks, established an insight, and took initiatives until the necessary changes were implemented and the overall integrated curriculum was completed. In addition, while, on the one hand, the teachers stated that their individual efforts were most notably expressed in the daily lesson plans design on the basis of the existing curriculum frame and in which they charted the usual daily planning components such as lesson objectives, content, teaching-and-learning aids, teaching methods, forms, as well as instruments for monitoring students' performance and achievements – which we highly approve of, on the other hand, in the recorded state of affairs via participant observation and the detailed analysis of the authentic daily lesson plans we found nothing more beyond their answers that they also did chart students' and teacher's activities in their lesson plans.

On the grounds of the interpretation of the participant observation results, we identified the *basic elements of active teaching* in the researched sample of course classes. In other words, aside from the integrated teaching approach in planning the teaching content of the areas taught, i.e., *Introduction to Environment/Nature/Society, Mathematics, Mother Tongue, Fine Arts, Music, and PE*, the realization of the classes showed teachers' reasonable care regarding the number and objectives of the activities in class and students' independence in performing them.

In the analyzed *daily operational lesson plans* we found teachers were taking care about the aspects of didactics and the teaching methods as well as the premises and time features in the educational process realization in each of the courses taught. Indeed, in practice, the daily operational lesson plans reflected the course content correspondingly i.e. as charted for the respective days; they were realized in accordance with the course content objectives set with the curriculum, implementing the planned teaching methods and aids and at the scheduled lesson place and time. Equally addressed in the lesson plans were the activities charted in accordance with the lesson stages (introductory, teaching-learning, and assessment) whereas the end-of-class activities regarding the results and effectiveness of the teaching and learning were only briefly listed.

The *more detailed analysis of the daily operational lesson plans* showed that the activities charted were only listed without giving clear picture of who they were designed for to perform, i.e., which ones were planned to be performed by the students and which ones to be performed by the teacher. Moreover, the types of students' activities were not defined either; instead, only the type of the instruction was stated, according to which we could only presume what activities the teacher had on mind. As an illustration, in the operational plan¹⁴⁹, the lesson in

¹⁴⁹ We have found out that the daily lesson plan for the same grade course classes – as a piece of the filed records on the realized classes, has been the same with all of the teachers i.e. either prepared in collaboration or shared, whereas

the *Nature* course for fourth-graders was planned for revising; accordingly, the activities to be performed included navigated conversational activities as *introductory* ones; independent students' work, teacher's supervision, guidance, and correction as *teaching-and-learning activities*; and checking the results of the work and drawing conclusion as *evaluative activities*. In addition, the lesson activities for this level were not clearly discriminated nor were the types and the number of the activities determined in the daily lesson plans. Thereby, those generalized activities – in this situation listed/perceived as teaching methods, do not make it possible to decide whether they are in correlation with the lesson content and objectives i.e. whether they proceed from them.

The situation presented above collides with the teachers' statements obtained with the *non-directive interview* in which most of them answered that they designed students' activities for each lesson stage in their daily operational plans. In other words, all of the teachers took the stance that their individual endeavours and contribution were at their peak when planning the daily lessons and adapting the study programmes to the students' needs. *However, it was evident that the teachers did modify their instruction on the basis of the previously diagnosed teaching-and-learning effects and that they did tune their lessons to mend the failures and fill the gaps identified and recorded in their students' learning, but although employing various activities in class to achieve all of this, they had none charted nor listed with this aim in their daily lesson plans.* In fact, teachers' individual endeavors were manifested in class and in their taking necessary measures to clarify unclear topics or sections or to add details to insufficiently described ones, thus helping their students to either improve or enhance their competences and meet the set course objectives; they managed this via adapting the number and type of activities to accord with the genuine students' abilities, and with stimulating combinations of teaching methods and forms.

Furthermore, upon examining the daily operational plans, it was established that neither the instruments nor the techniques of monitoring students' learning process and assessing their learning performance/outcomes/results regarding the given lesson were specified. More precisely, teachers largely used students achievement record lists – designed by the EDB¹⁵⁰ for the purpose of formative assessment, in which they defined students achievements for each instructed topic with symbols respective for the three levels (basic, medium, and high level of achievements) and with marks denoting individual progress; progress with teacher's associations, progress with teacher's help; and with marks for no progress irrespectively of the teacher's help.

The factual situation identified regarding teachers' daily lesson planning in general puts at question the organizational and articulatory dimension of the lesson realization as well as the successfulness of the realization of students' activities when they are not specified in the daily lesson operational planning stage. In fact, it is this stage in which a large number of issues and dilemmas must be accurately resolved. For instance, the question of preferring the application of one method over another, certain teaching form rather than another, particular activities instead of some others; the outcome of the activities planned to be performed: whether they would spur students' involvement, whether they would motivate students to put more efforts into their learning, whether they would improve students' individual learning, whether those planned activities meet each student's interests, preferences, abilities, and talents, and whether they are

students' activities and teaching methods were variably adapted to students' and class abilities while conducting the instruction.

¹⁵⁰Biro za razvoj na obrazovaniето – Skopje / Educational Development Bureau – Skopje.

adequate for the objectives aimed at; which instruments and techniques to select as best for monitoring and assessing the results of the realized students' activities.

However, regardless of the fact that precise records and specifications of students' activities were not found in teachers' daily lesson operational plans, the classes reflecting active learning in which research procedures were applied, and which – according to the results of the focused observation, were in higher number than those traditionally organized, showed that the class instructions included *quality perceptive-motor activities as well as receptive, observational, discovering, researching, and evaluating on the realization of which provided not only students' cognitive competences development but the development of their socio-emotional and psycho-motor competences as well.*

Conclusion

The conclusions simply flow out from the previously said. In practice, students' activities are not specified in the daily operational plans, nor are the types of the activities for the students and the teachers. However, the factual situation we had identified does not affect the active learning and the achievement of the goals set, primarily because of the personal and professional competences and experience of the teachers, as well as because of their well-established familiarity with students' potentials and nature. In addition, it is a fact that the planning of the entire course instruction entails an immensely wide range of activities which take time, energy, high motivation and complete commitment to the educational process.

As our field findings showed as well as the teachers' statement in the non-directive interview and the observation with participation, the double record taking of students' achievement (in a students' achievement record book in hard copy and in an electronic document) as well as the troubles in electronic records rendering that teachers went through additionally make the work more complex and prolong the time necessary to manage those records. This means that it is the doubled pedagogic record taking work that takes up much of the time necessary and useful for designing and selecting learning modes, and focusing on teaching and learning activities.

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