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FAKULTET ZA SPECIJALNU  
EDUKACIJU I REHABILITACIJU

UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE  
FACULTY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION  
AND REHABILITATION

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## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REFLECTION-BASED APPROACHES IN THE EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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*Education and rehabilitation of children with disabilities represent complex processes that need to be approached in continuous, structured, and sustained programs. Professionals need to have the competences to understand, plan and support every aspect of evaluation and intervention, which sometimes can be a challenge, undergoing a meaning-making process of the child's learning and development, trying to answer to questions such as: how the child is learning, what his or her difficulties mean, how difficulties can be overcome and progress be achieved, the better support of needs and interests of child with disabilities while meaningful learning experiences are created. It is essential to understand how and why the child learns in a specific way, how can intervention become conceptualized, operational and implemented in various educational and social contexts, what creation of opportunities mean and the role of environment. The reflection-based approach has known a growth and application in the domain of special and inclusive education, promoting the concept of reflexive practitioner who analyzes, projects and reconsiders assessment and intervention according to observations and results. The presentation will focus on the implications of the practices based on reflection in planning and developing assessment and intervention programs, the specificity and the functional outcomes.*

**Keywords:** reflection-based approach, education and rehabilitation, children with disabilities, learning and development

Teachers have various roles and responsibilities being facilitators of development, communication and learning, enabling participation and involvement of children in learning experiences, managing interactions and relationships within supportive environments and aiming the results of educational programs and learning processes. Teachers also need to work in multidisciplinary teams, interacting and cooperating with parents, colleagues, and different specialists, participating in

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taking decisions and implement those decisions so that evaluation and intervention programs can be of great benefit and effectiveness for learners with disabilities and their families. Teachers have to prepare resources and materials to be used by students in their learning and testing contexts, but they also need to rethink their practices and be updated with the latest knowledge of how children learn (Ostorga, 2006). Bullough (1997) cited by Rice et al. (2012) argued that teacher identity is the basis of decision-making and determines them to engage in actions based on their knowledge and experiences. The authors state that teacher knowledge consists of formal and practical knowledge, experience, action and identity. The literature of specialty and numerous studies underlie the importance of teachers becoming reflective practitioners and critically reflect on their own decisions and actions. Reynolds (2011, p. 5) proposes a definition of reflection that involves thinking about past or current experience of events, situations or actions, attributing a meaning to them in determining future choices, decisions and actions. Zeichner and Liston (2011) cited by Hathazi (2020) state that teaching means both thinking and feeling, and those who can reflectively think and feel, will have more professional rewards. Kolb (2015, p. 50) defines learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” and learning takes place from the creative tension among four learning modes, which are: experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting. Beard and Wilson (2002) apud Burns and Danyluk (2017) state that to learn effectively, there is a need for an environment of trust and support. Teachers must be aware that they need to develop a trustful environment for the students to engage in learning and participation. Burns and Danyluk (2017) presenting Kolb’s model of experiential learning (1984) focus on the phases that the teachers may go through in their professional development programs to understand the implications of experiential learning. The model starts with the concrete experience in which the teacher functions and have the experiences. The first phase is followed by observation and reflection on the experience, making associations with previous experiences and knowledge. The third step is formation of abstract concepts based on the reflections towards the fourth step of new ideas. Some of the questions that the authors in the study suggest for teachers involved in professional development programs relate experiential learning to the development of teacher identity. A few examples are: “How will I teach.? Will I be successful in. . .? Does it matter that I don’t know about. . .? How can I teach lessons that. . .? How do I create lessons. . .?” (Burns & Danyluk, 2017, p. 254)

Sparks-Langer and Colton (1991) cited by Sofo and Easter (2010) propose three elements of reflection: cognition, critical reflection and narrative inquiry, so that teachers can use their knowledge in decision-making processes, to address issues such as beliefs and experiences and to interpret their own actions. Sofo and Easter (2010) citing Van Manen categorize reflective practice into three types: retrospective reflection, anticipatory reflection and reflection in action. Within a model of reflection presented by Sellars (2017) cited by Hathazi (2020) the first step is to acknowledge the condition and the situations that triggers reflection, meaning the need to identify the experience that will be reflected upon. The WHAT? Question, will be followed by the SO WHAT? Question, determining teachers to identify

causes and the implications, followed by analysis and discussions, finalizing with the question NOW WHAT as a following plan of action. Reynolds (2011) describes three modes of reflection: technical, aligned and critical. The technical mode refers to problem-solving and identifying the best solution. The aligned mode ensures that the solutions are supported by beliefs, values and norms and the critical mode questions the above-mentioned conditions.

Common principles of reflective teaching consist in professional development and increase of competences through adoption of responsibility, analysis and critical evaluation of action and practices (Calderhead, 1987, p. 270). Schon and DeSanctis (1986) suggest that successful practitioners frequently think about what they are doing, so that “reflecting-in-action” is implemented, and practitioners learn to cope with the difficulties and challenges within practice. The question of WHAT to teach and to WHOM precedes the question of HOW to teach (Grant & Zeichner, 1984). It is stated that traditional methods of teaching and classroom structures are often decontextualized from students’ background and experiences, so that knowledge may lack meaning (Dewey, 1938, apud Breunig, 2017). Teachers need to take into consideration the learning profiles and experiences of learners, to develop an educational context and space which is natural and supportive, to use resources so that the learners can see utility and possibilities of immediate use, to establish interactions based on trust and perceived support and understanding. It is not only about the content and how to present it, but student-centered approach is needed, to know students, how they are, how they learn, but also teacher-centered approaches so teachers know about themselves, what are their values and what are their actions driven by in terms of developing analytical and reflections in teaching (Gheith & Aljaberi, 2018).

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