

Abstract

This dissertation addresses the issue of the propaedeutics of student self-governance in early primary education, highlighting its significance in the context of dynamic socio-cultural transformations and the growing demands placed on civic education. The aim of the study was to examine the experiences of children aged 6–9 in relation to participation in self-governance activities, and to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder the development of agency, co-responsibility, and participation within the school environment. The analysis was situated within the pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and political science traditions, as well as within the framework of the new sociology of childhood, which views children as active participants in social life.

The theoretical part of the dissertation provides an analysis of the evolution of the concept of self-governance in philosophy and pedagogy, a developmental profile of the child in the early school years, the role of the school and teacher in shaping social competences, and the legal frameworks concerning children's participation and self-governance. Based on the literature review and original analyses, an authorial model of the propaedeutics of self-governance was developed. The model integrates four key dimensions: the role of the peer group, the role of the teacher, the culture of the school, and the influence of educational policy.

The empirical research was conducted in a community school, grounded in a subject-oriented and participatory paradigm, and employed action research methodology. A methodological triangulation was applied, encompassing participant observation, semi-structured interviews, sociometric tests, researcher diaries, video recordings, and photo walks. The analysis and interpretation of the data focused on four perspectives: children's experiences, teacher practices, the dynamics of peer relations, and the institutional role of the school.

The findings indicate that young children conceptualize self-governance through experiences of co-decision-making and influence over classroom life, although their participation is often constrained by formal school structures and the hidden curriculum. A key factor supporting the development of self-governance is the teacher, who acts as a moderator and guide, creating spaces for children's initiative and shared responsibility. The peer group constitutes a crucial environment for learning negotiation, cooperation, and conflict resolution, while the school, through its culture and institutional framework, can both foster and restrict children's democratic experiences.

The dissertation contributes to pedagogical scholarship by proposing an original model of the propaedeutics of self-governance, which may serve as both a diagnostic and practical tool for teachers, school leaders, and educational policymakers. The recommendations presented have an applied character, offering strategies for creating environments that foster children's agency, participation, and sense of responsibility for the community, thereby supporting the long-term development of civic and democratic attitudes in society.