

Forms, methods and means of using foreign experience in the organization of educational activities in non-state preschool education

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Abstract . The article presents an analytical review of the systems of external independent evaluation of preschool education quality in the United States and Singapore. Special attention is given to the specifics of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as well as programs like STARS (Pennsylvania, USA) and SPARK (Singapore). The key characteristics of external quality assessment in these countries include voluntary participation, the presence of a PR component (so that parents understand how to navigate in a variety of kindergartens), support of leadership qualities and training managers within organizations, the use of standardized rating scales (eg, ECERS-R), which have been recognized by the international community and focus more on evaluating environmental performance rather than children's results. So the review of the foreign practices of organizing pre-school education quality assessment helps us to better understand how to form our national system of independent expert examination of pre-school education in the most productive way.

Keywords : external quality assessment system, development of pre-school education , international experience, USA, Singapore, the ECERS scale.

Introduction . Territorial accessibility remains a key criterion for choosing a kindergarten, but more and more families are beginning to pay attention to the quality of educational services. First of all, this is due to the fact that significant efforts have recently been made to eliminate queues in kindergartens, therefore, the service has become more accessible, and a significant part of families have the opportunity to choose the program and conditions that best suit their child. Increased quality demands on the part of parents are also due to the diversification of the offer structure: a large number of commercial child development centers have appeared on the market, offering a very diverse range of activities; a network of private kindergartens is gradually taking shape; information about various foreign approaches to the upbringing and education of preschool children is freely available.

Main part. The combination of these factors necessitates qualitative changes in the Russian system of preschool education, but their direction and success significantly depend on how accurately and reliably it will be possible to identify weaknesses in the existing wide practice of kindergartens. It is the identification of such points of application of the efforts of all existing agents of change (departments, municipalities, educational organizations themselves, parents), the impact on which will lead to the most systemic shifts in relation to the quality of educational services, is the main task of an external (independent) assessment of the quality of preschool education today . An equally important task is to work with the ideas of the parent community about what the quality of preschool education is. Not being experts in the field of modern programs of preschool education, the developing environment of the kindergarten, the features of child-adult communication aimed at cooperation, parents, as a rule, go to extremes: they either focus solely on the experience of their childhood and demand that the educational organization comply with the norms of twenty- thirty years ago, which, of course, pulls the system back, not forward. Or, on the contrary, they deny all the achievements that have grown on domestic soil, and demand compliance with the so-called. "Western models", which is also impossible for objective

reasons. In particular, because there are no single, once and for all established canons of quality and, accordingly, its evaluation in the world.

The education system is both a reflection of the current social structure and a driver of change. The same can be said about the system for assessing the quality of education. On the one hand, it is needed for an objective, valid and reliable diagnosis of what is happening in a particular organization and in the system as a whole. On the other hand, the parameters of the assessment system are guidelines that the professional community needs to move forward, and parents need to learn how to correctly "separate the wheat from the chaff" and, accordingly, create an increased demand for truly high-quality educational services, thereby stimulating their development.

That is why the quality assessment system must meet several mandatory conditions. Firstly, to be independent, free from the pressure of the governing structures (only in this case it will not be reduced to control and censure, but will fulfill the mission of development, improvement of the system). Secondly, to have a level character, that is, to set a kind of "road map" for the promotion of the teaching staff. Thirdly, its results must have a "public interface", that is, a visual expression in the form of a logo, a quality mark, a recognizable name, as well as a website on the Internet. It will explain, in an accessible language for parents, exactly what benefits their child will receive now and in the future from attending this particular educational organization. Fourthly, to be voluntary, since any coercion to development instantly leads to the formalization of the process and the depreciation of the result. Fifth, a system of expert support should be built in such a way that the teaching staff can prepare, revise their advantages and disadvantages, close some local gaps or globally reorient the movement strategy. And, finally, sixthly, the assessment should be carried out by high-class certified experts with extensive experience in the industry, since it will be necessary not only to check documents for compliance with federal and regional legislation, but also to carry out participant observation in groups of children, analyze subject-spatial environment, probably to monitor parental opinions, to advise the teaching staff.

All these parameters can only be satisfied by the so-called "external independent system for assessing the quality of education", that is, one that is of a non-departmental nature. The subject of state regulation is accreditation, attestation, licensing of an educational organization, that is, admission to work with children. But the level of quality of educational services can be determined only by the professional community. An analysis of international experience shows that an independent system for assessing the quality of preschool education exists in almost all countries where schoolchildren show positive results in international comparative studies (PISA, PIRLS). Often, state authorities themselves initiate or support the formation of an autonomous operator that would carry out level certification and expert support for educational organizations.

We bring to your attention an analytical review of the features of the independent quality assessment systems for kindergartens in the United States and Singapore. Due to the fact that in Russia the institution of external assessment of the quality of education is just emerging, at the moment it is useful to study the experience of any effectively operating models. The US experience is interesting because it is a country that is comparable to Russia in terms of scale, population (and, accordingly, the number of educational institutions), sociocultural heterogeneity, and the presence of regional specifics. Here it is important to understand how harmoniously the assessment according to federal quality standards (the operator is an autonomous non-profit organization) and regional initiatives of different states are connected.

Singapore is attractive because it has managed to turn from a third world country into a technology leader in a short period of time, and Singaporean school graduates show some of the best PISA results. It is now also important for Russia to overcome the backlog, and to do it in a short time. The Singapore model is significant because it is sufficiently centralized (the agency that carries out certification, although it is autonomous, but operates under the patronage of two ministries within the framework of interdepartmental interaction), which makes it somewhat more realistic for implementation in Russia than experience, for example, any of the Scandinavian countries, but at the same time focused on growing initiative leaders in the field.

United States of America: NAEYC standards and Pennsylvania experience

Nearly every state in America has some form of preschool financial support program. Accordingly, there is a need to "calculate" their effectiveness, for which, first of all, an assessment of the quality of the educational service is required. This was the reason for launching a series of external evaluation programs for publicly funded kindergartens and child development centers. The main coordinator for the implementation of these programs is the Department of General Administrative Regulation in Education (Education Department General administrative Regulations (EDGAR)).

As a rule, the assessment is based on the results of tests and checking the academic skills of children: it is important what the child came to kindergarten with and how he graduated from it. Private kindergartens, which are forced to compete in the market for parents to decide to bring their child to them, have a slightly different situation. Here, the main evaluation parameter is satisfaction and positive feedback from parents.

National Early Childhood Education Association (National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the largest non- profit organization in the United States, offered its independent preschool quality accreditation system to define professional standards and help

parents to recognize the best quality institutions for their children. At the moment, NAEYC accreditation is a mark of excellence for preschool education in the United States, its structure includes both public and private branches, which are semi-autonomous.

The national association evaluates 10 key areas, with accreditation usually taking place in 3 stages:

1. Self-examination of a preschool institution.
2. Assessment of the accrediting body.
3. Making a decision.

Of particular interest is the experience of the State of Pennsylvania, which has operated a voluntary preschool quality assessment program since 2002 (Wright RW, 2010). The ECERS-R scale (Early Childhood Environment Ratio Scale , Revised). There are also special requirements for the qualifications of educators, staff development, communication quality, leadership, partnership with the family. The Pennsylvania Kindergarten Assessment System has much in common with the NAEYC accreditation standards, but is specific in that it has a tiered nature. The name of the program is an acronym for STARS (Standarts , Training / Professional Development , Assistance , Resources , Support - English; standards, training and professional development, assistance, resources, support - Russian). According to the results of the assessment, a kindergarten or center can be assigned a certain number of stars: from one to four. Up to two stars may be awarded to an organization on the basis of a written application containing the required information. Three or four stars can be assigned to an educational organization based on self-assessment and assessment by an external expert. It should be noted that in Pennsylvania, an analytical study was carried out comparing the NAEYC Standards, the ECERS-R scale, and the Pennsylvania State Standards in order to compile the so-called. " crosswalk " (pedestrian crossing - literally, here - "road map") for educational organizations in order for the actions of the professional association, the US Government and kindergartens and centers to be coordinated.

So, how do the different levels of the STARS program differ:

1 star

- The educational program meets the requirements of the Pennsylvania Standard for Early Childhood Education and provides key milestones for child development.

- Parents receive a handbook with all the information about family and social services in the state.

- At the time of enrolling a child in kindergarten, teachers meet with parents.

- When the child is ready to move on to the next level of education, parents receive all the information on how to ensure the smoothest transition.

- The staff of the organization draws up a plan for their professional development every year.

2 stars

- At least half of the leading educators have education in the field of early childhood development (Associate's degree).

- Teachers organize a meeting with the family at the time of enrolling the child in kindergarten; take care of the daily renewal and diversity of children's activities.

- Hold an annual conference of educators, where the progress of each child is discussed.

- Once a year there is an assessment of children's achievements.

- Educators use the Pennsylvania State Standards to plan children's daily activities.

- Educators use standardized scales to improve environments and educational interactions in kindergarten (ECERS-R).

- The program provides for special types of activities that make it possible to mitigate the transition from one study group to another.

- Kindergarten teachers are provided with at least two components of social protection, such as health insurance. This allows you to reduce the "churn" of staff.

- The staff undergoes additional training every year.

3 and 4 stars

- At least half of the leading educators must have education in the field of early childhood development (Bachelor's degree). The rest must have a specialized education at the Associate's level degree .

- Teachers organize a meeting with the family at the time of enrolling the child in kindergarten; take care of the daily renewal and diversity of children's activities. Spend an annual conference of educators, where the progress of each child is discussed.

- Assessment of children's achievements is carried out three times a year (the first 45 days after the child's enrollment).

- Educators use the Pennsylvania State Standards to improve curriculum and assessment.

- The quality of the educational environment is assessed annually using standardized ECERS-R scales.

- Kindergarten interacts with both the family and the school to ensure the child has a smooth, smooth transition from family to kindergarten and on to school.

- Kindergarten teachers are provided with at least three components of social protection (for the Three Star level) and four components (for the Four Star level), such as health insurance. This allows you to reduce the "churn" of staff.

- The staff undergoes additional training every year.

Pennsylvania kindergartens have achieved STARS certification in one way or another.

Singapore: SPARK Kindergarten Support and Independent Accreditation Program

The term early childhood education in Singapore refers to kindergartens and child care centres. These two types of organizations are subordinate to different departments. Kindergartens are supervised by the Ministry of Education and provide an educational service for children from 4 to 6 years old, while the centers are attended by children from 2 to 6 years old, supervised by the Ministry of Social Development, Youth and Sports. Singapore currently has approximately 600 kindergartens and 900 centres.

Prior to the start of the new millennium, bilingualism and preparation for primary school were the priorities for early childhood education in Singapore. The focus was on academic achievement and subject content.

However, as Singapore moved towards building a knowledge-based economy, the need to review and restructure educational priorities in the direction of formation of creative thinking, flexibility, innovative approaches.

The paradigm shift in the field of preschool education has caused considerable resistance both from the kindergartens themselves and from the parent community. Parent surveys in the early 2000s show that public demand for early childhood education was based on outdated, rigid ideas about what quality early childhood education is.

For example, 80% of the parents surveyed considered written work in the classroom highly desirable, 50% welcomed homework; 44% supported tests and tests; 25% prioritized discipline;

19% - reading and writing; 19% - the ability to interact; 17% - desire to learn; 11% - respect for elders; creative thinking - 11% (Peng Ch.F. , 2011).

In order to radically change the situation, the Singaporean authorities have relied on the broad participation of foreign specialists in the restructuring of the system, including preschool education. A large number of teachers of preschool pedagogy from Great Britain, North America, and Australia were invited to the universities of Singapore.

At the same time, a number of programs for the external quality assessment of preschool education were launched, the most ambitious of which is currently the SPARK program.

Singapore Nursery Education External Independent Assessment Program (SPARK)

In January 2011, the Singapore Nursery School Accreditation Program (The Singapore preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK)).

In April 2013, the Early Childhood Development Agency (The Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)) is an autonomous institution operating under the patronage of two ministries: the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social and Family Development. The agency's functions include working with key aspects of ensuring the development of children under 7 years old in kindergartens and child care centers. At the moment, the implementation of the SPARK program is fully included in the functionality of this Agency.

The program has two main goals:

- 1) to help kindergarten employees bring the quality of education to a much higher level;
- 2) to help parents of preschool children with the choice of an educational organization so that they focus not only on the territorial accessibility of a kindergarten, but also on the quality of the educational service provided in accordance with modern international concepts.

The authors of the program note that SPARK provides kindergarten leaders with recognition and support in the process of improving the quality of teaching, learning, administration and staff management in order to achieve the holistic development and well-being of children in kindergartens. The program sets guidelines for development and allows , among other things, to more effectively organize the self-assessment of organizations so that the new goals set by them really have a developing character.

The SPARK Accreditation Program is voluntary. Both kindergartens and child care centers can apply for evaluation and certification.

The design of the program has four levels:

- 1) Registration and regulation / licensing

An assessment is made of the minimum standards for the functioning of the organization.

- 2) Self assessment

Upon registration, all kindergartens are strongly encouraged to complete a self-assessment phase .

- 3) Quality Rating

At this stage, kindergartens already have a better understanding of what level of quality they correspond to and are ready to check the results of self-assessment with the help of an external expert.

- 4) Accreditation

According to the results of external evaluation, a rating of kindergartens is formed in terms of the quality of the educational service. Organizations that are at the top of the ranking receive a certificate.

The SPARK Program upholds five core values on which the ranking criteria are based:

1. The focus is on the child

Children thrive best in a safe educational environment where learning is experiential and age appropriate. Every child has different abilities, educational needs and interests. The high qualification of the teacher and skillful facilitation can provide each child with a full disclosure of potential and a powerful start for further education.

2. Leadership vision

Leaders set the direction and tone for the rest of the team. In order to meet the changing challenges in the industry, good leaders need to fit into the changing educational landscape: keep abreast of the latest trends in pedagogy, see beyond the immediate issues. They should inspire and lead people to realize the concept of development of their kindergarten.

3. Influencing professionalism

Teachers shape the character of children, reveal their potential over many years of growing up. Kindergartens need enthusiastic teachers who are ready to fully devote themselves to the profession, those who are aware of their mission and have a high enough competence to involve the child in meaningful, purposeful learning. Teachers should, on the one hand, develop the reflection of children, and on the other hand, constantly look for opportunities for their own professional growth.

4. Targeted innovation

Working with young children requires kindergartens to innovate and welcome change. All improvements must be consistent with the development concept of the kindergarten. If the kindergarten meets the requirements of the time and is receptive to innovative pedagogical approaches, then this provides an opportunity for children to acquire the knowledge and skills that they need in the future.

5. Partnership for growth

Relationships with family members and the immediate environment significantly affect the learning and development of children. Kindergartens should work closely with parents and the local community to ensure the holistic development of the children.

Coaching Scheme One of the support measures offered by ECDA to kindergartens that want to be certified under the SPARK program is the so-called “ coaching scheme ”, which certifies quality. Such training can be voluntarily applied for by those kindergartens that apply for the SPARK certificate. During the training, external experts work with the kindergarten to help the organization identify weaknesses, missing links in the entire structure of the kindergarten, and also give recommendations for development.

The trainers of the SPARK program are experienced practitioners, representatives of the education system, working with the problems of early and preschool childhood. Trainers are identified and trained by ECDA.

Criteria that a kindergarten must meet in order to apply for SPARK Coaching :

- 1) meet the basic licensing requirements;
- 2) at least 75% of teachers must have a diploma of education in the field of preschool pedagogy and education (diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education - Teaching (DECCE-T));
- 3) the head of the kindergarten must have two diplomas in the field of preschool pedagogy and education (Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education - Teaching (DECCE-T), Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education - Leadership (DECCE-L), also the leader must have at least 2 years of experience in preschool education;
- 4) Kindergarten must be ready to complete the training and be assessed 12 months after the start of coaching .

Depending on the existing needs, the kindergarten has the right to have up to five coaching sessions (20 hours of training). The exact amount is set at the first session by the head of the garden and the trainer. During coaching sessions, consultations on the parameters of assessment in the SPARK program, work with documents, observation, and demonstration of educational technologies take place.

To date, out of 1,500 kindergartens in Singapore, 409 educational organizations have a SPARK certificate. 56 kindergartens are certified by the SPARK program with honors. This is recognition of the strong level of teaching and administration of the educational process, the implementation of an integrated holistic comprehensive program, the presence of a productive educational environment, which leads to the holistic development of the child.

The certificate is valid for three years. Prior to the deadline, kindergartens can re-certify and if they still meet the SPARK criteria, re-certify their status.

Modern surveys of the parent community in Singapore show that the SPARK certificate is becoming a key criterion by which parents choose a kindergarten for their child, which, accordingly, generally leads to a change in public demand in relation to the preschool education system.

Based on the review, we can draw a number of general conclusions, first of all, regarding the quality parameters that countries with developed education systems set as guidelines for the development of kindergartens and centers.

1) Directly children's academic achievements in most cases are not considered the basis for drawing conclusions about the quality of the work of the kindergarten. Such a component as the analysis of children's results is included in the assessment systems only in the United States (of the analyzed countries), and even then in a mild, very average version. The central object of monitoring is the so-called "environmental indicators" - the organization of space, the nature of communication, equipment, safety, and the qualifications of employees.

2) Attention is drawn to such a parameter as "leadership". Especially great attention is paid to it in Singapore. The expert looks at how the head of the kindergarten or center is the subject of his professional activity, whether he has an organization development strategy, how it is accepted by the team, how this strategy is provided organizationally and financially. The initiative of the leader and the ability to take responsibility for a large team and pupils is a key condition for improving the quality of education offered by the organization.

3) A very important sign of quality work is the integration of a kindergarten into the local community and friendly partnerships with parents, the degree of involvement of which in the life of the children's team is also a significant indicator of the quality of the work of teachers.

Attention should be focused on the subject of assessing the quality of preschool education. This procedure is carried out not by officials or parents, but by professionals, experts in the field of preschool pedagogy, representing independent organizations, which determines the developmental nature of the procedure for independent quality assessment and its results (improvement of educational services in the direction of meeting the needs of preschool children in harmonious development). It is important that kindergarten employees themselves (both administrative and pedagogical) actively participate in the quality assessment procedure, which also allows us to speak about the developing essence of national systems for assessing the quality of preschool education in different countries.

A key characteristic of external quality assessment in the US and Singapore is its voluntary nature: kindergartens and centers decide whether to apply for participation and to what extent to use the services of invited experts. This means that the process of preparation for certification in itself gives a powerful impetus to the development of the organization (both through the training provided by the operator, and through systematic self-assessment, reflection on the grounds of one's own activity).

Conclusion . Thus, the foreign practices of organizing the assessment of the quality of preschool education that we have considered contribute to understanding the productive directions for the formation of the domestic system of independent examination of preschool education at the stage of introducing new legal frameworks and updating the social order for high quality educational services.

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