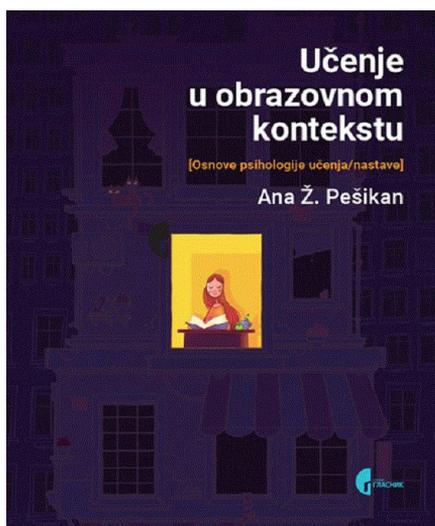


doi: 10.26529/cepsj.1520

Ana Ž. Pešikan, *Learning in Educational Context: Psychology of Learning/ Teaching* [Srb: Učenje u obrazovnom kontekstu: osnove psihologije učenja/ nastave], Službeni glasnik, 2020; 451 pp.: ISBN: 978-86-519-2435-7

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Ana Pešikan's monograph *Learning in Educational Context: Psychology of Learning/Teaching* is a truly exceptional book – it offers many important insights and enough provocative material to make it a page-turner that leaves you wishing for more. What makes it so great is both its content and the way it is conceptualised. You can say this publication is a scientific monograph *and* a textbook in one. When you read sections and paragraphs, the book clearly meets the highest standards for academic writing. It is also skilfully 'accessorised' to answer all expectations for a quality textbook. These remarks will be explained in more detail.



The monograph includes nine sections that are strongly and logically interconnected – starting from the conceptual and methodological frameworks for studying learning/teaching, through the exploration of characteristics of quality learning/teaching, all the way to the deliberation of the very principles and purpose of education in the 21st century. In that sense, it greatly surpasses what is expected from a monograph, both in its volume and scope.

In the first chapter, Ana Pešikan offers a theoretical introduction, addressing various concepts and terms in this field, underlining the difference between two disciplines in psychology – educational psychology and school psychology. After positioning the psychology of learning/teaching in

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educational psychology, the author describes the most essential features of the central concept in the book: *learning/teaching*. Since learning and teaching are seen as inseparable aspects of one phenomenon, the term 'learning/teaching' is used throughout the book. School learning is described as an activity that takes place in a real (as opposed to an experimental) institutional context. It is planned and systematically organised and is primarily influenced by the learning environment.

The second section presents quantitative and qualitative approaches to research in the educational context. This segment contains an exceptionally comprehensive description of research methods – experiment, sociometry, content analysis, action research, and methods of evaluating the process of teaching/learning – with a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses. It is concluded that decisions about an appropriate research approach must take into account the purpose of the research, the nature of the phenomena, and other criteria.

The third section is dedicated to the development of the concept of *active learning*. The theoretical foundations of this concept rely on the works of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky, seen as potential resources for overcoming the problems of the *traditional school*. Relations among these authors' notions were elaborated in a very detailed manner, with an emphasis on their pedagogical relevance and implications for school learning and teaching. In the next chapter, the author explains the concept of *quality education* and presents various factors of educational effectiveness required for high-quality teaching and learning in school. As stated, good school learning is impossible without effective teaching, which requires professional and competent teachers. It is necessary that teachers apply the knowledge about child development, subject content, teaching methods, students' individual characteristics, and similar. Quality education requires teachers who create a stimulating learning environment and successfully cope with the immanent process of change in the field of education as well as in society as a whole.

The problem of learning assessment is the main topic of the book's fifth chapter. This segment includes questions about the purpose of assessment and grading, the types of assessment teachers can apply, the principles and why they are important, the main dilemmas in the learning assessment domain, and similar. Throughout the text, a correlation between assessment and learning is emphasised, stressing that every assessment should be a part of a learning process. An assessment must inform, but it also needs to support and enable further learning and the development of the students. In the sixth chapter, the author explains the content and significance of the concept of *socioemotional*

learning. It is argued that emotions are not an unwanted addition to the cognitive process; on the contrary, emotions are necessary for learning to occur. As a recognition of the importance of emotions in the classroom, Pešikan advocates the development of the *socioemotional competences* of both students and teachers. These competences lead to the improvement of academic achievement and contribute to the students' personal development.

Chapter Seven deals with the principles of school learning in the 21st century. Education needs to correspond to the changing conditions and specificities of contemporary society. The book introduces the main concepts, such as hard and soft skills, key and generic skills, transversal competences, and different models and frameworks for defining key competences. The author presents a list of *key competences for the 21st century* as a syntactical model that overcomes the recognised shortcomings in the European Reference Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. The next chapter refers to learning in the online environment, reminding us that digital and media literacy are very important for work and life in contemporary society. This section deliberates the positive and negative effects of the online environment on school learning and opens up a space for further discussion, asking for additional evidence and more convincing research findings. The ninth, final chapter of the book addresses a profound and essential topic – the question of the purpose of contemporary education. Exploring different agendas and impacts of certain interest groups, this section ends with considerations of the consequences of growing neoliberal influence on education. Although the author's standpoint can be recognised in the tone and nuances of the text, in the last paragraph, Pešikan calls for a joint rethinking of these topics, not just by the experts in the field of education but by the wider public as well.

Even this brief overview of the chapters' content demonstrates that *Learning in Educational Context: Psychology of Learning/Teaching* comprises the most important, fundamental topics and questions about learning and teaching. Not only the scope of the topics but also the thorough approach and comprehensive writing make this manuscript a remarkable monograph. Offering clear argumentations and insightful interpretations, indicating various perspectives, and elaborating on their implications, the author studiously and convincingly develops the concept of school learning/teaching. What adds value to the book is that many research findings are placed side by side, so various dilemmas or open questions, as well as disagreements among scholars, are presented and left for the reader's consideration. This brings us to the second remark offered at the beginning of this review – the conceptualisation of the publication.

The claim that this manuscript meets all the expectations set before a quality textbook can be supported by listing several important attributes of the text. *Dialogicity* and *heteroglossia* were apparent, for example, in the way the various research and ideas were presented to invite readers to compare the findings and try to resolve the open questions. The *clarity* of the book is provided not only by a very comprehensible, reader-friendly style of writing but also by the creation of numerous tables and figures, summaries, and boxes in the text, as well as definitions offered in the margins. *Engagement* is recognised in all the situations in which the reader encounters well-chosen and reasoned examples, anecdotes, and illustrations. *Stimulation* is found throughout the text, but especially in the 'tasks segments' that are placed at the end of each chapter. These tasks are related to the text that precedes them but are not limited to the recollection of the content. Instead, they encourage readers to explore, compare or combine, create, investigate, or experiment. Finally, a vast space left for the readers in the margins of the text, with the lines offered for writing comments, shows how the recipient is considered, both by expecting and inviting their reactions.

The comprehensiveness and communicativeness of this publication confirm the assessment that this important work will strengthen educational psychology in many ways. The book offers conceptual and terminological discussions, introduces many new concepts and terms and clarifies existing concepts and relations among them. The most significant value is, of course, that the book contains an unexpectedly large number of complex fundamental topics and problems, which are treated in a very studious and thoughtful way. Of particular importance is the fact that a great deal of new research in this area has been presented, as well as that the research has been very skilfully interpreted, brought into connection, and accompanied by substantive discussion of the findings and results. Also, the trajectories for future explorations and the identification of new topics and challenges in the time to come are excellent support and valuable potential for the development of scientific knowledge in this field. Finally, I would like to claim that this monograph has an international quality. Specifically, the rich literature that abounds in the manuscript is primarily foreign, so that – regardless of the fact that the text is written in the Serbian language – readers from all over the world can easily relate to the text, examples, and references.

It has already been pointed out that this book raises many fundamental and interesting questions, so it is very difficult to single any of them out. However, in the introductory part, the author expresses a tacit desire that the publication will invoke readers to offer additions, changes or refinements to it.

As a response to that invitation, a very brief reflection on one topic is offered here, having in mind that it could be a subject of some future, more systematic discussions.

It would be crucial to supplement the considerations of selected topics with pedagogical literature, and particularly to include knowledge and research in the field of didactics. This pedagogical discipline's main subject of study is teaching and learning; therefore, its input is vital for the discussions on learning in the educational context. This supplement, of course, primarily belongs to the didactics scholars themselves, and this book clearly provides an excellent basis for further elaboration and additional insights from a didactic perspective. As part of that endeavour, it would be of great value to explore the areas of intersection between educational psychology and didactics, but also the specifics and differences between them. Certainly, the interconnectedness of these disciplines is quite strong. However, it would be entirely wrong to compound these disciplines to the point of non-recognition. Both disciplines have their tradition and heritage, epistemological and theoretical foundations, wide knowledge base, distinctive subject of study, and a characteristic research approach. Therefore, it would be a mistake to blur the boundaries between them, but it is undoubtedly necessary to emphasise the complementarity of their influences in the effort to study learning and teaching. In any case, it is certain that this monograph is a major work that will undoubtedly contribute to the strengthening of educational psychology, but also a source that should not be missed in didactic studies. This book will unquestionably initiate empirical research and conceptualisation in didactics and can also inspire further development of this pedagogical discipline.

There is no doubt that Ana Pešikan's book *Learning in Educational Context: Psychology of Learning/Teaching* will significantly impact education and that its reception will meet the hopes its author had for the publication and perhaps even surpass them. The author intended this book for everyone who deals with education, precisely with topics of school learning and teaching. However, it can be added that this publication is intended for everyone who is learning and wants to develop and improve themselves. In other words, not only experts in the field will enjoy it. Everyone who is curious about what learning/teaching is and what the prospects and potentials of education are will find many valuable and inspiring insights. That is why the book can be wholeheartedly recommended to a broader public, as well as to the academic community, researchers, policymakers, educators, and teachers.