



Jolanta Barszcz-Skowronek

ORCID: 0000-0002-9732-0259

Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin

House Chores in the Awareness of Preschool Children

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

learning, chores,
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independence

The main objective of the article is to present the results of the research on house chores of preschool children, based on parents' utterances and children's pictures made at home during the fulfilment of the educational project. Family as a natural group of reference which provides the space of strong emotional identification, not only gives its members the sense of community and relation, but also the conditions for their optimum development. In the process of learning, the key role is played by the child's psychological contact with the parents and the mechanisms of imitation, identification and modelling that function within this context. Children should not only care about their space, but, as they grow older, they should take up more and more difficult obligations/chores. That is why, it is important for even the youngest children to have certain obligations at home. Making the child involved in house chores means teaching them independence, self-discipline and the ability to effectively manage their own time. Also, during the performance of the chores, the parents are given the opportunity of additional interaction with the child. Common chores, i. e. the activities of parents and children carried out at home, are as effective in improving family relations as integration through play.

Introduction

The person's independence is a very important disposition for taking up challenges and actions according to one's will. It is related with the readiness to take up further attempts to fulfil an intended task, and with the ability to bear the consequences of one's choices and decisions. The achievements of a preschool child in this scope constitute the basic condition necessary for the development of many other spheres of personality, including the sphere of motivation, the volitional sphere, and an adequate image of oneself. Also, independence is the condition for the child's correct social relations. The obtainment of practical independence, which includes various areas of the child's everyday functioning, is necessary for the successful fulfilment of particular social roles and developmental tasks which the child faces at the end of preschool education (Kuszek 2006).

Preparing the child for independence and responsibility in adult life starts in the family, when the person is born to this world. Proper parental attitudes result in the fact that the child trusts their parents, asks them for advice and help, is satisfied with the results of his/her own effort and work, is able to cooperate with the peers and take up obligations, and cares about his/her property and the property of others. Such a child is creative, intelligent, self-confident, and easily adjusts to different social situations. He/she aims at overcoming various obstacles, finishing the tasks that had been begun and solving difficult tasks, and taking up actions on his/her own initiative (Ziemska 2006).

In the process of learning, the key role is played by the child's psychological contact with the parents and the mechanisms of imitation, identification and modelling that function within this context. "Through imitation the child learns most forms of his/her behaviour, without the necessity to apply the method of attempts and mistakes in order to make sure what behaviour standards are awarded in the society the child lives in". The heritage of experience from the family home is very important in the person's development (Przybył 2001). "The child participating in everyday, natural family situations, in direct interactions among the family members, acquires elementary knowledge on the world, values, moral and social norms, culture of the family home, and he/she learns the ways of satisfying many needs and developing one's interests" (Izdebska 2000). Maria Pecyna emphasizes that the relation between the child and the parents activates the mechanism of identification in which the child's "I" is built under the influence of a personal model. "It is not ordinary imitation, but internal acquisition of conditions facilitating the achievement of such similarity. [...] The parent treated as a model is a kind of a screenplay used for shaping the structures of personality" (1998: 37).

People are able to imitate the behaviour which they saw in others, so, as a result of watching different actions of various people, it is possible to achieve new, innovative solutions and perform independent creative actions. Thus, the child who may imitate different models and experience various stimuli, has the opportunity to develop his/her own independent actions, although they are modelled upon the actions of the persons from the environment. Imitation understood this way is not an exact copying of other people's behaviour, but it makes it possible to create one's own, individual solutions (Kuszak 2006).

Terminological basis

Independence is presented in different categories. Behaviorists perceive it as a habit. Humanistic concepts explain it as a subjective pursuit or as a specific attitude towards oneself and social environment. Cognitive concepts interpret independence as the result of collecting experiences in the course of the individual's life (Kuszak 2006: 11).

Encouraging the child to fulfil various obligations teaches self-discipline and the ability to effectively manage one's time. Also, the parents are given the opportunity of additional interaction with the child. Common obligations are as effective in improving family relations as integration through play.

In the preschool period, kindergarten plays the role of an entity that supports family in raising the child. Education is a social experience which makes it possible for the man to efficiently and effectively act in the surrounding world. The person learns through the relations with the environment, due to which he/she actively builds knowledge and skills, gains key competences, and enriches his/her bonds with people. In his/her educational activity, a teacher should look for such methodological and organisational solutions that make it possible for the children to take up various cognitive activities through which educational objectives shall be achieved in the optimum manner. The adult may influence the child's development in the following manners:

- by creating the space for the child's actions,
- by taking up actions aimed at advancing such changes in the child's development,
- by changing the direction of the child's actions and transforming them according to new principles (Brzezińska 2000: 200-202).

According to J. Bruner, learning is looking for schemes, regularity and predictability, and teaching means helping to shape and discover similar schemes and principles. A teacher may effectively support the students' development if he/she believes in the

possibilities of his/her pupils and treats them as autonomous entities that decide for themselves. One of the ways of using the students' possibilities and intensifying their process of learning is applying the method of educational projects (Andrzejewska 2013).

The **project method** is one of the methods falling within the scope of activating strategy of teaching. The project method is the most interactive of those methods and it combines various ways and techniques of learning. Its most significant aim is to shape an active attitude of the researcher towards the environment, teaching independence in thinking and problem-solving, and developing the students' interests. Such method makes it possible for the children to select a task depending on their level of development, it stimulates them to think, teaches to apply the new knowledge in practice and to share information with others, shaping communicative and social competences. The project method enables learning through action and direct polysensory experience, which increases the level of effectiveness of learning among children. "A project is a kind of a «backbone» of educational experiences of students and teachers. It is based on a strong conviction that learning through action is very precious, and group discussions and return to earlier ideas and experiences are the best way to gain and extend knowledge" (Helm, Katz 2003: 29).

Research assumptions

The basis for carrying out the research included educational experiences collected in educational projects fulfilled in Kindergarten No. 1 in Bełżyce in 2014–2018. The principle of choosing the topics for the project fulfilment was the reflection of the teachers' council on the kindergarten agenda or important events on the local or national level.

In the school year 2017/2018, Kindergarten No. 1 fulfilled three two-week educational projects: "Umbrella, or sustained development", "My town of Bełżyce – 600 years", and "Conscious preschooler today – conscious citizen tomorrow".

The objectives of the last project were:

- supporting the child's multidimensional activity in the kindergarten and at home,
- creating situations facilitating the development of habits and behaviours leading to independence and care for one's health,
- cooperation with parents and other entities aimed at creating the conditions facilitating the child's identity development.

Moreover, in the project the attention was paid to the fulfilment of obligations related to house chores by the children. Such obligations exemplified the contents

of the projects fulfilled in the kindergarten. The topic of the third day of the project: “Girls and boys equal in their rights” was related to broadly understood partnership, including partnership in accepting and performing house chores. Table 1 shows the actions taken up during the educational project: “Conscious preschooler today – conscious citizen tomorrow”, and the kinds of children’s house chores correlated with the project.

Table No. 1. Topics of the day and project tasks

Topic of the project day	Work/activity at home for that day
To be a giver	Share a book/toy with someone
Why do we learn?	Bring accessories related to different professions
Girls and boys equal in their rights	Draw your house chores
A baby is born. What’s next?	Bring your baby photos
Earth – the planet of life	Bring some books about the Earth, man, science. Find out what smog is
Earth’s treasures	Bring a treasure of the Earth
Safety	Find out who protects us
A sound mind in a sound body	Come to the kindergarten dressed in a sports outfit
Water	Bring your favourite mineral water
Children of the world – parade	Prepare a costume with your parents (children of the world)

Scientific problems

In the course of the educational project children prepare a lot of materials which are used as a research material. They include: category maps, researcher’s diaries, researcher’s corners, homework, art works, and other things made by the children.

The research on the children’s house chores was inspired by the information from the research carried out by CBOS (CBOS 2018) “Women and men at home”, according to which house chores are almost exclusively performed by women.

The main research problem was the question of the children's awareness of their house chores. In the research, children's works were used – an art work entitled: “My house chores”.

In the school year 2017/2018, 200 children aged 3-5 attended Kindergarten No. 1 in Bełżce. I analysed 124 works. This number of children made a picture at home (out of 176 children who were in the kindergarten on that day). One of the works was not taken into account in the research as it was impossible to interpret it (scrawl).

In the picture each child illustrated one or several house chores he/she was responsible for.

The number of works analysed in particular age groups:

- 3-year-old children – 47 (37,9%)
- 4-year-old children – 30 (24,2%)
- 5-year-old children – 47 (37,9%)

After the analysis of the works, the following categories of chores were separated:

1. House chores (dusting, sweeping the floor, washing dishes, watering flowers, hanging the washing);
2. Caring for one's space and property (cleaning toys, making the bed, placing clothes on the shelves);
3. Activities with the use of household articles (dishwasher, vacuum cleaner, washing machine) – putting dishes in, putting clothes into the machine, adding washing powder, salt, capsules, shining preparations, vacuuming, turning devices on;
4. Caring for pets (dogs, cats, rabbits, fish, hamsters, hens, parrots) – cleaning, feeding, going for a walk;
5. Kitchen activities (preparing meals, setting and cleaning the table);
6. Garden works (watering plants, collecting mowed grass, weeding, mowing the lawn with dad, driving a tractor with dad);
7. Self service (washing, eating, getting dressed);
8. Shopping (participation, planning);
9. Going to the kindergarten;
10. Play;
11. Looking after siblings.

Description and analysis of the author's research

Table 1. Categories of house chores in the analysed group of children

Category of chores	The number of chores							
	3-year-old children	%	4-year-old children	%	5-year-old children	%	Total	%
House chores	35	74	28	93	47	100	109	88
Caring for one's space and property	33	70	21	70	46	98	100	81
Activities with the use of household appliances	11	23	20	67	43	91	74	60
Caring for pets	5	11	12	40	23	49	40	32
Kitchen activities	7	15	7	23	16	34	30	24
Garden works	3	6	5	17	19	40	27	22
Self-service	14	30	7	23	5	11	26	21
Shopping	2	4	4	13	15	32	21	17
Going to kindergarten	1	2	4	13	10	21	15	12
Looking after siblings	1	2	2	7	6	13	9	7

Source: the author's own resources.

The analysis of the presented results shows that the most frequent categories of chores in which the children participated were: house chores (88%), caring for one's space and property (81%) and activities with the use of household appliances – (60%). Obligations related to caring for the pets are fulfilled by 32% of the analysed children. A lot of children help in the kitchen (24%) or in the garden (22%). As the children grow older, they take up more and more obligations.

17% of children participate in family shopping, both at the stage of planning and shopping itself. In the analysed group, the participation of 3-year-olds is the lowest, and as the child grows older, the participation also increases.

Going to the kindergarten (12%) as the obligation increases as the children get older, and it is the most frequent among 5-year-olds.

9 children (7%) take up the obligation of caring for the siblings. Such obligation depends on the child’s age: the younger the child, the lower participation in the obligation is.

The analysis of children’s obligations as for self-service (21%) indicates that it is the task for 30% of 3-year-olds, 23% of 4-year-olds and 11% of 5-year-olds, which may mean that self-service activities are more important among younger children who treat them as obligations (the ability to get washed, get dressed or eat on their own). As the child develops, his/her independence increases as for self-service, and children no longer perceive such activities as obligations, but as habits.

10% of children mention play as an “obligation”. Perhaps it refers to “learning through play”, which the children perceive as obligatory, as opposed to free play.

Table 2. The number of chores and the age of children (children’s activities perceived as obligations).

Number of chores	Children’s age					
	3-year-olds		4-year-olds		5-year-olds	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1	31	66	10	33	8	17
2	8	17	11	37	14	30
3	7	15	7	23	19	40
4 and more	0	-	2	7	5	11

Source: the author’s own resources

In the art works one child drew one or several of his/her chores. Thus, I analysed the works from the point of view of the number of obligations taken up by the children according to their age.

The analysis of the research material included in Table 2 shows that the awareness of obligations among 3-year-olds is the lowest, and it increases as the children grow older.

During the fulfilment of the project “Conscious preschooler today – conscious citizen tomorrow”, for 2 weeks children performed 10 house chores that were treated by teachers as obligations and carried out in cooperation with the family. Cooperation is based on action. Through acting, partners obtain a specific shape of mutual relations which is called partnership. Such action has some specific features. In each approach to partnership, it is co-action (Mendel 2000). The kindergarten, in agreement and

cooperation with the child's family, is to bring children up taking into account their spiritual needs, develop their psychological and physical abilities and formulate the basis for general education so that the children become competent, responsible and independent people in their private and social life (Bałachowicz 2015: 14-15). In order to perform most of his/her obligations, a preschooler needs the support of adults. For the children taking part in the project, the child's activity in the family environment involves, at the same time, tasks for the parents. In Table 3 the author presents the data on the number of tasks fulfilled by the children with the support of adults.

Table 3. House chores of children in the project treated as obligations fulfilled in partnership with the family – ranking.

No.	Types of activities/project tasks	The number of children in the kindergarten	The number of chores that were performed	%
1.	Prepare a costume with parents (children of the world)	155	155	100
2.	Bring a treasure of the Earth	164	160	98
3.	Come to the kindergarten dressed in a sports outfit	159	147	93
4.	Make and/or bring some accessories to make research corners for performing different jobs	177	151	85
5.	Bring your baby photos	183	144	79
6.	Bring or borrow from the library some books about the Earth, science, man	180	134	74
7.	Draw your chores. Find out what are the chores of other family members	176	124	71
8.	Find out who protects us	155	91	59
8.	Bring a book or a toy which you can share with another child	172	102	59
10.	Bring your favourite mineral water	156	87	56

Source: the author's own resources

All the children made costumes at home. Later, the children put their costumes on and marched in a colourful parade through the town. This work was the last task of the project which lasted for 2 weeks.

The second place in the ranking (98%) includes a project task related to the Earth's natural resources. The collection of things brought by the children included: stones, shells, sticks, bark, fruit, vegetables, sand, coal, flowers, etc. Preparing a sports outfit and bringing it to the kindergarten was on the third place (93%). All the children participated in sport activities on the municipal stadium. The task which included making (on one's own or with the parents) and/or bringing some accessories related to different professions was ranked the fourth place – 85%. The project task from the fourth day of the project was on the fifth place in the ranking. The children were to find and bring their baby photos. The task was performed by 79% children present in the kindergarten on that day.

On the fifth day of the project, the children were to bring some books about the Earth, science and man to the kindergarten. Also, they were to find out what smog is. This task was ranked the 6th place – 74% children. Most children brought books from home libraries, but there were also children who borrowed the books from the library. I haven't got any data on how many children obtained information concerning smog. The seventh place included pictures showing children's chores being the subject of this article – 71% children who were present on that day made those pictures. Also, while talking in the group, the children enumerated the chores of other members of their families.

The next, eighth place included the task which required sharing a toy or a book with another child (59%). The same percentage was related to the work: "Talk to adults about safety. Who protects us?". During a discussion in the group, children shared their knowledge and indicated a person with whom they talked about safety. On the ninth day of the project the children were to bring their favourite mineral water. The task was performed by 56% children present on that day, which means that it was the task fulfilled by the smallest number of children.

The performance of project tasks by the children in cooperation with their parents in the analysed educational project: "Conscious preschooler today – conscious citizen tomorrow", was from 56% to 100%. On the basis of this data we may conclude that parents ask their children to perform certain chores and they support their children, thus maintaining the idea of partnership in their children's education.

Conclusion

The results of my analyses show that chores – even if it is just one activity – are already performed by 3-year-olds. As the child grows, he/she has more obligations and they become more and more difficult. Apart from easy cleaning activities, the children help their parents with setting the table, caring for the pets, or looking after the siblings. Through the fulfilment of different tasks, the children learn to take responsibility for their living space and shape their sense of authorship, noticing the consequences of their behaviour. Another advantage of taking up activities in the fulfilment of chores is learning to control one's time and plan one's actions.

Giving the children clear expectations and making them involved in house chores from their early years has a lot of advantages. They are particularly noticeable in their adult life. As adults, they become successful in many different fields – not only those related to education and profession, but also those which refer to everyday functioning and making relations with others. According to Martin Rossmann: “Through the participation in house chores, parents teach children responsibility, involvement in the family life, the sense of empathy, and caring for oneself”. The involvement of young children in house chores often results in the fact that the work takes a longer time and it is necessary to do some extra cleaning, especially when the child is helping in the kitchen. Nevertheless, from the perspective of supporting the child's development, such effort is worth its while.

The confirmation of my research results may be found, inter alia, in the concept of Rossmann. For more than 20 years, he collected data from 84 people, measuring certain aspects in three phases of their life: at the age of 3 and 4; then at the age of 9 and 10; and finally at the age of 15 and 16. According to the research results, young adults who were involved in performing house chores as very young children, were more successful in their adult life. It is worth mentioning that such successfulness was not noticed among the young adults who became performing the chores later, e. g. in their teenage years (Hajdas 2018).

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Mgr Jolanta Barszcz-Skowronek
Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology
Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin
e-mail: jolbs@interia.pl