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Introduction

Wprowadzenie

The main subject of this issue of EETP is the transformation of preschool and early childhood education which has been particularly significant within the last two decades. At that time, researchers in elementary education supplemented the Polish pedagogical thought with a new theoretical and methodological perspective on the child and childhood, trying to bring about a change in the language and thinking about the theory and practice of early childhood education (Waloszek, 2006; Bałachowicz, 2009, 2011; Klus-Stańska and Szczepska-Pustkowska, 2009). The interpretative-critical approach has directed the attention of teachers of small children into the full powers, cognitive resources and developmental possibilities of children in the context of self-determination and self-regulation. New fields of research have emerged that have shown researchers' interest in the child's experience of the world and his/her understanding of the reality. Their common point is the dominance of the socio-pedagogical approach to the education of the child/student in educational, cultural and social contexts, and the preparation for the professional functioning of early childhood education teachers in alternative educational models. The main research fields concern the reconstruction of the culture of early childhood education from conventional to innovative ideas, as well as redefinition, transformation and search for new pedagogical perspectives, including various preschool and early childhood education models.

The research dedicated to the analysis of the discourses of play and learning (participants, relationships, contexts, sites of meaning-making and children's activity) and the functioning of the child in preschool and school institutions (communication, socialisation, cooperation, participation) are very important nowadays. An important field of research is the spaces of children's freedom (including freedom of critical thinking), responsibility and creativity (Bałachowicz and Zbróg, 2021). It is worth highlighting successful attempts at reconstruction and contemporary readings of the classics of child pedagogy, such as Maria Montessori, Friedrich Froebel, John Dewey, Helen Parkhurst, or Janusz Korczak (Andrzejewska and Lewandowska, 2021).

The newest changes in preschool and early childhood education result from a difficult and (un)usual reality. Not long ago, we were struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, trying to ensure that the introduction of remote education would cause as little harm and bring as much benefit to children as possible. We are not yet in a position to assess the impact of the introduction of media spaces into children's family homes, although we do have some data on remote education regarding both its positive and negative consequences.

We have not yet had time to deal with the (post)pandemic reality when serious problems emerged related to the migration of people from Ukraine, most often mothers with children fleeing the war. New challenges arose related to the need to organise care and professional, long-term support for refugees, to overcome cultural and communication barriers, and to help the refugees function in a foreign environment on a daily basis (see Zbróg, 2022). We can see that in a world of a deep crisis there is a return to the classical system of values; to the responsibility for the Other.

Therefore, preschool and early childhood education is currently focused on intercultural challenges, including the need to ensure the well-being of children who do not know the Polish language in Polish kindergartens and schools, and on seeking methods not only to arouse their developmental potential, but, above all, to enable their effective integration and adaptation to Polish conditions while respecting their cultural distinctiveness in the conditions of their disturbed sense of security, often with post-war trauma.

The articles published in this issue show the specific features and directions of the transformations that have taken place in early childhood education over not only recent years, but also in working with the child and his/her family over the last century. They demonstrate that pedagogical innovations have constantly accompanied the innovators of preschool and early childhood pedagogy. In the history of these sub-disciplines of pedagogy, there are plenty of examples of personal, well-known authorities, but also of courageous and creative teachers acting daily for the benefit of children, creating original didactic solutions, democratising education, organising a pro-developmental environment for play and learning, providing a sense of freedom of choice, and respecting children's subjectivity.

We encourage you to read the inspiring texts that constitute a certain whole which is valuable for teachers as it motivates them to creative pedagogical activity for the benefit of our students.

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