

Rozalina Engels-Kritidis

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Miriam Valášková, Róbert Osad'án

Comenius University, Bratislava

Preschool Education and Kindergarten Teacher Training in Bulgaria and Slovakia

Abstract: While reviewing the modern theoretical framework of Bulgarian preschool education and some significant reforms in preschool education in Slovakia, the current paper presents the contemporary situation of preschool education in Bulgaria and Slovakia and considers some points of convergence between them, as well as some differences. Since having a university education for future kindergarten teachers influences their future pedagogical interaction with children, the university level preparation of future kindergarten teachers is also detailed. Some aspects of the in-service training of Bulgarian and Slovak kindergarten teachers have also been described.

Keywords: preschool education; modern theoretical framework of Bulgarian preschool education; significant reforms in Slovakia; Bulgarian State educational requirements/standards; Bulgarian educational preschool program systems; Slovak State educational program (ISCED 0); kindergarten teachers' initial and in-service training

Introduction

Bulgarians and Slovaks share a lot of similarities, mainly because of their common Slavic origin and the corresponding resemblance of their languages, as well as the relatively similar recent history of the two nations, both being part of the former Eastern European bloc.

While reviewing the modern theoretical framework of Bulgarian preschool education and some significant reforms in preschool education in Slovakia, the current paper presents the contemporary situation of preschool education in Bulgaria and Slovakia and considers some converging points between them, but some differences as well. Since having a university education for future kindergarten teachers is influencing their future pedagogical interaction with children, the university level preparation of future kindergarten teachers is also detailed.

Transition through the 1990's: the modern theoretical framework of Bulgarian preschool education

Since 1989, the economic, political and socio-cultural transformations have had an impact on educational development. New models of education were required in compliance with the professional structure of society and the needs of its development. Research was needed for optimization and mobility of Bulgarian education, in order to facilitate its effective integration into European structures (Engels-Kritidis, 2012; 2016).

Bulgarian preschool education is built on strong and constantly developing foundations. According to Roussinova & Angelov (2008, p. 11), the main goal during the transition stage was to educate a new generation that would be able to flourish in civil society and in the conditions of European integration, based on the quality of the Bulgarian educational system. According to the same source, several other changes during the 1990's have also had an impact on education, for example:

- Demographic development (negative population growth, birth-rate reduction and population aging, population increase in the

capital and large cities, reduction of kindergartens and primary schools in small towns and villages, etc.);

- Reflux in the teacher profession due to low salaries and high number of children in big cities, as well as unemployment in small towns and villages;
- Export of young pedagogical personnel abroad, where they can grow in experience due to the high professional competencies and skills attained in Bulgarian universities;
- Tendencies of emigration among the young population.

The educational goals have to be reconsidered in both global and specific, national operational aspects. The global goals include humanization of society, integration processes for achieving positive pedagogical practices in European countries and their constructive reconsideration in local conditions (Roussinova & Angelov, 2008, p. 11).

There are two preschool educational programs, developed during the 1990's, which have laid the foundation of modern theoretical framework of preschool education in Bulgaria: "Educational Program for Children Aged 2–7 Years" (Roussinova et al., 1993), developed by the scientific group of the Department of Preschool Education of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"; and "Children's Kindergarten Activities" (Vitanova et al., 1993). Both programs promote the pedagogical situation as the main form of interaction, with the child at the center of it, guaranteeing an active role for children in a subject-subjective partnership collaboration with the teacher. According to Roussinova et al. (1993, p. 11), pedagogical situations should ensure interaction on equal terms, discretion as far as the pedagogical strategy is concerned, differentiation and individuality of the interactions, as well as variety in the educational content. Each pedagogical situation must be realized in accordance with the defined educational goals, the individual characteristics of children and the competence of the whole group, while taking into account the prospect of further development. One of the key moments in the theoretical framework of Bulgarian preschool education (present in both Roussinova et al., 1993 and Vitanova et al., 1993, in slightly differing terminology) is the separation of

pedagogical situations into two main categories: *planned* and *spontaneous situations*. Planned situations are designed and structured by the teacher in a system, in accordance with the level of the group under their care. Spontaneous situations demonstrate the individual level of the child in the group. In these pedagogical situations, children's personal experience is being expressed more freely, stimulated by a certain need during a particular life situation for each individual child. The teacher's role is to find the proper approach for transforming that life situation into a pedagogical one, taking into account the moment when the child's need is manifested. More often, these spontaneous situations are initiated by the child, but they could also be provoked and stimulated by the teacher through proper material and social means.

The program by Roussinova et al. (1993) has been designed to focus on the needs of children's development; it is therefore structured in compliance with the three formulated types of goals of the pedagogical interaction: goals of cognitive development; goals of dissemination of practical experience; goals of stimulation of individual emotional experiences. All these goals build one upon the other and are realized in the three main stages of pedagogical interaction: perception; experiment; expression. In addition to the teachers, parents have also been given an important role in the pedagogical interaction.

The Bulgarian modern theoretical framework in preschool education defined in the 1990's is based on the ideas of the significance and preciousness of childhood, the stimulating functions of the material and intellectual surroundings, the encouragement of children's activities, the synchronization of educational activities and interaction; the importance of preschool education as a fundamental component of the educational system, the integration of the national educational experience with universal educational practices (Roussinova et al., 1993).

Significant reforms and tendencies in preschool education in Slovakia

In Slovakia there have also been significant reforms realized in the educational system, which have influenced preschool institutions (see Humajová, Pupala, 2008).

The most important reform was brought in the Education Law in 2008 (no. 245/2008) in which the status of kindergartens was changed with their involvement into the school system. According to Kosová (2009, p. 23), Slovakia has realized the importance of preschool education for the most emotional stage of life development of the human being, which cannot be neglected by leaving the child in the care of social institutions. On the contrary, it is important to offer intentional educational stimuli for every human being. Thus, continuity with higher levels of education was underlined and accepted. The developing, educational and also preventive and compensational functions of kindergartens have definitely become dominant over their social tasks. This also meant that all international, global and social changes related to the school system will affect it more than it was in the past.

In connection with the consequences of globalization and international trends in education, the understanding of the school and its functions generally, including functions of kindergartens, has changed. Currently, there is an emphasis on the model of learning in the school and kindergarten. Its first condition is some kind of autonomy, which enables the creation of one's own program for developing the school or kindergarten.

School is considered as a service for the child and takes the task of interactive and integrational institution in the education of children (Walterová, 2001). Kindergartens in Slovakia are trying to fulfil the four main functions of the modern kindergarten, which have been defined by Kosová (2009):

- *Qualification function* (learning to know) - it qualifies children for the next level of study, provides methodical tools for lifelong

learning; it also intermediates the acquisition of learning and working techniques. Within this function there is a special compensation role (much more than in other levels of schools) for various individual insufficiencies and also the prevention of future learning disorders, as well as ensuring the equality between learning possibilities of children;

- *Integrative function* (learning to act) – prepares pupils for active personal and public life, thus it is necessary to involve children in kindergartens in activities on behalf of the whole class, school, village or children from other countries, continents or poorer communities;
- *Social function* (learning to live together) – secures the secondary socialization in kindergartens and preparation of children for lives with peers and in the society. In contrast with higher school levels, this function also has the special task of protecting the child against negative social influences and violence. Kindergartens should create an atmosphere of trust and prevention against asocial behavior;
- *Personal function* (learning to be) – support for individuality of a pupil and his/her diversified self-expression, but what is the most difficult in kindergartens, leading a child to self-control and self-commanding, for example first planning and self-assessment.

The character of preprimary education in Slovakia is influenced by two main (and contrary) approaches to education:

- *The classic approach*, which is influenced by the behavioral paradigm.
- *The innovative approach*, which is currently preferred by experts in the university education of future kindergartens teachers and is influenced by the socio-constructive paradigm. The innovative approach is mainly followed by academics at university, but still not actively applied in public Slovak kindergartens.

In the first approach, the child is only a static object of education that learns mostly by memorizing. On the other hand, in the second approach, the child is an active participant in education. In the context of socio-constructivist education, the process of education in kindergartens is focused on a kind of specific human operation (mutual social communication exchange), which connects teacher, learning subject and the whole learning group into a dynamic relationship, which works as a specific framework (context) for learning and teaching (Kostrub, 2008). Within interpersonal interaction and transaction, the social cannot be divided from the cognitive, which is also seen in socio-cognitive conflict as an important component for realizing socially and culturally determined conceptual change. These socio-cognitive conflicts are also a natural part of education. In this kind of education, they are intentionally created by teachers and other subjects of education opportunities, when the learner has the possibility for his/her own individual or group experiments, cooperation, common participation, collaboration within construction of compatible understanding of meanings, acquisition of own operational and expressive understanding and thus learning of acceptance of others (Kostrub, 2008). Naturally, there is an effort to realize this socio-constructivist approach in real school educational programs (e.g. www.mater-skaskolokoliskova.estranky.sk, etc.).

Bulgaria: preschool education according to the law on preschool and school education (2015), State educational standards (2016) and alternative educational program systems

During the period 2000–2015, the State Requirements for preschool education were issued, following the content of Decree № 4 for Preschool Upbringing and Preparation (2000), prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science, with further additions published in 2005, which all subsequent educational program systems were required to comply with. These requirements defined the preschool curricula (age 3–7) which include attainable *knowledge*, *skills*, and *attitudes* classified in several

educational directions, each of which was further divided into educational kernels, as follows:

- Bulgarian Language and Literature;
- Mathematics;
- Social Environment;
- Natural Environment;
- Fine Arts;
- Sport Activity;
- Music;
- Constructional, Technical and Everyday Essential Activities;
- Play and Game culture.

In addition to the State requirements, a specially-developed program for the compulsory preparatory group/class for school (ages 6–7) was created in 2003 (currently, two years before school are compulsory for attendance – ages 6–7 and 5–6).

The significant place of preschool education in the whole educational system in Bulgaria is confirmed once again in the title and the content of the new law on preschool and school education (2015), where preschool education has its own place, on an equal footing with school education (Engels-Kritidis, 2016). In this regard, the development of new State requirements (this time called “standards”) for preschool education (2016) was launched by a commission of established university teachers, kindergarten directors, teachers and other experts appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science. The new State standards were approved and published on 3rd June 2016 (Decree № 5 for Preschool Education, 2016). Compared to the old State Requirements in Decree № 4 (2000/2005), the main changes are related to restructuring and reorganization of some of the educational areas. While Social Environment and Natural Environment in the old requirements were two separate areas, in Decree № 5 for Preschool Education (2016) they have been united under the common area named “The World Around Us”. Also, “Play and Game culture” was dropped as an educational area, but at the same time the key role of play and

games has been underlined several times throughout the text of the new Requirements. Therefore, in the new Decree № 5 (2016), we have the following areas:

- Bulgarian Language and Literature;
- Mathematics;
- The World Around Us;
- Fine Arts;
- Sport activity;
- Music;
- Constructional activities and technologies.

One of the most important changes (a negative rather than positive one, according to many opinions, including this author's) is that, for the first time, standards have been defined for each age sub-group (for 3–4, 4–5, 5–6, 6–7 year-olds), for each educational area. There were also changes in the content of the different kernels in certain areas. In the new State Educational Standards (Decree № 5 for Preschool Education, 2016) the duration of one organized activity with children (as mentioned, the main form of organized pedagogical interaction in kindergartens is called a "pedagogical situation") is defined as follows: "as per the judgement of the teacher, 15 to 20 minutes for 3–4 and 4–5 year olds, and 20 to 30 minutes for 5–6 and 6–7 year olds". In different age subgroups, teachers organize different numbers of "pedagogical situations" weekly – between 11 and 17 at minimum, according to the same Decree № 5 (2016). The new Requirements have been accepted with objections to various elements in them.

In compliance with the old State educational requirements (2000/2005) and, conceptually at least, in a way based on the two aforementioned educational programs (Roussinova et al. 1993; Vitanova et al. 1993), as well as the program for the preparation of a school group/class (2003), more than ten educational program systems have been developed; they are currently being updated according to the new Decree №5 for Preschool Education (2016). Nowadays, Bulgarian kindergartens use

program systems like: "Hand by Hand" (2003); "Molivko" (2003), "I am in the kindergarten" (2007); "Friends" (2008), "Fairy Tale Footpaths" (2008), "АБВ ☺ games", (2013); "Vikkie and Nikkie" (2014), etc. These program systems, approved by the Ministry, usually consist of teacher's books, children's books and various educational materials (cardboards, posters, stickers, multimedia and on-line electronic resources, etc.), developed according mainly to the age specifics in the four preschool age groups and often aimed separately at each of the nine educational fields. These systems have been developed by groups of authors (university lecturers, kindergarten teachers and experts) and approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. They suggest specific schemes of pedagogical ideas for practice, planned on a weekly and monthly basis. These "program systems", each from its own point of view, aim at adding detail to the specific goals of pedagogical interaction in the four different age groups (3–4; 4–5; 5–6; 6–7 years).

Slovakia: preschool education according to the State educational program (ISCED 0)

As part of the aforementioned school reform in Slovakia, a new conceptual framework for preprimary education has been created. A new educational, two-level model was initiated. It is founded on two levels of education: first, the education realized on the basis of the State Educational Program (ISCED 0; Guziová et al., 2008), which, on the second level, provides the opportunity for every kindergarten to create its own original educational program (see the law on education no. 245/2008).

The State Educational Program for pre-primary education is called "Child and the world" and it is based on the international standards for pre-primary education (ISCED 0). According to the authors (Guziová et al., 2008, p. 3), it aims at "reaching the optimal perceptual-motoric, cognitive and emotional-cognitive level as basis for preparedness for school education and for life in the society. The starting point is the uniqueness of each child, active learning and incorporation into the group and collective team".

“Achievement of this goal assumes favourable educational school climate focusing on the development of creativity, where learning is realized by games instead of memory learning (memorizing). The emotional experience of a child is also important” (Guziová et al., 2008, p. 5).

The State Educational Program for kindergartens “Child and the world” also defines a profile of a preprimary education graduate, who should be able to have these competences (or their basics, at least): 1. Psycho-motoric competences; 2. Personal (intrapersonal) competences and principles of self-awareness; 3. Social (interpersonal) competences; 4. Communication competences; 5. Cognitive competences, including: a. basics for problem solving, b. basics for critical thinking, and c. basics for creative thinking; 6. Learning competences; 7. Informational competences. This program expresses educational standards for preprimary education in Slovakia (Guziová, 2008, p. 15–26). It contains what level a child should reach at the end of preprimary age (age 6 or 7 years), when starting primary education; however, it does not include any specific evaluation/diagnosis.

The State Educational Program “Child and the world” is divided into themes, but not into educational fields. There are four themes: 1. *I am* (content focused on social, spiritual, physical, emotional life of a child); 2. *Culture* (content focused on the world of things, world of games, world of art); 3. *Human race* (focused on family, other people, human race); 4. *Nature* (focused on the Earth and space). These thematic fields should diffuse and complement each other, while integrating during the whole educational process. The program also involves sectional topics (environmental education, traffic education, protection of human beings and their health, education for a healthy lifestyle, education for creativity, medial education, work with information, etc.) which can also diffuse in all thematic fields.

Children attend the kindergarten for 1–3 or even for 4 years. Usually, classes include three age groups: 1–3, 4–5, and 5–6. However, in the State Program there are no specific curricula for single age groups.

In the framework of this new “two level” conceptual framework for pre-primary education, the State Educational Program “Child and the World” (Guziová, et al., 2008) is a starting point for teachers for creating

their specific school curriculum/program. This becomes a basic document for the separate schools, which enables them to realize education.

In each school program set up by a kindergarten, it is necessary to follow the requirements and objectives declared in the State Education Program (Guziová et al., 2008). At the same time, while developing the School Education Programs, schools are allowed to consider whether the teachers will extend their target requirements beyond the framework set by the State Education Program. Percentages are not strictly determined for the kindergartens, as it is intended by creating of the basic school programs, but it is recommended in the Guide for the formation of a State Education Program (Hajdúková, 2008), so that the basis of 70–80% is formed of the State Educational Program and 20–30% is beyond the framework of basic target requirements.

The quality of educational programs of specific schools is guaranteed by the State School Inspection controls (see the Law on education no. 245/2008, §7 and the Law no. 596/2003, § 13). In our opinion, as well as that of the entire group of academic experts, they are insufficient, since it is only the school inspectorate that monitors the program controls without the approval of experts-academics.

The insufficient control of specific educational programs through the state school inspection is not the only object of criticism by academics in this new “two-level” conceptual framework for pre-primary education. According to experts (Zápotočná, Petrová, 2010; Pupala, Kašćák, 2012), another problem is the actual initial State educational program “Child and the World” (Guziová et al., 2008) itself. The grouping on the basis of thematic areas and not on the basis of educational areas is criticized as non-conceptual. Furthermore, the program is criticized for insufficient specification of educational standards, as well as the absence of specific evaluation (diagnosis of achieved knowledge and skills of children). For these reasons, it is very difficult for teachers to arrange their own school educational program on the basis of the State Educational Program.

The handbook for preparation of school educational programs for kindergartens (Hajdukova, 2008) does not help them either, as it is too general for teachers. Also, there is no universal textbook for preschool ed-

education available, although it would be necessary. Teachers can choose from a broad selection of didactic tools, various textbooks, workbooks, even including e-programs (for example, the newest one is the interactive program *Kindergartens via game* 2015). This selection also includes a number of quality literature items.

In Slovakia, the situation is that many of the individual school programs are of a high quality, but there are also some that are not so good. The quality of school programs depends on the education and qualification of individual teachers who are involved in the creation of their own school program/curriculum.

Some good quality teachers, who apply innovative methods in developing their programs, have criticized the initial State Educational Program "Child and the World" (Guziová et al., 2008). The criticism of both teachers and experts – academics has been an incentive for the development of a new, innovative State Educational Program.

This alternative / innovative State Educational Program was created by experts (Pupala et. al., 2014). It should be approved in 2017. In contrast to the issues presented above, the educational standards in the new program are more specific and evaluation questions are added. Another difference is that the content of pre-primary education is not divided into 4 themes, but rather into 7 educational fields: 1. Language and communication; 2. Mathematic and work with information; 3. Human being and nature; 4. Human being and society; 5. Human being and the world of work; 6. Art and culture; 7. Health and movement. The goal of authors is to ensure a more effective preprimary education and thus enable a better continuity between preprimary and primary education.

The fields in Pupala et al. (2014) are not so much thematic but more look like educational areas which are predecessors in a way of the subjects at school – similar like educational areas in Bulgaria. In Valášková (2011; 2012) it is claimed that experience has shown that teachers cannot work with thematic areas since "it is difficult to integrate something which they do not understand"; primarily, teachers must learn to distinguish the different components of the educational field, then they can learn according to themes.

In conclusion, it is very important once again to note that the situation in Slovakia is similar to that in Bulgaria, that some changes in the framework of the state requirements are about to happen.

Initial education and the in-service training of Bulgarian kindergarten teachers

In Bulgaria, the professional qualification for the “preschool teacher” is currently obtained in specialized faculties at universities after four years of vocational training (Bachelor degree) and one year of full-time training in a Master’s program. Students who have completed undergraduate programs in other humanitarian disciplines are also given the opportunity to take an extended two-year Master’s program in order to acquire the qualification for working as a preschool teacher. Furthermore, three-year training for a PhD degree in preschool education is available.

The teaching positions in preschool education are usually held by personnel who have completed the traditional degree of *Preschool Pedagogy*, as well as one of the relatively new degrees of *Preschool Pedagogy with Foreign Language* and *Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy*. The first of the new degrees reflects the current need for qualified preschool teachers who, in addition to the mainstream pedagogical work, are specially tutored for early foreign language teaching in one of several languages: English, German, French, Russian, Spanish, or Italian. The basic premise of the second degree, the “hybrid” specialization in *Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy*, is the idea of facilitating the transition of children from kindergarten to elementary school by providing teaching professionals with a broad spectrum of competence, who are well-acquainted with the specifics of working with both preschool and primary school ages.

The university training ends with written state exams. Students of *Preschool Pedagogy with Foreign Language* are additionally tested on the respective foreign language, while the students of the hybrid *Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy* specialization are tested in a state exam on a pooled questionnaire.

For the practical training of students in a real educational environment, universities have contractual agreements with specially-selected nurseries, kindergartens and teachers. The practical training of teaching skills starts from as early as the first semester and ends with a practical state exam. Students gradually move from observation and analysis of teaching situations to independently performing their own situations in real pedagogical conditions.

According to the Bulgarian national system for in-service training, all Bulgarian teachers (including preschool teachers) can develop their qualifications in a five-level qualification scale. The first two levels involve education on contextual and technological innovation, as well as sharing of the teachers' individual experiences and pedagogical practices, while the latter three levels focus on activities related to the practical application of innovations and the creation and practical testing of individual innovative practices. The highest professional qualification level also allows for dissemination of innovations introduced by the teacher through publications (Kusheva et al., 2006).

The main providers of continuing professional development across the country are university departments of information and in-service training of teachers; National Institute for Education and Qualification in the Educational System; some pedagogical faculties; educational inspectorates; non-governmental organizations; foundations, and other public and private providers at national, regional and local level (Engels-Kritidis, 2016).

In the new Law of Preschool and School Education (2015), there is a separate Section 4, titled "Career development of pedagogical specialists", in which the career development is defined as "the process of improving competences via successive posting in teaching or educational positions or via acquisition of educational levels in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of education" (Art. 227). The same article defines teaching levels – teacher, senior teacher, and headteacher – applicable for children's teachers as well. As foundations of career development of pedagogical specialists, the text mentions teaching service, acquired qualification credits, acquired professional qualification level, as well as results

of performance appraisals; a larger number of qualification credits and a higher professional qualification level are bases for a faster career development of pedagogical specialists, regardless of their years of service. Participation in specific forms of CPD is formally recognized in terms of career advancement. The requirements and the procedure for acquiring teaching levels are defined by the state educational standard for the status and development of teachers, headmasters and other pedagogical specialists, which is currently in development (Engels-Kritidis, 2016).

Initial education and in-service training of Slovak kindergarten teachers

A kindergarten teacher in Slovakia is currently required to have finished secondary education (Regulation of Ministry of Education No. 437/2009). The particular qualifications for kindergarten teachers can be obtained after studying at an Academy of Pedagogy and Social Sciences. Additionally, there is the possibility of a two-year secondary education follow up study, in which any person who has finished secondary school education can be enrolled. The study at the secondary school with a follow up two-year secondary study ends with a school leaving examination. This type of education is also highly criticized by experts as being unsatisfactory.

That is the reason why students who have finished secondary education at Academies of Pedagogy and Social Sciences usually continue their studies at Faculties of Education (Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Prešov, Banská Bystrica, Ružomberok and Komárno), where they become acquainted with current trends in pre-primary education which ends in a Bachelor's degree.

They can also achieve a higher qualification after two years of further study (a Master's degree), which is provided by some of these faculties (e.g. Banská Bystrica).

The complete study (Bachelor's followed by Master's degree) ends with state exams. Part of the study is also devoted to practical education in selected kindergartens. Selected preschool establishments cooperat-

ing with faculties of education enable students to participate in training. Initially the students follow the teaching process and analyze it with the particular teacher afterwards, later on they teach themselves and after the lesson the teacher provides them with feedback. The teachers are experienced professionals from chosen kindergartens and, at the same time, they are university teachers responsible for practical training. The concept of practical training in Slovakia is similar to the concept in Bulgaria.

Furthermore, it is possible to continue in a three-year study and obtain a PhD degree in the field of Education at some faculties of education.

In their professional careers, teachers are expected to add to their qualifications after graduation. For this purpose, lifetime learning is provided within various projects – accredited programs (e.g. www.mpc-edu.sk). Some of these accredited programs are in high demand, for example, the innovative programs like *Management in kindergarten*, *Innovation in didactics for pre-primary teachers* or so-called update programs *Digital Technologies in kindergartens*, *Reform of content in the kindergarten* etc. Apart from these there is also a demand to teach children a foreign language even in kindergartens – the option is usually English. To meet this demand, teachers can increase their qualifications by means of a two-year course of study at a public language school. They end this with a state language exam.

In line with the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 445/2009 *On lifetime learning, credits and attestation of educational and scholarly employees* and according to the *Law No. 317/2009* the teachers receive credits and increase their qualifications after the first and second attestation exam. The first attestation is focused on the application of the creative experience of an employee and solving scholarly – methodological problems connected with educational activities. Only educational employees, university graduates who have obtained at least a Bachelor's degree, can apply for this attestation exam. The second attestation is focused on the presentation of significant innovation and creative skills concerning methodological problems and educational activities. It can be acquired only by an educational employee who has already obtained the first attestation and obtained at least a Master's degree.

Conclusion

Built upon a solid historical and theoretical basis and encompassing the overall transformation of social life in the country, Bulgarian preschool education matches the standards for education in developed European countries. The child and its needs are firmly established as the core focus of contemporary preschool pedagogy; in this respect, the continuing education of preschool teachers accentuates training that allows educators to adapt to the constantly-changing educational needs of children. The situation in contemporary Slovak preschool education is a similar one.

Additionally, both countries are continuously modernizing and innovating their programs. Both Bulgarian and Slovak educational systems incorporate a desire for harmonization with the pedagogical requirements adopted by various European and international forums, but at the same time they are constantly looking for the means and forms which will allow for the preservation and promotion of national traditions in education.

A fundamental difference between the Slovak and Bulgarian education system is in the required qualification of teachers of preschool education. In Bulgaria a teacher has to obtain a university degree (at least Bachelor's Degree), while in Slovakia a secondary education is a sufficient qualification; university education (Bachelor's, Master's Degree) is currently not required for a teacher to teach in a kindergarten. Consequently, the quality of educational activities in Slovak kindergartens is different. In this respect, Slovak academics are endeavoring to change the legislation so that teachers in kindergarten should have at least a university education of the first degree (Bachelor).

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Information about the authors:

Rozalina Engels-Kritidis, PhD in Pedagogy, Associate Professor

A graduate of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with a BA in Pre-school Pedagogy with a minor in history; BA in Bulgarian Philology; MA in Mass and Arts Communication pedagogy Dr. Rozalina Engels-Kritidis is a lecturer at Sofia University delivering academic courses in two main disciplines: *Basis and theory of preschool education*, and *Language acquisition and speech development in early years*. She is one of the authors of the preschool educational program system "Friends" (2009), approved by the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and

Science. She has been a visiting scholar at a number of universities and institutions across Europe, including the University of Cambridge, Athens Kapodistrian University, University of Patras, Central European University in Budapest, Catholic University of Leuven, Municipality of Sundsvall in Sweden, Comenius University in Bratislava, and the German Youth Institute in Munich. She is the author of more than ninety publications in both Bulgarian and English, as well as the following four books: "Contemporary Aspects of Preschool Education in Bulgaria" (2016); "Intercultural Educational Program for Preparatory Classes in Bulgarian Sunday Schools in Greece" (2013), "Proverbs and Sayings in the Educational Interaction with Bulgarian Children Living Abroad" (2013), and "The Child in the Allegory World of Proverbs and Sayings" (2012).

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",
Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education,
bul. Shipchenski Prohod № 69A,
Sofia 1574, Bulgaria
e-mail: rozalinae@yahoo.com

Miriam Valášková, PhD.

Professional specialization: early literacy and its development in the kindergarten, development of reading and writing in primary school, general didactics.

Comenius University in Bratislava
Faculty of Education
Department of Preprimary and Primary Education
Šoltésovej 4
813 34 Bratislava, Slovakia
email: miriam.valaskova@gmail.com

Róbert Osad'án, PhD

Assistant Professor at the Comenius University in Bratislava (Faculty of Education). Graduate of the Comenius University, Master's degree in education and history and PhD in Cultural Anthropology; teaching gender studies in education, sociology of childhood, history of education, sociocultural differences.

Comenius University in Bratislava
Faculty of Education

Department of Preprimary and Primary Education

Šoltésovej 4

813 34 Bratislava, Slovakia

e-mail address: osadan@fedu.uniba.sk