Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

Journal of Preschool and Elementary School Education

Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow

Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities

Catholic University in Ružomberok

University of Presov in Presov

Charles University in Prague

Szent István University in Szarvas

Gál Ferenc College in Szeged

University College of Nyíregyháza

Sofia University St. Klement Ohridski

The Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

Table of Contents

Reports and Reviews

Introduction

Early childhood education is the first and most important step in the structure of the modern school system. The reason why it should be considered a top priority is the fact that it represents a fundamental and propaedeutic level, ensuring the continuity of teaching and educational processes in kindergarten and primary school, and prepares for further education in the more senior grades.

Early childhood education is defined as "the golden age" of child development; it is in this period that we can see: a fast pace in understanding the surrounding world, an excellent memory, the tendency to participate in the life of a school group, activeness in games, performing social roles, a tendency for expansion. The basic forms of children's activities are: fun, learning, and working in the kindergarten; and learning, work, and fun at school. The key value here is the subjectivity of the individual and the highest stage – the plenipotentiary. Education of the youngest is known to be open and friendly, opening many opportunities to develop creativity, responsibility, independence and freedom in taking any action and tasks. Its primary objective is to stimulate the development of children, preparing them to take compulsory schooling and, in classes I-III to assist the student in the development of physical, mental, social, emotional, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions.

Modern education has had and is still facing a period of many dynamic changes that are taking place in the education of a small child. To meet all the problems it seems necessary to take subjects which are considered to be important, in terms of establishing the changes which have already occurred, as well as in stimulating further transformations, which will follow on from this process. The key role in early education has three entities: student, teacher and parents, and the common educational space that they create through their own actions.

Jolanta Karbowniczek
Beata Komorowska

The publication *Journal of Preschool and Elementary School Education* is a scientific journal representing the effects of international scientific cooperation between the Polish, Slovak and Czech Republics, and Hungary and Bulgaria; it is a forum to exchange views on the present and the future states of the kindergarten and early education in European Union countries, and around the world. The journal is directed to those who are professionally involved in school: teachers working in kindergartens and schools (grades I-III), educators, psychologists, sociologists, therapists, specialists in all aspects of the process of the upbringing and education of a child, teaching staff, candidates for the teaching profession, and student teachers' colleges.

We hope that the scope of the journal will address the scientific needs of professional circles, dealing in the theory and practice of the upbringing and education of a young child, whilst at the same time emphasizing the need for integration and dialogue across boundaries between representatives of various specialties. The title of the journal encourages a broader, multi-functional look at the education of young children, motivates to seek a common language and interdisciplinary cooperation. It emphasizes openness, flexibility, originality and inspiration by presenting work of high quality in terms of scientific value. The structure of the journal consists of three sections: Articles, Reports, and Reviews.

The mission of the journal is to provide readers with a comprehensive and up to date knowledge about the child's early education, active participation in the development of early education and the propagation of achievements and experience of both, domestic and foreign experts in this field. As authors, we will strive to achieve the status of an influential academic publication throughout this country and beyond. The reader may expect, therefore, a high degree of reliability and validity in providing him with information and can participate in improving education at the preschool and early education levels. An important area of the mission that this journal is undertaking is to promote the scientific development of young talents.

This will be expressed through opening the columns of the journal for doctoral candidates from Polish and foreign universities, and for em-

ployees involved in post-doctoral dissertations. We propose a systematic publication of notices of research work and the implementation of its results in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Hungary.

The first issue of the *Journal of Preschool and Elementary School Education* is devoted to topics related to modern trends in the kindergarten and early education, and to paradigmatic transformations.

We encourage the sharing of experiences, ideas, introduced innovations and empirical research, as well as insights and doubts.

The individual point of view is essential, as well as concrete proposals for solutions. Any theoretical assumptions, ideas, and proposed changes, which are so important for modern education, will be discussed by practitioners, and practitioners will be able to read the opinions from many other environments.

Jolanta Karbowniczek
Beata Komorowska

Articles

Jolanta Karbowniczek
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland
Beata Komorowska
The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Current Trends in Early Pedagogy

Early school education deals with the process of teaching and educating children of school age, and functions within the broad mainstream of the contemporary humanities. For many years it was identified mainly with the process of teaching and educating in grades I–III of primary school; this kind of methodical preparation of teachers was supposed to lead to the achievement of effects described in various programmes and manuals. The process of teaching and learning had previously been based on assumptions of behaviourism and was supposed to lead to specific, detailed outcomes reflected in the behaviour of students. This situation has gradually and consistently been altered by various conditions, some of which have arisen from developments in science, psychology, philosophy, anthropology, pedagogy, and didactics, but also because of social and political influences. Pedagogy, as well as early pedagogy, "is both a sub-field of the educational sciences, as well as activities carried out in schools (…), so it is expressed in this language (scientific – theoretical, advisory – methodical, educational) and in social practices." (Klus-Stańska, Szczepska, 2009, p. 26–27). Therefore, the education of early school age children should now be perceived in a versatile, complex, multi-function way, taking into account multiple intersecting factors.

Determinants and directions of early school education

The most important determinants of changes in the area of early school education should include:

Jolanta Karbowniczek
Beata Komorowska

✔ The process of reforming school education in Poland:

- reducing the compulsory school age (this is being implemented, although it was again recently delayed for another two years until 2014 – this has resulted in an interesting situation for the present five-year old children who are currently doing a year of a mandatory preparation for the school in kindergarten, but do not know what they will do the following year if their parents decide not to send their children to school. If they repeat the same year, will it be beneficial for their future learning? This is a repeat of the situation in 2009 when the new core curriculum was introduced, when all seven-year olds in large part repeated the first-class programme that had been taught in the previous year in class zero, (Komorowska, 2011, p. 46–51);
- increasing the availability and popularisation of children's early education – this concerns mainly legislation and designing pro-grammes that aim to popularize preschool education, especially in rural areas; and linking early school education with preschool education;
- introducing integrated education and a descriptive evaluation at the stage of early school education;
- paying attention to the integration of teaching and education processes, which would entail restoring the properly understood educational function of the school;
- operationalisation of objectives and their reorientation. Under the influence of paradigmatic transformations, the hierarchy of values, which are the source of the early learning goals, has changed. Earlier, the priorities were: messages, then skills and values. Today, the formation of personality is the first priority (with special emphasis placed on attitudes), followed by skills and lastly the message. With this hierarchy, an entity should have the ability to attain self-fulfilment, intellectual autonomy, and should be open and creative. We help a child to learn about him-self and his own abilities. We pay attention to his abilities, aspi-

rations and the implementation of the goals that have been set. (Karbowniczek, 2011, p. 215);

- developing a new core curriculum; introducing compulsory computer classes and English language teaching as early as class I;
- the possibility to construct the authors' own teaching programmes based on a core curriculum;
- learning and working at school, which is run in the form of play;
- increasing the autonomy of the teacher in the framework of the programmes and handbooks choice (decentralisation), introducing innovations and authors' solutions;
- in-depth diagnosis and the monitoring of pupils;
- multiculturalism and bilingualism of children;
- systematic work with a child of special educational needs: including those who are outstandingly talented, or those who are exhibiting difficulties or who are handicapped;
- innovative activities of teachers in early school education;
- changes in the education system and the vocational training of teachers;

✔ a change of perspective on the relationship between teacher and students – which would focus on the two-party, master – pupil dialogue; this would involve parents in the education process (the education of parents, opening the school to the local community; school autonomy and care for the formation of its identity);

✔ socio-economic transformations and globalization processes in the country, which have an important influence on the lives of people, their needs, expectations, hierarchy of values, aspirations, and, at the same time, they determine the formulation of new aims:

- changing family patterns from those that are large and multi-generational, to those that are small, often with one child, often broken, with the child being raised in non-legalised relationships or mixed families that are multicultural. This requires the inclusion

within the pedagogical discourse of such conceptual categories as euro-orphanhood, multiculturalism, education in the border areas, or paying more attention to the value of families in the education process;

- lack of authority or their erroneous perception, with no fixed points of reference in the world of values, the relativism of values, and their selective treatment, which means that children raised in such an atmosphere have important gaps in their understanding of value, in determining what is right and wrong, and their role-models are the heroes of computer games or television cartoons. These are often negative characters from the point of view of education, which show a child relationships based on violence and the characters possess the attribute of having "many lives". This situation requires special consideration of how children are introduced to the world of values, what kind of reality they are shown in this regard, what reading to select and how to proceed in order to be attractive and credible when promoting those concepts that are not promoted by the colourful and ubiquitous media;

- threats to civilization, which reveal a number of pathologies, including the lowering of the age of alcohol, nicotine, drugs and sex initiation. The promotion of a lifestyle based on "simple happiness" and physical attractiveness, and omnipresent permissiveness which ensures that it is "unsurprising" that a 7-year-old girl has painted nails and is wearing a very short skirt made by a fashionable brand, and who is aware of her attractiveness. This situation requires consideration of the aims of education, the integration of preventative activities at the very beginning of the education of children (even in kindergarten, for example, there is a prevention programme called "Friends of Zippy");

- the requirements of the information society; the rapid development of technology, which, on the one hand creates opportunities for child development (at the Ministry of Education level there are projects being implemented such as: "Interclass" or

"Digital school", computer classes are introduced from the first-class), but on the other hand, this poses a significant threat to all areas of child development. Special attention deserves to be paid to the proper care of the linguistic development of a child. The ability of students to express themselves in the era of "cells and computers" is truncated, poor, grammatically incorrect; written statements contain a lot of spelling mistakes; there is a reluctance to read books; and children lack the skills of dialogue. There is an important role for teachers to create situations that enable interaction, and entering into dialogues (especially because children have poor experience in terms of communicating with others, because the contemporary family is determined by television – by J. Izdebska);

✔ negative social opinions about the reform of public education, about the school itself, which is not prepared for change, and about teachers who cannot cope with teaching – this creates educational problems, as children to not respect their authority. This causes dissatisfaction and opposition towards school education, and leads to the promotion of home education (home schooling is popular in the UK, and is gaining more and more followers in Poland), (for more on this subject see: Budajczak, 2004). There are doubts about the validity of this solution in an era in which it is difficult to find stability in a world of values and authorities; and there is certainly a need to develop such guidelines for home education, which would give chil dren an opportunity, rather than just addressing the needs of parents. Besides, it is difficult to understand the admiration for home schooling whilst also promoting early school education.

The above list shows the number of changes in many areas of people's lives, which have a significant impact on a child's education. They determine the trends in contemporary pedagogy, including early school pedagogy in both theoretical and practical terms.

Jolanta Karbowniczek
Beata Komorowska

Didactic aspects of early school education

The authors of the reform agreed that the optimal concept of teaching and education in classes I-III is that of an integrated-holistic education, which is conducive to the harmonious and comprehensive development of a child's personality. Accordingly, in the early school education programme we read "the aim of early school education is to support a child in his intellectual, emotional, social, ethical, physical, and aesthetic development. It is important to educate a child in such a way as to prepare him to live in harmony with himself, people, and nature. It should be ensured that a child can distinguish between good and evil, is aware of social belonging (to family, peer group and national unity) and understands the need to care for the environment. At the same time, people should seek to shape the system of knowledge and skills necessary for a child to explore and understand the world, coping with everyday situations and to continue their education in classes IV–VI of primary school".

In the context of the above, it is heartening to see the awareness of the importance of preschool and early education, which is called the "golden age of a child's development". "There is particular emphasis on the fact that a child's experiences in the early school period have a significant impact not only on the development of the student's school career, but are an important foundation for his comprehensive development. Therefore, early school pedagogy promotes a departure from the old behaviourist model of education in favour of one that emphasises the benefit of constructing knowledge by students, and which teaches cognitive independence. The transition from the domination of teaching to that of the benefit of learning through children's own activities and experience of the world is an important issue in current educational discourse. The modern school has to "create situations in which the student constructs his knowledge through self-activity, and not only captures, preserves, and restores the information provided by the teacher's skills." (Michalak, Misiorna, 2004, p. 70).

The task of the teacher is to stimulate students, creating the right environment and opportunities for discovering the surrounding world,

acquiring skills by using their experience and knowledge. "In the modern concepts of integrated education, treating children very subjectively, special emphasis is placed on developing their own multilateral activity. The intention is to make a student formulate and experience problems in real situations, so that the emerging questions, doubts and dilemmas can be addressed through activity, creating, and experimenting". (Just, 2005, p. 35). The individual's own activity is thus a basic condition of cognitive development.

In the process of constructing knowledge by children, interactions with adults are particularly important. "Every kind of knowledge constructed by students requires them to confront objects and people. Interactions with others often lead to a confrontation between their own way of thinking and understanding (…)". (Michalak, 2004, p. 185). Two subjective dialogues between a teacher and student provide an opportunity to feel the sense of being someone important in this relationship, which allows a child to develop adequate self-esteem and at the same time motivates the child to take further actions and share the effects of these actions with others, which stimulates a child's curiosity towards new issues and methods for their interpretation.

Individualisation is also important in the processes of a child's teaching and learning. It gains special importance in the process of implementing changes connected with the reform, which leads to the combining of classes, not only of children with varying intellectual levels but also those of different biological ages (this fact is a consequence of the on-going process of lowering the mandatory school age and the beginning of school education for children of 6 and 7 years in the last 3 years). Moreover, in light of H. Gardner's widely discussed elementary theory of multiple intelligences, which is the basis of education, every child develops their knowledge and responsibility for their experience, because man has at least eight forms of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily – kinesthetic, musical, visual – spatial, interpersonal, natural (Marek, 2006). They should all be accounted for and developed in the teaching process.

At the beginning the profile of intelligence of each child in the classroom should be determined; in the case of younger children by this

should be achieved mainly through observation. Secondly, teaching material should be presented in different ways to create the conditions for effective learning and teaching (various activities in the class). Third, the choice of the teaching methods and learning should be made according to the profile of intelligence and dominance of each child. And finally, classrooms should be decorated in such a way as to ensure that the children find within them a place to ensure multi-intelligent functioning (areas of interest); parents should also be familiarised with the child's intelligence profile in order that they can organize surroundings outside the school according to it. Profiling multiple intelligences of a child should indicate to teachers, parents and carers, what types of activities a child should be provided at home, school and during extracurricular activities. And it is not only about the strengths of the child, but also about stimulating the weaker attributes at this stage of development. By knowing the profile of a child's intelligence, teachers and parents should translate this into a way of planning his education and assessment. At the beginning of the school path it is important not to let the school mark or assessment demotivate the child; it should provide feedback related to student achievement in various areas of school life. In the light of existing legislation, evaluation in classes I–III has a descriptive character that excludes assessment through the use of giving marks in the form of numbers. However, as shown by numerous studies and observations, early school education teachers often use a digital evaluation or, when refraining from using them, they use points, percentages, or conventional signs – symbols (such as smiley faces, clouds, sun, or the letters A to D, where A is the highest degree of mastery of a specific message or skill and D the lowest), which are interpreted and translated for children and parents in terms of valuation. Teachers explain this fact by pointing to the expectations from parents and students regarding digital evaluation, which can be more easily understood. This fact, however, disturbs the whole concept of reforming early school education in the school. A student receiving a digital evaluation finds out the extent to which his work is similar or deviates from the ideal. For a correct understanding of children's learning descriptive assessment should be used, which gives in-

formation about both what the child knows, how and about what the child should work on, what needs to be improved, and how the child can learn. A special account in the assessment process of the youngest pupils (next to the evaluation summation report – which is a summary of knowledge of the topic – deserves formative assessment), is based on feedback, which takes into consideration what the student did well, as well as what should be done differently, and which direction to choose in further studies. (Hyżak, 2008, p. 78). It has the form of a commentary on the student's work. Formative assessment is this kind of assessment, which helps the student to learn. A student needs both, information about the degree to which he has mastered the material, as well as what he needs to improve upon and how he should achieve this. Therefore, teachers should still give signs, stamps, smiles, and those other forms that are used to "replace" digital evaluation, but one should also develop a plan of merger, or perhaps separation of these two methods of assessment (formative and summary) which would serve the student and his learning process.

For formative assessment parents must also be convinced; they should be made aware of the benefits of formative assessment as a factor that supports their children's education. As a result of the feedback, which accompanies formative assessment, parents also learn what their child has correctly completed, and what went wrong and how it should be improved. They also get tips on how to help their children and how they can support them in their learning. It is worth making the parents conscious of the fact that children do not go to school to receive a "number", but to learn something, such as a skill or to solve a problem. It is worth asking a student coming back from school: What did you learn today? What new experience did you have? What did you understand? Instead of: What grade did you receive today? (Hyżak, 2008, p. 79).

To sum up the above presented description of the main reasons for learning and teaching, we can quote Bożena Muchacka, when she says that "a good education will help a child's development; a student's innate intellectual dispositions should be especially supported by a number of factors, including:

– intellectual and developmental goal-setting (e.g. stimulating cognitive activity), developing cause-effect thinking skills (presenting a hypothesis), predicting, developing skills of critical, analytical and synthetic thinking, developing attitudes to learning, research, communication,

– cooperation and collaboration (in mutual interactions: children, teachers, parents),

– consideration of the forms and functions of learning, depending on the needs of the child,

– consideration of forms and functions of learning, depending on the development process".

(Muchacka, 2010, p. 85–86)

Projected directions of further changes in early school education

In terms of the theoretical aspects of early education in the future we can expect:

– the emergence of new orientations, directions and currents within the humanities,

– an emphasis on the role of subjectivity in this plenipotence, which is the highest stage of subjectivity,

– an increase in the amount of qualitative research relating to teaching and education of children at an early school age,

– a critical review (positive and negative) concerning the implementation of the concept of integrated education in grades I–III.

In terms practice, we can expect:

– more reliable and detailed work with children with special educational needs (both weak and capable),

– multi-dimensional development of the concept of integrated education in schools,

- improvement in the quality of multilateral education of children,
- the addition of a new practical-teaching solution,
- the triggering of new teacher initiatives, which will boost creative activity,
- an approximation of the educational process to the standards of a democratic open society,
- a search for unconventional methodological solutions,
- the effective implementation of the pedagogisation of parents to schools.

To summarize: contemporary trends in early school pedagogy are largely a response to the question: what are the expectations and challenges faced by modern education. The complexity of the factors that determine the shape of modern education and an awareness of the importance of early education for children's development, and the further education route caused by modern early school pedagogy, has to cope with many directions of research, with the need to redefine some of the concepts and processes and the continuous search for the most optimal ways of achieving the objectives of early school education. This will prove to be a major challenge for teachers at this stage of education, who are required to change their habits when it comes to the ways of teaching and organising the learning process, re-evaluating knowledge and skills, as well as to be creative and innovative in the implementation of various educational strategies.

Jolanta Karbowniczek
Beata Komorowska

Bibliography:

Budajczak M., *Edukacja domowa*, Gdańsk 2004.

Just M., *Przestrzenie terapeutyczne dramy w edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*, in: P. Waśko, M. Wrońska, A. Zduniak (eds.), *Polski system edukacji po reformie 1999 roku*, Poznań-Warszawa 2005.

Hyżak D., *Ocenianie kształtujące. Skuteczny sposób lepszej edukacji jutra*, in: K. Denek, K. Zatoń, A. Kwaśna (eds.), *Edukacja Jutra*, vol. 2, Wrocław 2008.

Karbowniczek J., Kwaśniewska M., Surma B., *Podstawy pedagogiki przedszkolnej z metodyką*, Kraków 2011.

Klus-Stańska D., Szczepska-Pustkowska M., *Pedagogika wczesnoszkolna – dyskursy, problemy, rozwiązania*, Warszawa 2009.

Komorowska B., *Dylematy wokół nowej podstawy programowej w opinii nauczycieli edukacji wczesnoszkolnej i rodziców uczniów klas pierwszych*, in: P. Mazur, E. Miterka (eds.), *Edukacja wczesnoszkolna w zmieniającej się rzeczywistości*, Chełm 2011.

Marek E., *Rozwijanie wielorakich inteligencji dzieci w edukacji elementarnej*, in: Grzeszkiewicz B. (ed.), *Współczesność i przyszłość edukacji elementarnej*, Szczecin 2006.

Michalak R., *Konstruktywistyczny model nauczania*, in: H. Sowińska, R. Michalak (eds.), *Edukacja elementarna jako strategia zmian rozwojowych dziecka*, Kraków 2004.

Michalak R, Misiorna E., *Rzeczywistość a założenia edukacji małego ucznia*, in: H. Sowińska, R. Michalak (eds.), *Edukacja elementarna jako strategia zmian rozwojowych dziecka*, Kraków 2004.

Muchacka B., *Wcześniejszy start szkolny w kontekście rozwoju i edukacji dziecka*, in: S. Guz, I. Zwierzchowska (eds.), *O pomyślny start szkolny dziecka*, Warszawa 2010.

Abstract

A child's education at an early school age is a major challenge, both at the individual and society levels. Its present shape is conditioned by, on the one hand, the development of science, especially psychology, pedagogy and didactics; on the other hand, by the changing socio-cultural, political and economic

reality. These changes have established new trends in early school pedagogy. The article includes the process of reforming the school in terms of elementary education, the role and place of the teacher and student in the learning process, the objectives of early school education, the comprehensive development of the student, his activation and evaluation.

Keywords: early education, school reform, comprehensive development of student, child teaching and learning, assessment in early school education

Information about the authors:

prof. nadzw. dr hab. Jolanta Karbowniczek

Doctor of Humanities in Education. Associate Professor in the Department of Teacher Training, Institute of Educational Sciences, Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. Her research interests are focused on core curriculum, learning difficulties, the concept of integrated education, educational reform, foreign language teaching to children in preschool and younger school ages.

Akademia Ignatianum w Krakowie

Instytut Nauk o Wychowaniu

Katedra Dydaktyki

ul. Kopernika 26, 31-501 Kraków

mobile phone: +48 604 887 631

e-mail: jkarbow@poczta.onet.pl

dr Beata Komorowska

Doctor of Humanities in Education. Assistant Professor in the Department of School Education Teaching at the Catholic University in Lublin. Her research interests are focused on: teaching, the axiological foundations of education, school education and working with students with educational problems.

Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski

Instytut Pedagogiki, Katedra Dydaktyki i Edukacji Szkolnej

ul. Droga Męczenników Majdanka 70, 20-325 Lublin

mobile phone: +48 513 015 645

e-mail: beatakom@kul.pl

Anna Klim-Klimaszewska

University of Natural Science and Humanities in Siedlce, Poland

Development of Children's Creative Activity in Preschool

An essential element of the teaching system, which is of vital importance, is the set of educational methods. The most prominent place among these methods is occupied by those methods that develop creative activity. These methods include:

1. The Project Method

The essence of the project method is determined by children's self-reliant work. During that time they are able to practice many skills. Children become involved in the project, which is carried out from the time in which it is being planned until its evaluation. They gain knowledge while searching for answers to some questions or through research activity. The project encompasses many fields of teaching and abilities. Classes are focused on research activity, searching for answers to questions, while using all of the materials.

Nursery school children may carry out two types of educational projects:

- A research project that is based on the collecting and systematizing of informations related to particular issues. As a result of this, items such as albums, interviews or drawings may be produced.
- The project of local operations relies on taking some actions in the local environment (also within the nursery school itself).

The project's realization proceeds along the following stages:

1. Establishing the project's topic
2. Establishing the range of the project
3. Carrying out the project
4. Presenting the project
5. Summarising the project

2. Constructing board games

Games are a great way for developing children's speech, training memory and teaching them how to use various rules, e.g. spelling. Each game is like a story based on the same pattern (the board, pawns indicating particular participants and the race to the finishing line).

The way of constructing all of the games is similar and requires:

– drawing the route of the race, which should be a long path, measuring the right size of tiles and setting the place for the start and finishing line,
– establishing who is going to race, thinking of some traps and bonuses and marking them clearly on the route of the race.
– instructions and rules are established while the board is being drawn (each new game requires the drawing of a new board).

In order to let the children construct the game they need the following accessories:

– sheets of paper, Bristol boards, scraps of smooth wallpaper, fabrics,
– dice,
– felt-tip pens, crayons, scissors, coloured paper, sticky tape,
– Kinder Surprise toys,

- small toy cars,
- animal figurines,
- counters, pebbles, buttons,
- blocks to measure the tiles for the path,
- string,
- lollipop or ice-cream sticks,
- rubber bands,
- clothes pegs,
- dominoes, which can be made of paper, and created by the children if needed,
- small homogeneous objects, e.g. beans, chestnuts,
- postcards,
- measuring tapes,
- pick-a-sticks,
- playing cards.

3. Celestyn Freinet's techniques

In the educational and teaching work of the nursery school, in order to release the productive energies within children, some of the following of Freinet's techniques may be used:

➢ artistic expression – children's unconstrained creation: verbal, artistic, music, motor and in the field of DIY,

➢ classroom bulletin – thematically collected materials that are used for, among other things, decorating the classroom, in order to display important and current information, and also to exchange letters between nursery schools,

➢ correspondence – writing letters, classroom bulletins and tape recordings,

➢ issue portfolios, thematic albums,

➢ self-prepared stagings,

➢ interviews,

➢ experiences of searching,

➢ the weekly planning of classroom work together with the children, summing up which of the planned works were completed.

In Freinet's nursery school classroom there ought to be:

– clay – which is a perfect model-making material,

– sand – which children love sifting between their fingers, and when wet it can become a building material; it can also be a great material for spontaneous experiments connected with measuring and weighing,

– water – which may enable experiences in the field of measuring capacity and, when mixed with paint, is a great tool for artistic expression,

– wood – big elements with a variety of shapes that can be used to construct a range of building structures, various planks, wooden slats, circles, springs, bobbins, string, some nails and the easiest tools for DIY, chestnuts, acorns and cones,

– a dolls corner – quite big doll's-house furniture that can be opened, rearranged, tidied; dolls with a proper supply of clothing; a cupboard with dishes and other items that will allow children to have imitative games that resemble their family environment,

– a blackboard that is hung low and coloured chalk – to encourage the children to draw,

– coloured paper and glue for cutouts and tear-outs, and various pieces of cardboard for sticking these on to,

– paper for drawing – a variety of colours and shapes which give children alternatives to choose from,

– soft pencils, coloured crayons, artistic chalk, school and poster paints with the widest possible range of colours and good brushes,

– linoleum and proper burins to cut into it and a duplicator,

– various shapes of windowpanes and printing ink or oil paints for repetitive work,

– scraps of fabric, canvas, wool, raffia, straw for embroiders and applications.

4. Maria Montessori's method

According to this nursery school upbringing method a child is completely independent while developing cognitive activeness. The teacher's role is simply to create the proper conditions that will enable and stimulate progress, as the motto says: "Help me do it myself". There should be a proper environment that is designed for where a child would find special impulses, which would stimulate any actions. The crucial determinants of an environment that has been prepared in this way are some handy developmental tools that can be used to help the child not the teacher.

5. Carl Orff's method of physical expression through actions

This method is based on a close correlation of physical culture with the culture of rhythm and music, and the culture of words. In this method, the emphasis is placed on expression that results from the child's emotional commitment and creative possibilities. Orff introduced percussion instruments with an uncomplicated playing technique, and for older children string and wind instruments. They include such unmelodic instruments as: drums, a tambourine, small and big drums, sets of bongo drums, maracas, boxes, clappers, castanets, cymbals, clattering rattles, etc. There are melodic instruments as well, such as glockenspiels, metallophones, and xylophones. When teaching older children, string and wind instruments are also used. However, Orff excluded the piano. Thus, as the basis of this method there are forms of games (which are disappearing nowadays) that include: exercises, dances, music, sayings, legends, fairy tales, poetry or prose, etc. These games afford an opportunity to develop children's inventiveness, both those who are talented and those that have fallen behind but which are given the opportunity to improve some of their shortcomings.

6. Alfred and Maria Kniess' method of rhythmical gymnastics

This is a form of creative gymnastics with dancing, which is based on the constant searching of new forms and manners connected with rhythm and music. Aesthetically prepared equipment plays an important role in the Kniess' method for physical exercise, and tools for sound production, such as: double bat, ribbon, rattle, small bells, halves of coconut shells, drums, cymbals, and others. Unusual tools are often used that have been made by the children themselves, which are also used as percussion instruments. Kniess' method of rhythmical gymnastics is characterized by widely understood motor expression and by a high degree of activeness on the part of those who exercise. It inspires new ideas and solutions.

7. Weronika Sherborne Developmental Movement

The purpose of doing exercises according to Sherborne's method is to create circumstances that will allow a child to get to know his own body, improve movement, experience a feeling of strength and fitness, and consequently improve his motor abilities. As a result of this, children may have confidence in themselves and also gain a sense of security. They can be more active, which will manifest itself in greater initiative, and become more creative.

The system of exercises worked out by W. Sherborne is derived from the natural needs of children, which are fulfilled while being in contact with adults. She created her therapeutic system out of so-called frolic, which occurs in the period of early childhood of every healthy child in each normal family. In her programme of developmental movement Weronika Sherborne outlined the following groups of exercises that support the child's progress:

- exercises that make it possible to get to know your own body,
- exercises that let you gain self-confidence and the feeling of safety,

- exercises that make it easier to establish contact and co-operation with a partner or the whole group,
- creative exercises.

Developmental movement exercises can take various forms: as individual classes with only one child, or children working in pairs, or they can be in groups of three or four, when adults exercise with the children, or as classes with more people, and they usually last about 30 minutes. Children's partners are often their parents, but they may also be a different adult, teenagers or school children.

8. Josef Gottfrid Thulin's method of making stories through physical actions

In this method the teacher chooses the proper topic of a story that he has invented which serves to stimulate the child's imagination. Next the child is supposed to retell the story with physical movements and presents various situations and events. Each child should do that in his own unique way, and work at his own pace and intensity. Thulin's method of making stories through physical actions favours developing fantasy, which plays a leading role in each child's life. It is the teacher who creates the situations, and the problem of solving them is left to the child's imagination. It requires that the teacher makes good and careful preparations for classes, and understands that the content of the story is just an aid that will allow the children to create their imaginary movements.

9. Emil Jagues-Dalcroze's method

It assumes that in order to activate fully a child, it is necessary to depart from verbalism in the educational process, and instead introduce practical classes of experiencing music before the theory of music

is presented. Dalcroze's method also includes actively training the ear for music, and vocal, instrumental and motor improvisation. Thus, it is a synthesis of the three ways of musical education.

Dalcroze's rhythmical exercises can be divided into two main branches: exercises that are supposed to educate the child musically and those that are all-educational. The first branch came into being as a result of music practice and composition analysis. Here we can find exercises that make children more sensitive to various elements of music (dynamic, agogical, concerning the tempo, articulatory and reacting to melodic element) and exercises that train rhythmic discipline based on the acquisition of practical information about music rhythm (performing the length of notes with physical movements, the music time and music themes, the chains of music themes, polyrhythmic exercises, complementary rhythms, the speed of rhythmic themes). However, the all-educational exercises appeared as the result of observing technical difficulties among children.

10. Edwin E. Gordon method of music learning

This is a method based on stimulating the development of musical thinking through singing. Edwin E. Gordon's method of teaching music was designed for children and seeks to develop musical abilities, musical language and contribute to wide-ranging progress. Classes led according to Edwin E. Gordon's method take the form of group work. At nursery schools they should be introduced in small groups of 6–12 children in a big well-aired room on a carpet. There should also be a variety of props – for instance blocks, balls, scarves, rings, etc. – which along with the music will stimulate the children's particular behaviour.

During these classes there are only three elements: the welcome song, taking the attendance ritual, when the teacher sings the name and surname of a child with a rising fifth, and the child then answers using the same notes inversely, going from the fifth downwards and answers: *Here I am*. When one on the kids is absent, the rest answer by singing: *Ab-*

sent. The third permanent element is a song for goodbye. The teacher may invent her own words for the welcome and goodbye songs that are suitable for the given melody.

11. Bati Strauss' method of active listening to music

In this method children get to know classical and jazz music and also the folklore of various regions. It is based on the usage of many elements like movement, dancing, gestures, singing and the playing of percussion instruments. The aim of Beti Strauss' method is to let the children get to know some pieces of music through so-called 'active listening'. It depends on performing easy rhythmic and dancing choreographies proposed by the teacher. The form of story-telling is very often used.

The new model of active listening to music consists of a few stages:

- Children listen to a particular piece of music and then talk about it (the tempo, dynamics).
- The content of a story is presented through gestures and dancing.
- The orchestra is formed with a conductor in front of it.
- The last stage is the playing of percussion instruments or some unconventional ones according to a graphic score.

The music in these methods is selected in order to apply the following forms of musical education:

– performing the vocal and instrumental music (the singing and playing of percussion instruments),
– creating music as a result of vocal and instrumental improvisation and also through vocal, instrumental and motor improvisation,
– integrating the movement, singing, playing with the use of instruments and speaking.

The exercises proposed are easy to perform and are possible to do at nursery schools. Furthermore, the teacher does not need to have a professional music education.

12. Theatre at nursery school

It is one of the working methods, which to a large extent applies the theory of education through art. It releases in child-actors creative acting, which becomes a source of experiences for them.

The following theatre stagings can be performed at nursery schools:

- cut-outs theatre (silhouette),
- puppet theatre (puppets, jumping jacks, marionettes),
- Chinese shadow theatre,
- judgement over a negative character,
- lively scenery (children arrange the screenplay themselves),
- lively theatre (improvisation),
- stagings of literary works.

13. Drama

This is a method that enables children to become acquainted with the world through action. Children learn how to analyse positive and negative reactions while making at the same time corrections to their behaviour. Drama depends on creating situations, outlining problems and attempting to solve them by adopting a role in which children are able to identify themselves with, as well as other people or things; they can also empathise with other personalities.

In drama children have the possibility to observe directly a range of behaviours, including their own and those of other children. They have a chance to analyze the sources of particular reactions, what is positive in

them and what is inappropriate, and how they should be changed. They can see the different ways in which others behave and they can take advantage of good models in order to make instant corrections to their behaviour. In drama the teacher's commands should be simple, and the problem that is to be solved is supposed to be close and well-known by the children. The application of drama as a working method with children enables:

- the development of self-confidence in children,
- the forming of a rounded personality, and the stimulation of harmonious progress,
- the broadening of the range of children's activeness,
- the use of educational interaction of their peer group,
- the use of elements in art in everyday educational practice, which can take a variety of forms (music, theatre, plastic art),
- the development of sensitivity, imagination and experience,
- the creation of situations in which a child can make independent choices and decisions,
- the forming of an open and creative attitude,
- greater emphasis on a child's individual progress,
- the development and enrichment of vocabulary.

A starting point for drama can be: moods and emotions, a screenplay or a poem, a painting or sculpture, a story, a comic strip, photography or illustrations, music or other sounds, and individual experiences. When working with nursery school children one can apply drama techniques, such as drama games, sculptures, and photographs.

14. Music therapy

This is a specific method which uses music and its elements as sources of emotional stimulation and expression, and also non-verbal communication. Applying well matched music may result in the assuaging of

aggressive feelings. After studying the music of many composers it was found that the richest music in terms of high frequencies, which energizes and activates the brain's workings, is Mozart's music. Systematic work on this music revealed a phenomenon which was later called Mozart's Effect.

Music therapy is used in order to:

– disclose and relieve blocked emotions and tension, facilitate in tegration in a group, and improve communication,
– learn how to rest and relax,
– rationalize perceptive and motor functions,
– sensitize an individual to music and nature,
– improve the psychophysical condition, the rise of a positive attitude in life and vital force.

Music therapy can exert a great influence on children's development and especially:

• develop creative thinking,
• teach simple thinking operations (comparison, analysis, synthesis, abstract thinking, etc.),
• improve disturbed visual, auditory and kinaesthetic functions,
• reduce tension produced by stress,
• improve memory and attention.

15. Relaxation

This is a set of exercises that lead to physical and mental relaxation. It is effective in terms of regenerating strength and eliminating tension caused by various experiences, and exhaustion, weariness that appear after particular forms of behaviour.

The following relaxation techniques can be applied to children at nursery schools:

- Maxwell Malz's method of forming a positive internal image. That is a method which is based on practising the skill of imaginative thinking.
- The training of creative visualisation for children. Visualisation is a way of recalling in the mind images of objects from the past.

16. Conclusion

The methods listed above are different ways of working with children that are designed to release their free creative expression, in contrast to traditional methods. They are educational and developmental methods for nursery school children which can be used to free their activeness and creativity.

The originality of these methods relies most heavily on the assumption that the teacher, beginning with the children's experiences, lets them work according to their own rhythm. The teacher is there to help and encourage children to put still more and more effort in harmony with each child's individual possibilities. It is the child, though, who makes the decision whether to accept the offer or not. The child is also completely free to choose the topic, material or technique.

Bibliography:

Dzierzgowska I., *Jak uczyć metodami aktywnymi. Fraszka Edukacyjna*, Warszawa 2006.

Dorance S., *Zajęcia twórcze w przedszkolu. Przedmioty i obrazy*, Warszawa 1997.

Klim-Klimaszewska A., *Pedagogika przedszkolna. Nowa podstawa programowa*, Warszawa 2010.

Nowak-Grobelska K., Pilecka B., *Program wychowania przedszkolnego wspomagający rozwój aktywności twórczej dziecka „Jestem częścią świata"*, Białe Błota--Bydgoszcz 2000.

Podhajecka M., *Edukacnymi hrami poznavame svet*, Presov 2008.

Abstract

An essential element of the teaching system, which is of vital importance, is the set of educational methods. A prominent place amongst these is occupied by those methods that develop creative activity; this is because the main element that results in the maximizing of the child's developmental chances is its creative activity.

The article presents the following methods that actively develop the nursery school pupil's creativity: the project method, the construction of board games, Celestyn Freinet's techniques, Maria Montessori's method, Carl Orff's method of physical expression through actions, Alfred and Maria Kniess' method of rhythmical gymnastics, Weronika Sherborne's Developmental Movement, Josef Gottfrid Thulin's method of making stories through physical actions, Emil Jagues-Dalcroze's method, Edwin E. Gordon's method of developing the love of music, Bati Strauss' method of active listening to music, theatre, drama, music therapy, Maxwell Malz's method of forming a positive image of oneself, and the practise of creative visualization for children.

The methods listed above are different ways of working with children that rely on releasing their free creative expression, in contrast to traditional teaching methods that oppose those methods that activate the educational process. They are educational and developmental methods for children who are at nursery school, and they facilitate unconstrained activeness and creation.

Keywords: methods, activity, children, nursery school

Information about the author:

prof. nzw. dr hab. Anna Klim-Klimaszewska

A pedagogue, specialisation in preschool and elementary school education, the author of more than 180 publications published in Poland and abroad (Spain, France, Switzerland, Cyprus, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Finland, Canada), including 25 books – monographs and edited. A member of the following scientific organisations: Siedleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe (Siedlce Learned Society), Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne (Polish Pedagogical Society), Akademickie Towarzystwo Andragogiczne (Academic Andragogical Society), Międzynarodowa Słowiańska Akademia Kształcenia im. Jana Amosa Komeńskiego w Mołdawii (The John Amos Comenius International Slavic Academy of Education in Moldova), Drohiczyńskie Towarzystwo Naukowe (The Drohiczyn Learned Society), European Association of Security, Asocjacja Profesorów Słowiańskich Państw w Bułgarii (Association of the Professors of Slavic Countries in Bulgaria), Towarzystwo Rozwijania Inicjatyw Oświatowych TRIO (Society for Developing Educational Initiatives TRIO), Zespół Teorii Wychowania przy Komitecie Nauk Pedagogicznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk (Unit for the Theory of Education at the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences), Polski Komitet Światowej Organizacji Wychowania Przedszkolnego OMEP (Polish Committee of the World Organization for Early Childgooh Education OMEP). The chief editor of an international journal "Pedagogica. At Utilitatem Disciplinae" published by the Institute of Pedagogy at Siedlce University of Natural Sciences and Humanities. An organizer and co-organizer of 15 national and international conferences.

Uniwersytet Przyrodniczo-Humanistyczny w Siedlcach

Instytut Pedagogiki

ul. Popiełuszki 9, 08-110 Siedlce

mobile phone: +48 604 232 638

e-mail: klimanius@interia.pl

Ekaterina Sofronieva

"St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia, Bulgaria

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes to Non-traditional Pedagogy in Very Early Language Learning

This article presents the introduction of a new instructional tool for Initial Teacher Education at "St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia in Bulgaria. The aim of the study was to train undergraduate students of Early Childhood and Foreign Language Teaching in the Narrative Format (NF) model of Early Second Language Learning for one academic year, and to conduct research into the effectiveness of the model as an educational tool at university level. Students practised their newly acquired skills by teaching English on a weekly basis to over 200 small children from university partner nurseries, schools or in a home environment. The results of the impact of the model on raising teacher trainees' efficacy beliefs and their perceptions of language proficiency are described in the article "The Efficacy of the Narrative Format Model in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation" (Sofronieva, 2012). This article presents the results of the research into students' opinions of the new model and course evaluation. With regard to this issue, our hypothesis was that the methodology course would be evaluated positively by the students who had studied it, and that it would be viewed as a useful university module.

The Narrative Format model of early foreign language learning and teaching was developed by prof. Traute Taeschner from Sapienza University of Rome. Because it is loved by all children who learn languages with their new friends Hocus and Lotus – the two main characters of the stories of the model – the NF model is often referred to as *Hocus and Lotus*. It has been diffused in many countries and won numerous awards (e.g. the Golden Prize at the Lifelong Learning Awards in Berlin, 2007; the prize for

Best Educational Cartoon from the Unicef Jury, 2005; the prize for Best Soundtrack at the Dervio International Cartoon Festival, 2002, etc.). "Children who experience the Narrative Format model acquire a second language naturally, and, given time, can reach a level of fluency in the second language which matches that of their mother tongue. The model has been developed in five languages: English, German, French, Italian, and Spanish. It is designed for five years of instruction (for each language) and is suitable for nurseries and primary schools or the home environment." (Sofronieva, 2012, p. 29–30).

The NF model responds to the need for new working methods covering both theory and practice in the field of early foreign language teaching. It equips language teachers with a consistent and holistic language methodological framework which can fully develop children's foreign language acquisition, their physical, emotional, and psychological growth and simultaneously enhance teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. It is not only suitable for specialized language teachers but for teachers who lack the necessary fluency in the language they teach. It has demonstrated that it has the potential to facilitate the development of the key skills which are important for developing a sense of success in teachers. It provides a viable alternative to training which relies more heavily on theories (important though these are) inherent in the more academic training normally found in university departments, and thus also addresses issues of teacher quality, readiness, and self-efficacy.

In her book "The Magic Teacher", Taeschner (2005) describes in detail the theoretical principles of the model, which are rooted in concepts that have a psychological nature, such as affection, good communication, narration, the use of verbal and non-verbal means of communication (e.g. gestures, facial expressions, voice intonation, gaze direction, etc.). The book also presents the research results of 120 Italian teachers who were trained in and applied the model with their pupils from 1997 to 2000. Since then, a copious amount of research in various countries has been conducted which confirms the results of the project implemented in Italy and the effectiveness of the model. Views from thousands of classrooms provide continual evidence for children and teachers' language progress

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes
to Non-traditional Pedagogy
in Very Early Language Learning

45

ARTICLES Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

(for more information on the NF model see also the official website: <http://www.hocus-lotus.edu/>).

In 2009, Sofia University specialists took steps towards introducing it at university level in Bulgaria, and regarded it as a tool that could help students on their route of professional development as future language teachers, and would increase their self confidence, readiness to enter the teaching profession and satisfaction.

Participants and procedures

First and second year students (n = 79) in Pre-school Education and Foreign Language (English) and Pedagogy of Mass and Art Communication (English) were trained in the NF model and applied it in their work with children for one academic year. The students represented the entire population of students on the two BA programmes with the English language who followed the same language curriculum. The training on the NF model was embedded into their general linguistics classes and further applied during their university practice in partner nurseries – both required courses on the curriculum. At the end of the year the students were invited to complete an evaluation questionnaire in Bulgarian on a voluntary basis. To avoid anxiety and to ensure truthful responses, the questionnaire was anonymous. On average 10–15 minutes were allocated to the completion of the task during the final class session of the academic year. All students who attended the class completed the questionnaire. Altogether 68 responses were collected. One form was incorrectly filled, so 67 responses were entered into the final analysis which represented 86% of all students who studied the course.

Of all the respondents, 59 were females (88% of the group) and 8 were males (12% of the group). The mean age of the students in the group was 20.04 (S.D. = 1. 25; range 19–25). Of all the participants, 41 students (61%) were in their first year of university studies and 26 students (39%) were in their second year of studies. In the group, 42 students (63%) were students in Pre-school Education and Foreign Language Teaching

(PEFL-English) and 25 students (37%) were students in the Pedagogy of Mass and Art Communication (PMAC- English).

The Instrument

Evaluation Questionnaire

The instrument was designed to conform to the university model and to match the methodology. It tackles a few separate areas of interest and comprises 12 evaluation questions (listed as Q11–Q22 on the original form)[1] projected to cluster on 5 indicators: course satisfaction, effectiveness of training, effect on children, empathy: fantasy and perspective taking, and perception of methodology. Questions were developed in a way that would force a choice (yes/no) in students' responses, or would be responded to on a 4-point Likert scale. Further comments and recommendations on the methodology course were initiated as an open invitation to participants to share opinions or comments.

RESULTS

To check our hypothesis, which stated that the majority of the group of students who had been trained in the Narrative Format model would accept and evaluate positively the innovative instructional tool that had been offered to them at the university level, we analysed the data collected in the evaluation questionnaire. Responses to Question 1 are presented separately as the item referred to the same construct that is measured by Question 2 on Indicator 1. Means and SD of the scores on

---

[1] The first ten questions (Q1–Q10) are part of a separate form filled in by the students along with the evaluation form, which collected data on students' demographic characteristics (presented in this study as well), their self-efficacy beliefs and perception of language proficiency. For simplicity, we will refer to the 12 evaluation questions as being numbered from 1 to 12 in this article.

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes
to Non-traditional Pedagogy
in Very Early Language Learning

47

the 5 indicators were computed. A detailed report on the question items, the measurement scales and data on the generated scores on the indicators is presented below. The mean and standard deviation and the frequency distribution of scores on each indicator are displayed in the graphs that follow.

Question 1 "Have you found the course useful?" The responses required a "yes/no" answer. The results showed that 66 students (99%) found the course useful and only 1 student did not.

Chart 1: Percentage distribution of yes/no responses on Question 1

Have you found the course useful?

1%

99%

☐ Yes
■ No
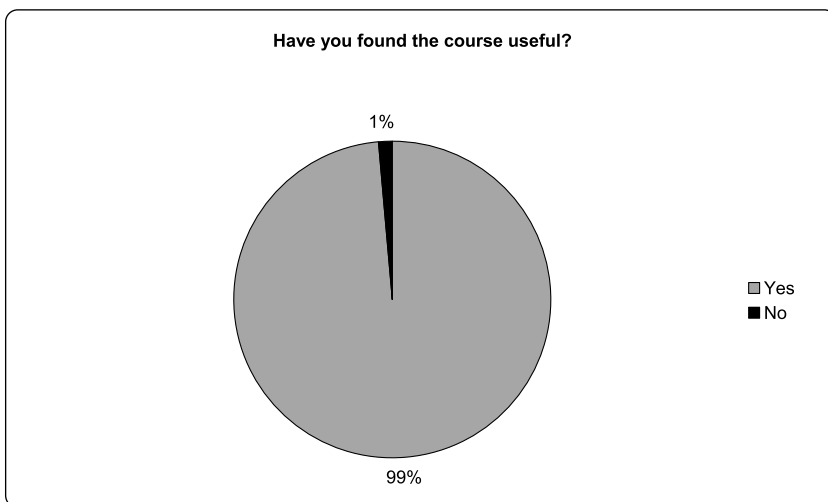
INDICATOR 1 – COURSE SATISFACTION

Question 2 "How useful did you find the course?" (1–4)
1) not useful at all   2) not very useful   3) useful   4) very useful

Question 12 "What is your overall satisfaction with the university course?" (1–4)
1) not at all satisfied   2) not very satisfied   3) satisfied   4) completely satisfied

Score range: 2 min.–8 max.

Graph 1: Mean and SD of scores on Indicator 1

Indicator 1 - Course Satisfaction
Mean and Standard Deviation

Scores

8.00

7.00 ◇ 7.10

6.00

5.00

4.00

3.00

2.00

Course satisfaction - entire sample
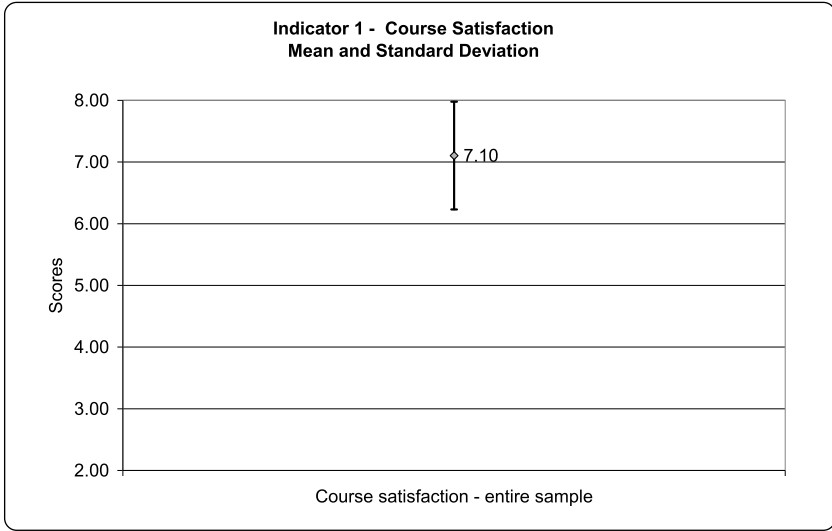
Graph 2: Frequency distribution of scores on Indicator 1

Indicator 1 - Score Distribution

Frequency

70

60

50

40

30 — 29

22

20 — 16

10

0 — 0 — 0 — 0 — 0

2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Scores

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes
to Non-traditional Pedagogy
in Very Early Language Learning

49
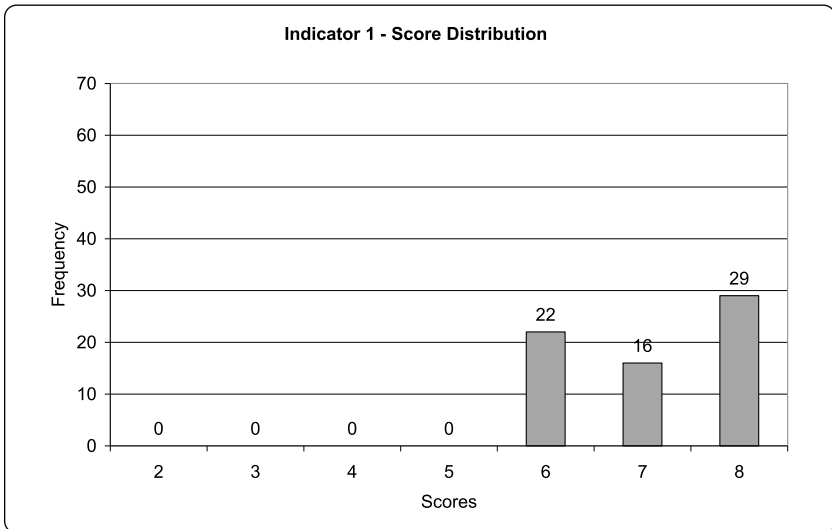
As can be clearly seen in the above graph there were no values of 2 to 5 received on this indicator. Students' responses showed that they found the course either useful (46.3%) or very useful (53.7%) and were satisfied (43.3%) or completely satisfied (56.7%) with it.

INDICATOR 2 – THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TRAINING

Question 3 "Did the course help you to feel better prepared to teach languages to children?"

Yes / No (1–0)

Question 4 "Has studying for the course influenced your teaching style?"

Yes / No (1–0)

Score range: 0 min.–2 max.

Graph 3: Mean and SD of scores on Indicator 2

Indicator 2 - Effectiveness of Training
Mean and Standard Deviation

2.00

◇ 1.81

Scores

1.00

0.00

Effectiveness of training - entire sample
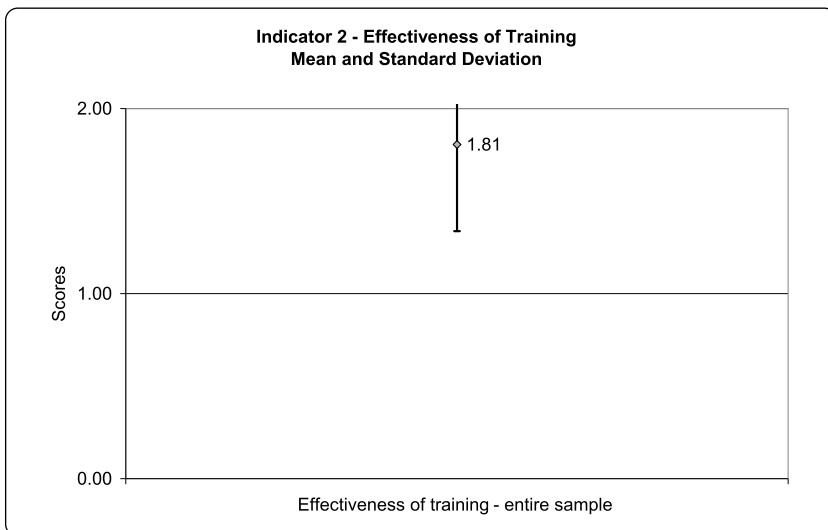
Graph 4: Frequency distribution of scores on Indicator 2

Indicator 2 - Score Distribution
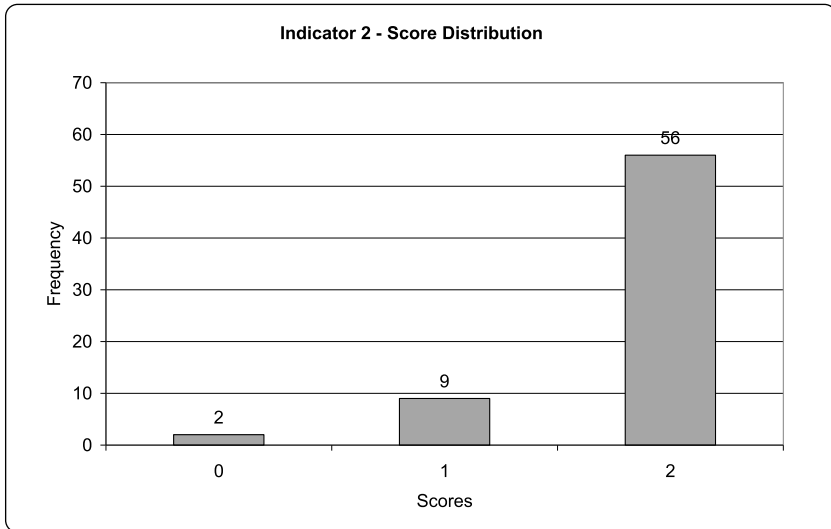
A large majority of the students (95.5%) stated that the training course helped them to feel better prepared to teach languages to children, and 85.1% reported that it influenced their teaching style.

INDICATOR 3 – EFFECT ON CHILDREN

Question 5 "Did your work with the children on the Hocus and Lotus model have a positive impact on your communication and relationship with the children?"

Yes / No (1–0)

Question 6 "Do you think that the children you work with can learn foreign languages more effectively with this model?"

Yes / No (1–0)

Question 7 "Do you think that the method is a positive experience for the children you work with?"

Yes / No (1–0)

Score range: 0 min.–3 max.

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes
to Non-traditional Pedagogy
in Very Early Language Learning

51

Graph 5: Mean and SD of scores on Indicator 3

Indicator 3 - Effect on Children
Mean and Standard Deviation

Scores

3.00

◇ 2.90

2.00

1.00

0.00

Effect on children - entire sample
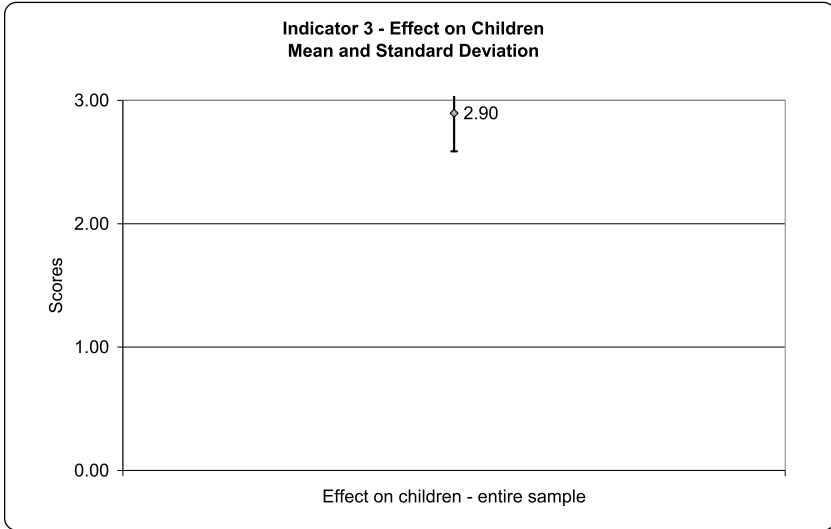
Graph 6: Frequency distribution of scores on Indicator 3

Indicator 3 - Score Distribution

Frequency

70

60 — 60

50

40

30

20

10 — 7

0 — 0   0

0   1   2   3

Scores
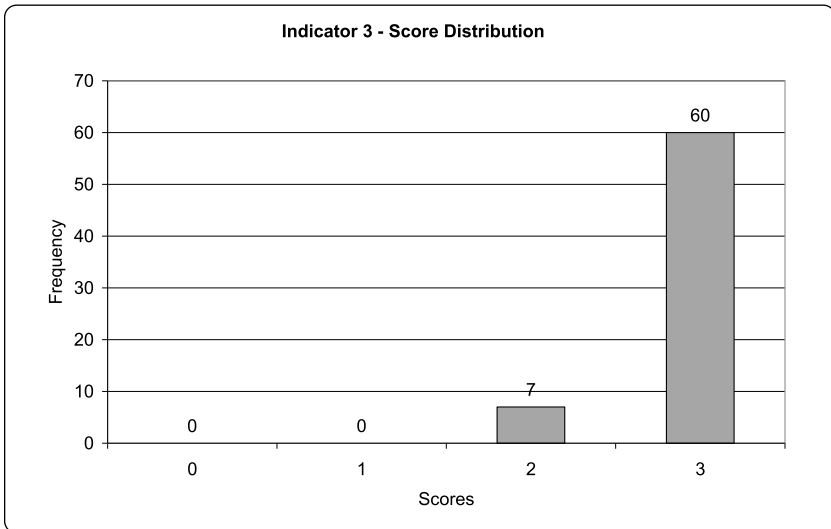
All the students, with one exception, (98.5%) answered affirmatively to the first question on the indicator. The next question generated 91.0% affirmative responses. All students (100%) reported that the NF model was a positive experience for the children.

INDICATOR 4 – EMPATHY: FANTASY AND PERSPECTIVE TAKING

Question 9 "Did you find it easy to transport yourself in the world of fantasy during Hocus and Lotus classes and practice?"
Yes / No (1–0)

Question 10 "Did you find it easy to put yourself in the shoes of the different characters of the narrative format?
Yes / No (1–0)

Score range: 0 min.–2 max.

Graph 7: Mean and SD of scores on Indicator 4

Indicator 4 - Empathy: Fantasy and Perspective Taking
Mean and Standard Deviation

1.54

Empathy: fantasy and perspective taking - entire sample

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes
to Non-traditional Pedagogy
in Very Early Language Learning

53
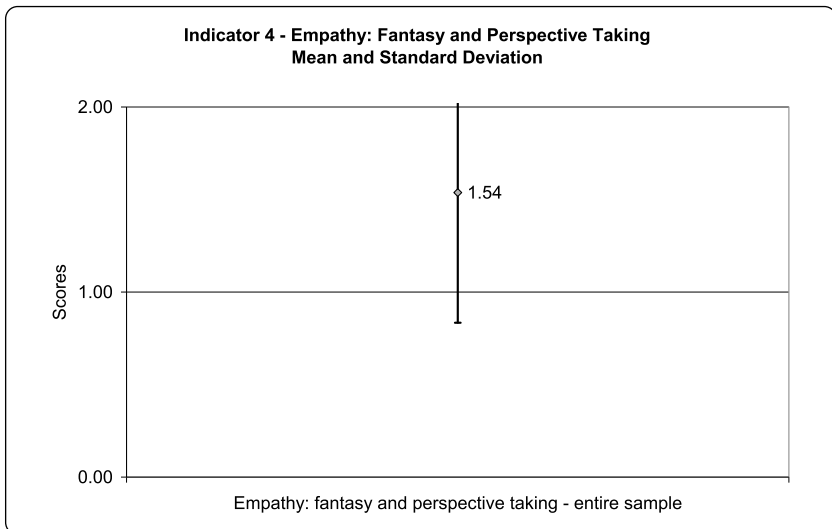
Graph 8: Frequency distribution of scores on Indicator 4

Indicator 4 - Score Distribution
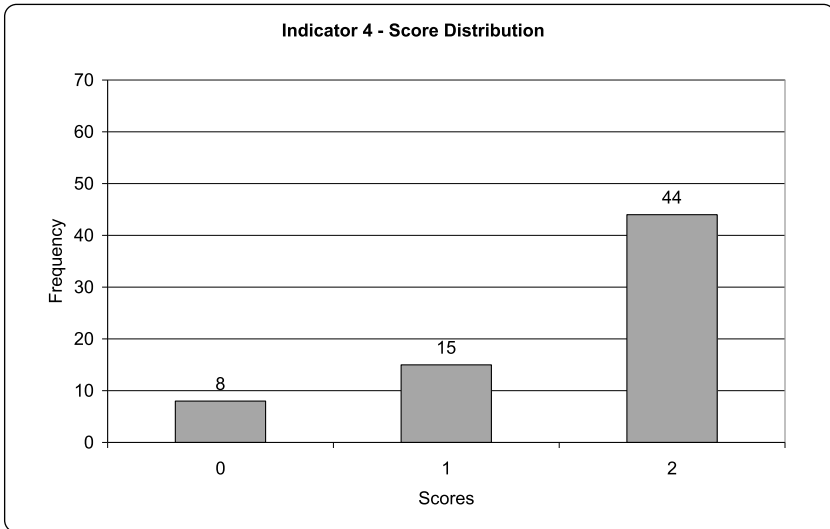
The questions for this indicator were designed to relate to the fantasy and perspective-taking subscales of the IRI (Davis, 1980). They inquired into students' perceptions about their more cognitive empathy skills. We wanted to explore whether students had encountered difficulties when applying these cognitive strategies; these typically occur during the acting out of the narrative stories – a core activity of the model. "FS measures the tendency to identify with characters in movies, novels, plays and other fictional situations" whereas "the perspective-taking subscale contains items which assess spontaneous attempts to adopt the perspectives of other people and see things from their point of view" (Davis, op.cit., p. 2). In the group, 79.1% of the students reported that they had not encountered difficulties on the fantasy component and 74.6% stated that they did not find it difficult to step into the shoes of the different characters in the acting out activity of the formats.

INDICATOR 5 – PERCEPTION OF METHODOLOGY

Question 8 "Was the method a positive experience for you?

Yes / No (1–0)

Question 11 "Would you like to continue your studies and work on the methodology in the next academic year as well?"

Yes / No (1–0)

Score range: 0 min.–2 max.

Graph 9: Mean and SD of scores on Indicator 5

Indicator 5 - Perception of Methodology
Mean and Standard Deviation

2.00 ⬦ 1.88

Scores

1.00

0.00

Perception of methodology - entire sample

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes
to Non-traditional Pedagogy
in Very Early Language Learning

55

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

ARTICLES
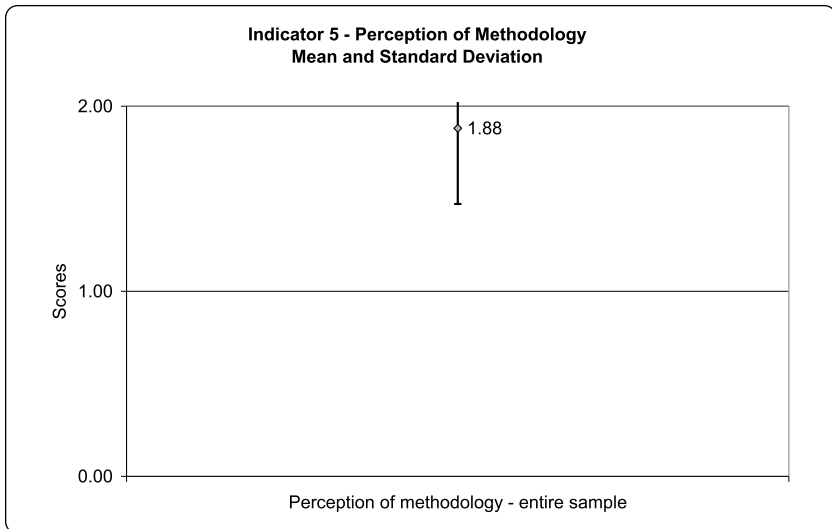
Graph 10:   Frequency distribution of scores on Indicator 5

Indicator 5 - Score Distribution
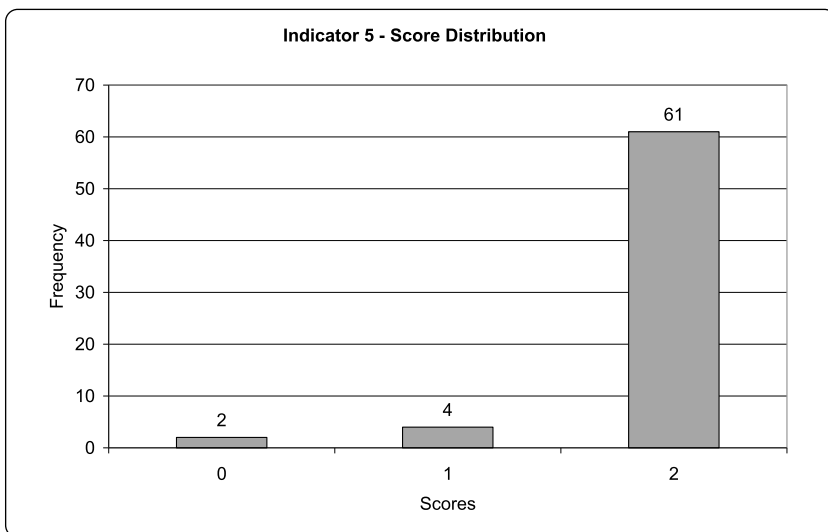
Most respondents (97.0%) reported that they had a positive experience and only 2 students did not. The results showed that a large majority of the students (91.0%) expressed their willingness to continue their work and practice on the model in the following year as well.

Additional comments received from students on the evaluation questionnaire

An English translation of some additional comments, received from the students, is presented below. Generally speaking, all the comments praised the method and were extremely positive. They reflected students' own experiences and perceptions as well as some children's responses that the students had received during their combined work.

- *It's a wonderful methodology. For me and for the kids.*
- *Working with you was incredibly pleasant and so was the work with the kids.*

- *It was recharging and positive.*
- *I am very grateful that I had the chance to study this methodology. It helped the children's development and my own. Thank you very much.*
- *The kids' results and reactions say it all – it is a fantastic methodology.*
- *Kids adore Hocus and Lotus. I adore it even more than they do.*

CONCLUSION

Data showed that the students who were trained in the Narrative Format model evaluated the university course and the new model extremely positively with most questions generating between 90%–100% affirmative responses. Our results confirm the positive evaluation of the NF model trainings that have been reported in previous studies (Taeschner, 2005; Colibaba & Gheorghiu, 2011). Given our students' positive perception of the introduction of the model, we feel that we managed to transfer successfully the positive experience of the model onto them and the children. The outcomes in terms of students' raised teacher efficacy beliefs and perception of language proficiency, and children's learning, which are part of separate studies and analyses, proved the usefulness of the introduction of the NF model at the university level in Bulgaria.

A Study of Student Reactions and Attitudes
to Non-traditional Pedagogy
in Very Early Language Learning

57

ARTICLES

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

Bibliography:

Colibaba A., Gheorghiu E., *Dinocrocs Travel to Romania*, "Preduchilishtno Vuzpitanie" ["Pre-school Education"], 9 (2011), p. 20–31.

Davis M. H., *A Multidimentional Approach to Individual Differences in Empathy*, JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology, 10 (1980), p. 85–104.

Sofronieva E., *The Efficacy of the Narrative Format Model in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation*, in: L. Kospartova, T. Diakov, S. Altukov, et al. (eds.) "Annuaire De L'Universite De Sofia «St. Kliment Ohridski» Faculté De Formation D'Educateurs et D'Instituteurs," Tome 104 (p. 25–43), Sofia 2012.

Taeschner T., *The Magic Teacher. Learning a foreign language at nursery school – results from the project*, London 2005.

Internet sites:

<http://www.hocus-lotus.edu/>

Abstract

This paper presents the introduction of a new instructional tool for Initial Teacher Education in Early Childhood language at "St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia in Bulgaria. The aim of the study was to train university undergraduate students in the Narrative Format model of foreign language teaching and learning, and to conduct research into their opinions and evaluation of the course at the end of the academic year. Our belief was that students' evaluation of the course that was offered to them would confirm its value as an educational tool. The results proved that Bulgarian students are in search of, and open to new working methodologies and classroom practices. As a result of the positive outcomes and students' extremely positive evaluation of the model, it has been incorporated into their university studies and nursery practice for another consecutive year.

Keywords: early foreign language teaching and training, course evaluation, the Narrative Format model

Information about the author:

Asst. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva, PhD teaches English language and methodology at the department of Preschool Education, Faculty of Primary and Pre-school Education, Sofia University. She has been a teacher trainer for many years. She is a doctoral student in Career Guidance and Educational Strategies at Sapienza University of Rome.

Ekaterina Sofronieva

Assistant Professor

Department of Pre-school Education

Faculty of Primary and Pre-school Education

"St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia

69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd., Sofia 1574, Bulgaria

mobile phone: +359 889 589 387

e-mails: sofpress@vmail.bol.bg and e_sofronieva@yahoo.com

Lora Spiridonova, Magdalena Stoyanova, Veronica Kozareva, Dimitar Gyurov, Vessela Gyurova

"St. Kliment Ohridski" University of Sofia, Bulgaria

Interactive Training in Pedagogical Competencies at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The Quality of Higher Pedagogical Education and Guarantees for European Competences

Interpreting the problems of higher education is influenced by current social, cultural, and educational trends, namely:

- Trends in the expectations for the development of Bulgaria's integration; in this respect, this means being open and willing to adapt to the new provisions of higher education reform, as influenced by the economic crisis;
- Trends justifying the unity of national and European institutions in the process of their improvement;
- Trends affecting the continuity in achievements at the national and European levels, as well as being bound to the democratic traditions of the Bulgarian nation and the universal values of today's citizens;
- Trends expressing civil and political approval of the education integration process.

All of the above allow one to develop a more strategic view of Bulgarian national education policy in the higher education sector, and emphasise that this is a decisive factor for Bulgaria's participation in the process of European integration.

The integration of higher education in the European area, as already stated, depends partly on legislative policy, but above all on the improvement of its quality. It is determined by: the management of higher pedagogical education, with regard to its autonomy and priorities, such as democratic decision-making, ensuring civil rights and freedom of choice. The presence of a modern legislative basis of academic autonomy and a strategy of European integration provides an opportunity to realize the following *principles*:

- Subsidiarity – the procedure for participation in decision-making;
- Parallelism – between public and private, governmental and intergovernmental structures and foundations;
- Security – for community, national and European interests;
- Constructivism, stimulating the interest, and self-creativity of the students.

Conceptually, these principles should be implemented seriously and in depth, while discussing and updating the curricula of educational technologies, and through the stimulation of students – who will be future teachers – in the education process. It is essential to ensure pedagogical competence through a qualitative change in the involvement of students in the learning process by encouraging the active and progressive assessment of contributions; an objective assessment of the significance of the studied subjects (mandatory, elective and optional); and ensuring the mobility of students who are travelling to other universities in the country or abroad.

Applying Child-Rights Based Approaches in Preschool Pedagogical Interaction

European priorities require the implementation of education models as early as the kindergarten stage, which aim for self-assertion in the interaction with others. The preschool age has a high degree of sensitivity

and susceptibility in the formation of self-image and one's value system. It is at this age that the emotional preferences, which define the behavior of the child, are built. Therefore it is advisable to apply a personality-oriented model of interaction and a child-rights based approach. Familiarity with their nature is a basic requirement for the development of a high level pedagogic culture and competence of the future teachers.

In a broad sense, the child rights-based approach requires concrete efforts to solve the social and economic problems that prevent the effective realization of the rights of the child. It challenges many of the assumptions for upbringing and educating children and requires long-term strategies.

When it comes to the application of the child rights-based approach in education and specifically in the preschool pedagogic interaction, we must consider that it is based on internationally agreed human rights standards and promotes these standards in society at large. The basic document where these principles and standards are defined is the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989 and was ratified by Bulgaria in 1991. The Convention applies to all children and young people up to the age of 18 in the countries that ratified it. That is why its application within the Bulgarian education system is not only natural, but also a legal and democratic requirement.

Equal and inclusive education, effective and relevant learning, which ensures children's participation, are the necessary preconditions to implementing the child rights-based approach. It promotes the personal development of the individual child and defines the education content methods and scheduling, which are relevant to children's individuality, (e.g. age, gender, cultural and social status, etc).

A popular, yet false, assumption is that children in preschool are not able to participate in the life of their community or to make decisions regarding their own lives. According to the child rights-based approach, every child is recognized on the basis of her or his competences, knowledge and abilities, and is able to use them in order to contribute to society, to shape the kindergarten, family and community environment.

It is therefore very important for the preparation of the future pedagogues to counter the stereotype that the child is a passive "receiver" of certain influences. They have to build their pedagogical competences for implementing child-rights based models in kindergarten, according to which every child can participate as an active subject in pedagogical interaction. Through his or her active participation in the learning activities, the child influences his or her own learning by making it more meaningful, more relevant and more enjoyable. These models have to provide child-centred interaction for gaining the key competences as preconditions for personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social inclusion.

The European education space is characterized by a high degree of dynamism that aims at constant democratization and humanization. Applying the child-rights based approach is one option for improving the quality of education which will facilitate our transition and adaptation to European education priorities.

The education approaches are very important:

Nature and environmental orientation – respect for the nature and environment in the kindergarten orientation has a central role. Children have many opportunities to observe, to experiment, to speculate and to find their own solutions. Hypotheses are made by the children and then checked.

Education in the social world – a child's personality is enhanced. Special School projects are designed to ensure a smooth transition from kindergarten to school.

Creativity – Life is colourful – while working in different groups, children receive many opportunities to express and present their own ideas and their own personality through painting, sculpture, and working with different materials. They create by trying different techniques.

Social behaviour – nature offers much more than a diverse playground. Specific experience in nature supports the education content and particularly social behaviour. While playing with each other, children learn about their relationships with other people, and how to make their

own feelings understandable and visible. It is also important to provide assistance for dealing with negative feelings.

Gross and fine motor skills – the world opens up to children through movement, children learn to explore, discover, and experience. Movement experiences are psychosomatic and they have a positive or negative effect on body and mind.

Language development – children must be provided with many opportunities to express themselves verbally. Language development can be achieved through picture books offering exercises for developing basic reading skills, games that involve singing, group discussions, role-plays, rhymes, conversations, and the exchange of experiences during meal breaks.

Self "I can do" – it is important for children to develop their personality, to exhibit a level of development that is appropriate to their age, and to be independent. Pedagogues in kindergarten should assist children in their detachment from the parental home. The children should have their own options for action and the educator should provide assistance in dealing with conflicts. In that way children's self-confidence and self-esteem are boosted. They learn to cope with failures, to accept criticism and to change their behaviour according to the situation.

Music – music promotes the development of cognitive, creative, aesthetic, social, emotional, and psychomotor skills.

Participation – the children should be guided and encouraged to participate in decisions. They have to be provided with the opportunity to develop their ability to plan, discuss and decide. All the important things that affect the group have to be discussed together.

Research Background of the Interactive Training in Pedagogical Competencies

Models of interactive techniques for pedagogical interaction, as a system of direct and indirect training, aim to provide socio-communicative, cognitive-reflective, expressive-emotional and functional-partnering

experiences in the educational processes. Therefore it can be assumed that the model of interactive techniques for pedagogical interaction has a positive influence when it comes to improving the European competences through the dynamics of the education environment.

The education environment in pedagogical university programmes is defined on the basis of the following research framework: 1) characterization of the partnering entities/communities in certain interactive play-based training, 2) meaningful presentation of the key cores of the students' experience regarding the European competencies, and 3) studying the impact of the model techniques on different aspects of the pedagogues' self-expression concept. The students were given a questionnaire which asked them to mark a range of numbers in relation to the importance of their education preparation for the European competences. They had the opportunity to determine their choice on a scale from 1 to 7. This meant that they had to rate each of the given cores according to its significance. The numbering with a priority mark could be set in more than one competence. Therefore the overall percentage of choices in the input and output stage exceeds 100% (the number of respondents).

Table № 1.

**Ratio of preferences of students at Preschool and Primary School
Education in determining the significance of subjective experience
of the key European competencies**

Cores Competencies	Typicality	Humaneness	Creativity	Projectivity	Criticality	Relevancy	Identity
Bulgarian Language							
Input	15	12	12	12	15	10	14
Output	3	3	7	25	20	2	**40**
Foreign Language							
Input	30	18	7	15	10	10	10
Output	20	5	10	–	48	5	12

Cores Competencies	Typicality	Humaneness	Creativity	Projectivity	Criticality	Relevancy	Identity
Scientific, Mathematical , Technical							
Input	25	20	5	15	5	15	15
Output	20	–	–	10	20	**50**	–
Civic and Social							
Input	18	13	7	21	12	12	17
Output	10	**46**	–	14	10	–	20
"Learning to Learn"							
Input	6	18	14	9	24	13	15
Output	**44**	–	–	27	23	6	–
Media							
Input	6	13	14	18	19	21	9
Output	20	13	16	**40**	–	11	–
Entrepreneurial and Economic							
Input	–	19	15	18	19	13	16
Output	10	24	–	15	**38**	13	–
Cultural							
Input	–	15	21	15	15	17	15
Output	20	5	**55**	10	3	2	5

Lora Spiridonova, Magdalena Stoyanova, Veronica Kozareva, Dimitar Gyurov, Vessela Gyurova

Table № 2.

Ratio of preferences of students at Preschool Education and Foreign Language in determining the significance of subjective experience of the key European competencies

Cores Competencies	Typicality	Humaneness	Creativity	Projectivity	Criticality	Relevancy	Identity
Bulgarian Language							
Input	11	13	12	10	20	12	14
Output	**38**	3	7	23	20	2	7
Foreign Language							
Input	30	18	7	15	10	10	10
Output	20	**35**	10	–	18	5	12
Scientific, Mathematical , Technical							
Input	25	20	5	15	5	15	15
Output	10	15	5	**30**	10	**30**	10
Civic and Social							
Input	12	13	10	21	17	17	12
Output	10	26	–	14	10	–	**40**
"Learning to Learn"							
Input	14	10	13	9	15	14	24
Output	17	10	4	**40**	13	6	10
Media							
Input	6	13	14	18	19	21	9
Output	20	13	11	20	–	**36**	–
Entrepreneurial and Economic							
Input	9	17	15	21	10	13	16
Output	10	24	–	15	**38**	13	–

Cores Competencies	Typicality	Humaneness	Creativity	Projectivity	Criticality	Relevancy	Identity
Cultural							
Input	–	15	21	15	15	17	15
Output	15	20	**45**	10	3	2	2

Education happens through both play and work. This requires the ability to change between activities. Children are seen as partners. Depending on the circumstances, educators perceive their participation in games differently within the education process. It is recommended that a positive atmosphere of joy is created, as well as the children playing together. Ideas and opinions are exchanged in this way.

The interactive game technology contains:

- Setting the game's objectives – i.e. a plan, topic, tasks.
- Focus on the game's content, etc.

Table № 3.

Interrelationship between processes in the game interaction

Indicators	Focus of the game interaction	Passive partner Adult/Child	Passive partner Adult/Child
Focus of the game interaction	Focus on a game	Objective of the game interaction	Tool for a game interaction
Active partner Adult/Child	Objective of the game interaction	Play/Game chat	Play/Game control
Active partner Adult/Child	Tool for a game interaction	Play/Game service	Play/Game communication

Play interaction is voluntary for all ages in the kindergarten:

- The play interaction is social group work that is based upon practical rules and instructions which aim to facilitate group interaction.

- Within the play interaction there are small groups, usually constant, which are set as small communities.
- Play interaction transfers the partnership and the actions within the game into experience.

The aim of the group play interaction is to provide education experience and community confidence within the group. Another aim is to develop a sense of belonging through play; that is, to develop the feeling of being part of a group. In order to create team spirit, the participants in the group play have to develop their skills to take part in joint activities, i.e. to take on tasks, and to cooperate with the others. For that purpose children have to be involved in activities that enhance their capacity to make decisions as a group, to discuss them, to make compromises and to vote on them. Of particular importance when making decisions in the group play is that everyone should be taken seriously and should be introduced to the rules of discussion. Children should learn as early as possible to accept differences between people and fight against prejudices.

The last aim of group play interaction is to create an atmosphere of security and recognition. This is achieved by creating an appropriate environment and team spirit.

The educator must know the play foundations well; and he/she should have the skills for: conducting group discussions; conflict resolution in the play; assessing the characteristics of the group and setting its goal; designing a programme for play situations. The pedagogue should know the principles of play: for example, planning and organizing; the relationships between the children in the group; group roles, and hierarchy within the play. In addition, the educator must have a good technical training and must be able to detach him or herself gradually from group play and lead the children to independence. He/she should be as active as is necessary and as passive as possible! On the one hand, the educator must be able to recognize the relationships among the children within the group and to respond individually to each child. On the other hand, the formation of groups for education purposes is typical, i.e. the

group members are part of the group for different reason, such as, for example, contact, communication or because they share the same interests. That they are also in the group in order to satisfy their social and emotional needs be accepted. The principles of educational play could be summarized as follows:

- Individualization;
- Including the strengths of the players;
- The educator should consider some group characteristics before starting the play, such as age characteristics, levels of play culture and play interaction, previous experience, etc. The pedagogue should proceed at the group's pace.

Educators should present children with situations that require decisions and, within a positive education environment, they should place boundaries around this process – the boundaries of individual freedom end where the freedom of others begins. A group in play interaction can be identified by consensus and conflict dynamics. These conflicts can be solved by different means: displacement of the conflict, exclusion, exit, suppression, majority vote, consensus, compromise, integration.

The group process can pass through several stages of group development, because as a process it has a beginning and finishes with a resolution. At first, the group process begins with the initial (orientation) phase. In this phase it is important that the group leader instructs and enables systematically many learning characteristics. There then begins the characteristic learning phase, in which the aim is to contribute and to learn about each other in a short space of time, to pique the curiosity. The initial phase is characterized by ambivalence (inconsistency).

Later in the group process, there follows a battle for a position and control among the group members. In that stage there is a hierarchy among the members, and frequently disputes between members over the assigned roles: for example, a clown, mediators, group leaders, etc.

The battle for a position is also related to various structures of power, which depend upon age, gender and social origin. After that the

relationships between the members of the group become closer. A characteristic of this phase is that each group member has found a place within the group, with which he/she is satisfied.

This phase is followed by differentiation with a sense of group togetherness and solid results. This is the moment when there is peace and acceptance of the different roles within the group.

The final phase of the group process is the separation and removal of the group. Since the group has come voluntarily together at the beginning, it is clear that the group will eventually be dissolved. This results in different reactions on the part of individual group members, such as grief or joy about the separation.

In order to explain the group process there are sociometric studies that provide information about relations within the group. The procedure for sociometric analysis is made possible by observation or questioning of the group members. A sociogram is created on the basis of results, which provide information on:

- group structure,
- problem areas,
- position of the individual within the group.

Improvement of Personal and Social Identity in Preschool

Intercultural competence consists of two aspects: personal identity, in terms of self-assertion of individual achievement, and social identity which is associated with recognition by others in terms of consistency of actions and behaviour. The experimental model of improving the intercultural competence of children from preschool has a positive influence on the development of their personal and social identity.

The following hypothesis is formulated regarding social identity: there is a statistically significant difference between the distribution of social identity in the entry, and the exit levels, respectively.

The statistical processing of results (SPSS, Willcox Test) leads to the acceptance of this hypothesis. Fig. 1 illustrates the distribution of social identity, with the parameters presented in table 4:

Fig. 1.

Distribution of social identity at the entry and exit levels
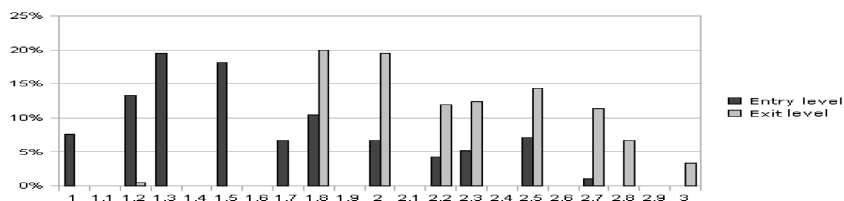
Table № 4.

Parameters of social identity at the entry and exit levels

	Entry level	Exit
N	210	210
Mean	1,616	2,255
S.E. mean	,030	,025
Median	1,5	2,2
Mode	1,3	1,8
Std. deviation	,441	,361
Range	1,7	1,8
Minimum	1	1,2
Maximum	2,7	3

With regard to personal identity, the following hypothesis is formulated: there is a statistically significant difference between the distribution of personal identity at the entry and exit levels in the experimental group.

The statistical processing of results (SPSS, Willcox Test) leads to the acceptance of this hypothesis. Fig. 2 illustrates the distribution of personal identity, and Table 5 presents its parameters.

Fig. 2.

Distributions of personal identity at the entry and exit levels
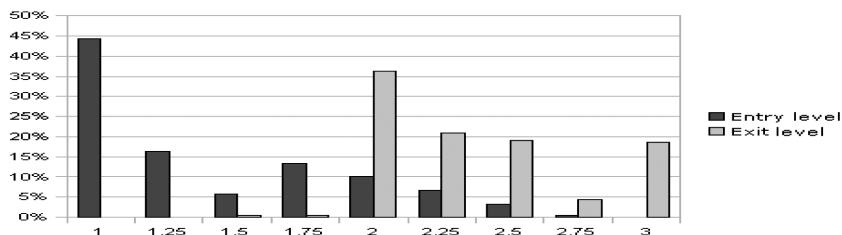
Table № 5.

Parameters of personal identity at the entry and exit levels

	Entry level	Exit
N	210	210
Mean	1,411	2,362
S.E. mean	,033	,026
Median	1,25	2,25
Mode	1	2
Std. deviation	,475	,376
Range	1,75	1,5
Minimum	1	1,5
Maximum	2,75	3

Conclusion: The experimental model of communication with differences, as tested in practice, has a positive influence on the development of the personal and social identity of the child, as a whole, in relation to the child's internal self-assertion and external self-realization.

Interactive Training for the Prevention of Stereotypes When Tackling Contradictions

If educators at various stages of their training monitor each other and ensure a mutual exchange of perspectives over pedagogically contradictory facts and processes, reflection and alternative solutions will become part of our professional lives in the form of best practices. The construction of a training game for a tandem (dyads), when the latter operate from a common position and jointly present solutions to the game participants, passes through the following phases: 1) phase of entry into the thematic area to build a tandem, where the partners, discussing common views reached consensus by a single game decision. Of greatest importance here is the statement of the theme as the play situation further develops the meaning of the entire tandem activity; 2) phase of association and accumulation of ideas for responding to the theme in the tandem, and 3) phase of transformation and ranking of these ideas in a new way for the purposes of the training. This phase is the most important and difficult to achieve in the tandem, since it requires a consensus based on the theme. 4) phase of presentation of the new structure under the pedagogical culture of the team.

Henceforth requirements for the interactive training in play-based interaction can be formulated regarding conflict resolution: between character and types of behaviour (training through staging plays, drama, stories); between characters and rules for responding – verbally and non-verbally (training through association games and exercises, sketches, drawing); between content and rules (training through constructive-didactic, didactic, teaching, intellectual, racing games, riddles, crosswords, etc.); between rules and tradition (training through ritual, folklore, action, sports games); between items and objects and their images (training through celebrations, entertainment, carnivals); between game material and the amount of information (training through entertainment and adventure, electronic multimedia); between education content and education tools in the interactive situation (training through film-strips, slides, videos and video games).

Fig. 3.

Interactive forms of association, acquiantance and befriending	Play-based interactive technique – motivation of future partnerig	Play-based interactive technique – decoding messages – understanding of the opposite player
Play-based interactive technique – representing social and play roles	Play-based interactive technique – enjoying and being fascinated with the play	

The mechanism of teamwork to overcome the contradictions is built on the constant interaction between participants. Its effectiveness is influenced by specific factors that can be managed.

Respect for diversity and contrasting viewpoints belong to intercultural education. Determining the education purpose is defined as a prerequisite for the achievement of non-didactic knowledge. The development of a cultural competence is the purpose of intercultural dialogue. Therefore, we can summarize that communication and games are important for any discussion. They are related to behaviour in different cultures. Organization and management are also important parts of the function of dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue includes communication, game experience, attitudes and behaviour to other cultures and communities. Education objectives in terms of encouragement have an impact upon viewpoints, impressions and experience. Institutions, organization and lifestyle are also significant. In this sense, intercultural dialogue establishes expectations and attitudes about intercultural aspects, which stem from the relationship in cultural mediation. We can claim that encouragement is an opportunity for participants in the game.

For many children the biggest challenges in kindergarten are to work with logic blocks, letters and numbers, and to repaint and complete worksheets. The day care centre is controlled by adults who make plans and programmes. The prefabricated mostly mono-functional toys leave little

room for imagination and creativity. And the scope of movement in the kindergarten offers little incentive and exercise areas. When children have enough free space, they learn early on to take responsibility; they demonstrate prudent and skilful actions and gain security. Children love to play outdoor games, self-initiated adventures, motion, change, sports, and experiments. Through them children will not only develop their own ideas, but they will realize them as well. They need the space and the consent of adults.

There are a variety of experiential education trends and there are different experiential concepts. Nonetheless, differences are evident in the concepts. This is related to self-discovery learning, from holistic learning to group learning, and to learning in real situations. It is also related to individual experience and reflection boundaries. The focus is on the idea of "self-learning experience" in general. The child needs to play and exercise and he/she influences the behaviours of other children and young people with whom he/she works, through intense experiences. His/her behaviour changes through action requirements that have been tried and have resulted in some exceptional situations when the boundaries are reached.

Bibliography:

Child-Rights Programming. How to Apply Rights-Based Approaches to Programming, prepared by Save the Children, Sweden, Lima – Peru, July 2005.

Gyurov D., *Aspects of the Inclusion of Foreign Language Education in Educational Programs* (co-authored with V. Gurova, 68–71); *Speech Flexibility and Education Strategy* (co-authored with V. Gurova, 224–231), all reissued in the "University course in Early Foreign Language Education", Sofia University, 2008 (in Bulgarian).

Gyurov D., *Pedagogical Interaction. An Innovative Model for Building a Social-Pedagogical System "Kindergarten – Primary School"*, Sofia University, Research work 2006–2011 (reprinted) (in Bulgarian).

Gyurov D., B. Angelov, V. Kozareva, L. Malinova, L. Spiridonova, T. Velinova, M. Stoyanova, V. Gyurova, *Common Socio-pedagogic System "Kindergarten – Primary school" in the Context of European Educational Priorities*, Sofia University Annals, Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education, 2011(in Bulgarian).

Gyurova V., *Kindergarten and Child – Today and Tomorrow*, Prosveta Foundation 2009 (Educational Technology for Team Work of the Teachers in Kindergarten).

Gyurova V., *Pedagogical Technologies of Play Interaction*, Veda-Slovena ZhG, Sofia 2009 (Research work) (in Bulgarian).

Hansen K., *Kultur und Kulturwissenschaft*, Paderborn 2000.

Holzbrecher A., *Wahrnehmung des Anderen. Zur Didaktik interkulturellen Lernens*, Opladen 1997.

Jakubeit G., *Materialien zur interkulturellen Erziehung im Kindergarten*, Berlin 1998.

Leontjew A., *Tätigkeit, Bewußtsein, Persönlichkeit*, Köln 1982.

Pommerin-Goetze G., *"Es geht auch anders!" Leben und Lernen in einer multikulturellen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a. M. 1992.

Prengel A., *Pädagogik der Vielfalt: Verschiedenheit und Gleichberechtigung in interkultureller, feministischer und integrativer Pädagogik*, Opladen 1995.

Rathje St., *Interkulturelle Kompetenz – Zustand und Zukunft eines umstrittenen Konzepts,* in: "Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht" (On line) 11 (3), 2006.

Spiridonova L., abstract of the dissertation: *Pedagogical Technologies to Foster Intercultural Competence in Preschool*, advisor Prof. Vessela Gyurova, Sofia 2009 (in Bulgarian).

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

Spiridonova L., *Pedagogic Technology for Improving Inter-cultural Competence of Children at Pre-school Age*, in: "Journal of Balkan Ecology," 11 (2008), p. 43–46.

Spiridonova L., Stoyanova M., Velinova T., Gyurov D., Gyurova V.. *Bulgarian Pre-school Features in European Educational Space*, in: "Journal of Balkan Ecology," 13 (2010), p. 417–422.

Stoyanova M., *Models for Inclusive Play Training for Children and Parents*, in: Annual scientific and methodical magazine "Innovations in Education and Cognitive Development" 2 (2011), p. 45-48 (in Bulgarian).

Abstract

Interpreting the problems of higher education is influenced by current social, cultural, and educational trends. The integration of higher education in the European area depends, on the one hand, on legislative policy, and on the other on the improvement of its quality. It is determined by: the management ideas of higher pedagogical education, related to the autonomy and priorities of higher education; ideas for making democratic decisions; ideas ensuring civil rights and freedom of choice. Education happens through both play and work. This requires the ability to switch between these activities. Children are seen as partners. Depending on the circumstances, educators differently perceive their participation in games in the educational process. It is recommended that a positive atmosphere of joy is created, and that children play together. Ideas and opinions are exchanged in this way. Preschool interaction has to be child-centred in order to guarantee that the key competences are being acquired as preconditions for personal fulfilment, active citizenship and social inclusion.

Keywords: interactive training, preschool education, pedagogical competencies, higher education, European key competencies

Information about the authors:

Prof. Dimitar Gyurov, PhD

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education,

69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

Prof. Dimitar Gurov, PhD is Dean of the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". He teaches the following courses: Pedagogy of interaction "child-environment", Preschool Education, Educational Technologies in Preschool, Introducing the Topic of Specialization, Administration of Policy of Preschool Education. He has participated in projects organised by the Ministry of Education, and in the development of the state education standards for environmental education and preschool education. He is an expert in the National Agency for Assessment and the Accreditation of Universities, and is a chairman of one of the first institutional and programmatic accreditations. He is one of the authors of the Programme for the Education of Children from the ages of 2 to 7 years, which has been approved for the national education system by the Ministry of Education in 1993. He is a tutor and author of the programme system "Hand in Hand".

contact address: 69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

phone number: +359 2 9706201

e-mail: gurov_d@abv.bg

Prof. Vessela Gyurova, PhD

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education,

69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

Prof. Vessela Gyurova, PhD is a lecturer in the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She teaches the courses: Pedagogical Technologies of Play Interaction; Preschool Education; Animation and Design for Children; Quality of Education in Childcare Centers – Monitoring and Evaluation; Research Aspects of Preschool Education; Psychological and pedagogical Requirements of the Design for Children; Play Culture and Intercultural Education. She is head of graduate programs in the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education in Sofia University – Playing and educational Resources and

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

Child-friendly Environment; Educational Management; Early Foreign Language Education. Prof. Gyurova is a member of the Faculty Council as well as of the Scientific Council. She is a co-author of the programme system "Hand in Hand", which has been approved as a national program of pre-school class in 2003 and one of the authors of the Program for Education of Children from the ages of 2 to 7 years, which has been approved for national educational system by the Ministry of Education in 1993.

contact address: 69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

phone number: +359 2 9706221

e-mail: gurova_v@abv.bg

Associate Prof. Lora Spiridonova, PhD

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education,

69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

Associate Prof. Laura Spiridonova, PhD is a lecturer in the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She leads seminars and workshops on Pedagogical Technologies of Play Interaction and Preschool Education as well as courses in Play Culture and Intercultural Education. She coordinates and evaluates practical classes, observations, the teaching practice of the university students. Associate Prof. Spiridonova, PhD is a member of the Faculty Council.

contact address: 69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

phone number: +359 2 9706221

e-mail: l.hristova@alink.biz

Associate Prof. Magdalena Stoyanova

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education,

69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

Associate Prof. Magdalena Stoyanova is a lecturer in the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski ". She leads seminars and practical classes in Pedagogy of the Interaction Child-environment, Preschool Education, Education of Mastery of Language and Speech Development,

Monitoring in Kindergarten. She is a co-author of the programme system "Hand in Hand".

contact address: 69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

phone number: +359 2 9706221

e-mail: stojanova_m@abv.bg

Veronica Kozareva, PhD Candidate

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski",

Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education,

69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

Veronica Kozareva is a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Education, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Her advisor is Prof. Dimitar Gyurov, PhD – the Dean of the Faculty. The topic of her dissertation is 'Building Socially-oriented Behaviour in a Multicultural Environment in Preschool'. She has participated in two projects, supported by the Scientific Fund of Sofia University, as a member of the scientific management committee.

contact address: 69A Shipchenski Prohod Blvd, 1574 Sofia, Bulgaria

phone number: +359 888 864 924

e-mail: veronica.kozareva@gmail.com

Iveta Kovalčíková, Juraj Kresila, Monika Miňová
University of Presov in Presov, Slovak Republic

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

Introduction: the phenomenon of education reform

Education reform involves a process of gradual changes ranging from the most general to those that take place at the level of the individual classroom; and these changes are not merely one-off events. Complex educational reform is the result of a combination of a number of different forces. As K. D. Bene and R. Chin state (in Bennis et al., 1985), even a well formulated education programme is usually interpreted properly by only a limited number of its final recipients (teachers); one of the effects of this is the often inappropriate and ineffective implementation of the goals of educational reform at both the school and classroom levels. Hence it is necessary to differentiate between the *rhetoric of purpose* and the *actual results* of purposes fulfilled. In creating a compact and cohesive system of education, it is necessary that the experts charged with this task can support their arguments for such a programme both with a theoretical outline of its most general aims and educational ideals relating to key social values, as well as with a more specific description of its practice in the classroom.

Education reform is largely dependent on the political climate of a given country. The state is traditionally responsible for the quality of education provided, and with Slovakia's entry into the EU, the overall state and standard of education in the country are regularly monitored within

the framework of various pan-European initiatives that focus on raising the quality of education. In its *Report on the Quality of School Education in Europe* of May 2000 the European Commission (2002) highlights five challenges for education in Europe, one of which is an appeal to decentralize education. This springs from the belief that the subject that is most affected by the decisions being made (i.e. the school) should be able to manage its own affairs. By joining the EU, Slovakia is to a certain extent obliged to respond to the recommendations and challenges presented by the European education reform agenda. In Slovakia, experts viewed the question of the need for educational reform largely in terms of the need to shake up a system that had been unchanged for decades. Politically, education was not an issue which was uppermost in people's minds, and it was only in the second half of the first decade of the new millennium that the situation started to change.

In this article we concentrate on an analysis of the processes of transformation in Slovak schools, mostly in terms of the transformation of the curriculum and education context in early childhood education and in primary schools.

1. Historical determinants of the current reform processes in Slovak schools

As stated by Kosová and Porubský (2011b), today's Slovak education system is the result of a process of historical development that began with the industrial revolution in the 18th century, and which was influenced by German pedagogic thinking, and took place within the legislative framework of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Certain factors characterize today's system, which, because of their stability, serve as a barrier to real systematic reform.

1. *The centralizing tendencies in educational policies and the efforts to facilitate state control* in educational processes. One aspect of this is that the teacher is perceived as a 'clerk' who follows instructions from the state.

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

83

2. *The tradition of informational teaching* which is based on ency-clopaedic learning in an effort to aquire all the knowledge that a person needs to know through a didactic model of the world (textbooks). As the former educational policy was based on centralization and state control, this tradition became a means for the centre to influence and control the material taught at schools.

3. *Limited social awareness of the value of education*. Social egalitari-anism and the non-existence of a labour market meant that in many cases simply having a diploma was the only criterion governing whether a per-son was employed or not, irrespective of the actual quality of his/her ed-ucation. These three traditions are still very deeply rooted in the Slovak education system and conspire to hold back real systemic reform (see Kosová, Porubský, 2012).

In the last century, the Slovak schools system underwent several re-form processes, the effects of which are now determining the course and form of today's transformation.

The first act in reforming Slovak schools in the postwar state was the statute of the Slovak National Council of September 1944, which led to state control of schools – democratization does not mean only *access* to education for the widest number of people but also democratization of the system of teaching and the culture (Srogoň et al., 1986, p. 376).

In 1948, Slovak society experienced radical change, part of which was the legal and organizational unification of the school system by decree. This law related to all levels and types of school, integrating them into one school system and giving them all a common educational aim. The unified school system aimed to remove the two-tieredness in education and granted free access to the highest levels of education. Schools were ver-tically divided into individual levels of education, with each level being based upon the intellectual and physiological development of pupils.

In the 1950s, the school system in Slovakia was strongly centralized, with the decision-making powers in a given department being trans-ferred – as in other government departments – away from the executive

and parliament to the central organ of the ruling political party. In 1951 a resolution of the central party organ was passed for secondary and national schools which monopolized the production of textbooks. A law passed in 1953 regarding the school system and the education of teachers led to an expansion of the network of early childhood facilities (Eurybase, 2008, p. 2).

In 1976, there was a debate within central party structures over the *Proposal for further development of the Czechoslovak educational system*. This development was to be achieved through the modernization of the content and methods of work and the tying-in of the educational process with the needs of manufacturing. The model of an open school was accentuated, where newly verified scientific information could be taught, and which encouraged the independent work of pupils based on new information (SNC, 1983).

The new political system in the 1990s created space for extensive school reform. Below we give an overview of the basic conceptual documents that underpinned the ideological reform movement in Slovakia, and which naturally influenced the development of early childhood and primary education. Analysis of these documents demonstrates that changing the education system is one of the most complicated parts of social transformation because it shows a relatively residual tendency.

After gaining independence in 1993, the Slovak government's first attempt at conceiving holistic reform of the education system was a Ministry of Education project called *Konštantín (Constantine) – A National Programme of Teaching and Education* (Constantine Project, 1994). This document attempted to define the strategic interests of the state in the area of *teaching and education*[2]. The strategic aims highlighted in the document reflected the task education had to perform in the transformation from a totalitarian society to a civil and democratic one. The new system was to be characterized by the openness and flexibility that is typical of

[2] The two terms *výchova a vzdelávanie* (teaching and education) were perceived in the document as two aspects of the same process and were, in the later parts of the document, replaced by the common term *edukácia* (Projekt Konštantín, 1994, p. 3).

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

85

ARTICLES

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

education in pluralist democracies and which should respect the abilities and needs of each child. When looking at ways of achieving this proposed education system, the authors of the document referred in section 4 to guidelines contained in internationally binding documents (Konštantín – 2nd stage, 1994, p. 7).

For the first time in Slovakia, the need to create a *framework curriculum* and attendant standards arose. In section 5 of the document, which presented a pedagogic view of teacher-pupil interaction, the term *the pupil's educational needs* is introduced, the fulfilment of which is the responsibility of the education system. As a response to the call to ensure the pupil's integrity of personality, the authors offer *creative–humanistic teaching and education*. After the change of government in 1994, however, the project was not implemented.

A further executive step in the field of education reform came with a government memorandum in 1998, which made a commitment to a long-term conception of educational development and a new school law that would support this idea. The conception was submitted at the end of 1999 and given the working title *Millennium* (1999).

The Millennium project proposed the following systemic changes:

a/ *to change the philosophy of education from a traditional one to one which was more creative and humanistic, integrating into it a pragmatic school philosophy where the school is a source of general education and a humanistic approach is adopted to learning*;

b/ *to change the content of education (curricular transformation) reducing the amount of unnecessary information and replacing it with knowledge that is necessary for life and key competences for which new syllabi, textbooks and modern study materials are needed*, (Millennium, 1999, p. 16).

As well as a change in philosophy and educational content, the authors also propose a change in the methods and technology of education: *moving away from directive, undemocratic, autocratic teaching methods to less directive ones, involving democracy, subsidiariness, heuristics, alternative methods, and multimedia technology*.

The need to create a two-tier model of educational content is again emphasized. *The state curriculum should contain general goals of education, basic subject matter, binding target requirements for pupils – standards, means of verifying fulfilment of standards and model education programmes* (Millennium, 1999, p. 20).

In December 2001 the government passed the National *Education Programme for Slovakia*, which was an extension of the *Millennium* project and which was intended to serve as a springboard for new schools legislation. Kosová and Porubský (2011, p. 40) state, however, that "the fulfilment of the programme did not gain wide political support and the transformation got bogged down at the level of minor amendments to the law on schools. This had a negative effect on the micro level of the education system. Disappointed teachers decided to resign in their struggle with state administration and innovative processes started to show signs of stagnation. Neither Slovakia joining the OECD (2000) nor the European Union (2004) reversed this trend despite bringing new impulses for change in society at large. This manifested itself in education policy in the efforts to Europeanize and modernize the education system, as well by a new curricular policy which aimed to build a two-tier and participative curricular model focussing on the development of key competences".

In February 2006 a new School Bill drafted by the right-wing coalition was submitted to parliament. Because of a change in government in the same year, however, the bill was not passed. In April 2007, a curricular council was appointed by the education minister, the main task of which was to coordinate school reform in Slovakia. In 2008, the Slovak state authorities finally started work on creating the legislative conditions for systemic reform (the passing of a new School Act), which was mainly the result of a discussion about Slovakia's indifferent results in the OECD's international testing of reading skills, natural science and mathematical numeracy (PIRLS, PISA, TIMSS). In May 2008, a government Education Bill was passed in parliament; and in June the *State Educational Programme*, which defined the general aims of schools, and the framework for the content of education and standards for various levels of education, was

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

87

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

ARTICLES

also passed. These steps meant that the practical implementation of education reform in Slovakia finally began after more than a decade.

The new Schools Act came into effect on 1 September 2008 and led to a number of key changes. Here we choose those related to early childhood and primary education.

– *Educational levels (early childhood and primary) were brought into line with the ISCED[3] international classification.*

– *A two-tier educational programme model was implemented for all levels of education in which the state would determine the compulsory part of the content* […] *through state education programmes and each school's specialization would be defined through the school's own education programmes.*

– *In early childhood education, which on the day of the act coming into force became a part of the school system, the educational process is regulated in the same way.* See Zimenová, Havrilová (2011) for more details.

2. A two-tier curriculum – the way to decentralize the education system in Slovakia

State education programme. The state education programme (StEP) for schools is, according to the new Schools Act, an overarching educational project that incorporates a framework model of a school-leaver, guidelines for teaching plans for each level of education and guidelines for syllabi. It presents the first guidelines for a two-tier, participative model of school management and expresses the main principles and goals of the state's educational policy as well as of the democratic and humanistic

---

[3] <http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-standard-class ification-of-education.aspx>, 15th April 2012.

values upon which national education is founded. It defines the general aims of schools in terms of key competences, in that it seeks a balanced development of pupils' personalities and the framework content of education. […]. It is a starting point and a binding document for the creation of a school's individual education programme[4]. The state education programme is divided into levels according to the ISCED classification.

School education programme. The school education programme (SchEP) offers an elective component of education to the teaching plan of the school. This component can be fulfilled within the school education programme of the school and represents the second tier in the partipative model of management. It gives schools the opportunity to specialize and cater to the needs and interests of their pupils, and is formulated by the school in compliance with the valid and binding state education programme. The school's programme reflects its function and specialization, as well as the strategy its management has chosen together with the regional and local community. It reflects the needs and opportunities of pupils and staff and is an indicator of the quality of education which the school offers. All the teaching staff are involved in its design, using the elective lessons to create their own teaching plan[5].

The general reaction to the introduction of the state education programme and two-tier curriculum. In the Slovak context, the new schools act marks a step towards the decentralization of the traditionally prescriptive and centrally managed education system. For a long time, the academic community had been subjected to reforms of the content of schooling; what the new law brought in, however, was systemic change, primarily in terms of a teacher's new competences with s/he becoming a co-author of curricular inputs. This therefore resulted in a sense of in-

---

[4] <http://www.statpedu.sk/sk/Statny-vzdelavaci-program/Statny-vzdelavaci-program-pre-1-stupen-zakladnych-skol-ISCED-1/Uvod.alej>, 15 April 2012.
[5] <http://www.statpedu.sk/sk/Statny-vzdelavaci-program/Statny-vzdelavaci-program-pre-1-stupen-zakladnych-skol-ISCED-1/Uvod.alej>, 15 April 2012.

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

89

security for some teachers as they felt unprepared to take on such a new professional role. The absence of a real call for the restructuring of Slovak schools from within the schools themselves is, in our view, one of the main reasons for the sceptical and negative attitude of the teaching community towards the new law: teachers have simply not been prepared to take on the role of co-designers of their school's education programmes. Teacher training in this country does not include this area of expertise.

The level of deregulation in centralized school management and the level of autonomy of individual primary schools. Traditionally in Slovakia, the material taught (the so-called knowledge corpus) was defined centrally, far from the classroom or school. The clearly defined boundaries between different subjects, together with the centrally prescribed tempo of study and the pedagogic role of the teacher, was typical of Slovak education culture for decades. One variable which was exclusively in the hands of the teacher was classification (assessing the performance of the pupil with a grade). The introduction of the new education law has now given Slovak schools new powers: more freedom to choose their pupils and to organize and timetable their educational content. The majority of a school's educational content, however, still remains centrally controlled.

We consider the enactment of the new schools act in Slovakia to be the start of a series of efforts to qualitatively change the centralized and directively managed schools system. A pluralistic, two-tier model of education is an appropriate means of providing social cohesion and consensus in an advanced democratic society. However, unlike countries which have a two-tier model of education (such as the UK), the initiative to delegate certain decision-making powers to the schools in Slovakia came not from the teachers themselves, but from the government. In addressing such issues, the state is bound by EU recommendations. In the minds of the central authorities, questions of reforming the education system have often dealt only with the need to reduce the outsized volume of teaching matter. By dividing the content of education into two tiers, the state surrendered some of its power to prescribe curricular inputs. This lost

power should, however, be compensated by the state's increased power to monitor education outputs, for which it has now taken responsibility. For the two-tier model to become functional, it was necessary to create a more objective means of assessing academic performance – one based on certain criteria. The Slovak education system has no tradition of standardizing academic outputs; as well as modernizing marking methods; it would therefore also be necessary to create a mechanism by which external institutions could participate alongside schools in assessing such outputs.

3. Selected aspects of the transformation of early childhood education in Slovakia since 1993

A Description of early childhood education in Slovakia. According to Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on Schooling and Education (the Schools Act), *„materská škola"* (MŠ)[6] – a nursery school is *the first stage in the school system* in Slovakia. This school encourages the child's personal development in various ways: socio-emotional, intellectual, physical, moral, aesthetic, the development of their abilities and skills, and creates the conditions for their future education. It prepares them for life in society in harmony with their individual and age-determined features. Although the nursery school – the founder of which may be the state, the church or a private person – has become a part of the school system in Slovakia, attendance to such schools is not compulsory by law. Nursery schools can contain one-class or multiple classes, and can be attached to a primary school. Care and education is provided according to the two-tier education programme made up of the state and the school education programme. The state education programme defines general educational goals at the nursery school level as well as the key competences of a child of an early age. The framework content of education defined by law is given in Table 1.

---

[6] Pre-school education facility for early childhood education in Slovak Republic.

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

91

ARTICLES Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

Table 1. The structure of the State Education Programme
ISCED 0 – early childhood education

Thematic fields	Educational areas	Subareas	Crossover themes	Competences
I am	perceptual-motoric	motoric	personal and social development	psychomotoric
People	cognitive	healthcare	protection of life and health	personal (intrapersonal)
Nature	social-emotional	natural science	transport education – learning road traffic safety	social (interpersonal)
Culture		mathematic-logical	medial	communicative
		linguistic	multiculutural education	cognitive
		communicative	fostering creativity	learning
		ethical	development of pre-reading skills and literacy in general	informational
		geographic	information-commu-nication technology and development of digital literacy	
		informational		
		artistic-expressive		
		practical		

The state education programme (StEP) is the first stage in the two-tier model of education programmes: 1. it is the highest valid curricular (target-programme); 2. it defines common requirements (goals) for all children attending a facility so that after their completion anywhere in Slovakia (even after a change of address), they can begin their primary education at primary school; 3. it sets basic minimum levels of competences which the state guarantees through early childhood education and through the professionalism of its teachers, fulfilling qualification requirements in accordance with the law. The StEP is set for the standard population of children. Nursery schools can offer educational options within the school education programme which go beyond those set by

the state education standards. We expect these to depend directly on the orientation of the school, the specifics of the region and the local conditions.

The aims of education. The main aim of early childhood education in Slovakia is to achieve an optimal perceptual-motoric, cognitive and emotional-social level in early childhood as a basis of preparation for school education.

The aims of early childhood education are:

- to fulfill the child's need for social contact with their peers,
- to facilitate the child's easy adaptation to a new environment (to nursery and primary school),
- to develop a positive attitude in the child to knowledge and learning through games,
- to purposely and systematically develop, in a creative atmosphere, the personality of the child in terms of psychomotor learning and the acquisition of knowledge, and in social, emotional, and moral areas,
- to apply and protect the rights of a child in cooperation with their family, the school administrator and other institutions (upholding the ethical principle of cooperation) while respecting the needs of the child,
- to gain the trust of parents in individual educational counselling and to direct their attention to their child's positive behaviour; if necessary to refer the parents to other specialists (paediatrician, speech therapist, psychologist etc.).

Education standard for ISCED 0. Act no. 245/2008 Coll. on Schooling and Education (the Schools Act) § 9 states that educational standards are divided into content and performance standards. In *content standards* we can find the defined content of education. Content standards are binding and define the teacher's structure of activities. Content standards are defined areas of development of elementary competences. *Performance*

*Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System*

93

ARTICLES

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

standards are conceived as target requirements which a child should achieve at the end of their early childhood period as an output of early childhood education.

Structure and organization of education. A child gains an early childhood education upon completing the final year of the education programme at nursery school. A child usually finishes early childhood education at the end of the school year in which they have their sixth birthday by August 31 and are of a school-going age. A child may finish their early childhood education before reaching the age of six if, according to the relevant educational advisory service and a children's general practitioner, the child is fit and able to to begin compulsory schooling (early school attendance is at the request of the parents). Nursery schools issue a certificate to the child to prove that they have completed their early childhood education. Those children admitted to nursery school are predominantly from three to six years old; if the school has the capacity, however, it may also admit children who are only two years old. Children who are already five, and children who have had their compulsory school attendance deferred, are given priority. As a rule, children of the same age are grouped together in one class. The Schools Act sets the maximum number of children for each class at nursery school as follows:

a) 20 in a class for three to four-year old children,
b) 21 in a class for four to five-year old children,
c) 22 in a class for five to six-year old children,
d) 21 in a class for three to six-year old children.

Early childhood education is provided in the following forms:

a. day-long education for a number of years;
b. separate classes for children who have to begin compulsory school attendance the following year;
c. separate classes for children who have to begin compulsory school attendance the following year with their legal guardians

present during the school day (with the agreement of the head of the nursery school) in combination with home preparation of the children;

d. half-day schooling in the form of four or five lessons daily in the morning or in the afternoon;

e. individual early childhood education.

Curriculum. The historical development of the education programmes for the nursery school level has been influenced by the historical and political context in which the programmes have evolved, as well as by the relevant school legislation. Since the foundation of Czechoslovakia (1918), 12 programmes governing early childhood education have been issued. *The programme of schooling and education in nursery schools* (valid during the 1999 – 2008 period), which was the forerunner to the current curricular framework – has been broken down into *educational components*. The content of schooling and education has been differentiated in its difficulty according to the age of the children. There has also been a move away from the dominant directive position of the teacher, to pedagogic approaches that focus on the child. The organization of the day gradually switches from frontal (teacher-fronted) activities to group activities carried out through didactic activities. At the start of the millennium, both nursery school education theorists and in-service teachers started to call for the following: the elaboration of a new education programme at NS; removal of the binding internal differentiation of content of schooling and education according to the age of the child; the creation of greater space for respecting the developmental potential and abilities of children; removing the system of educational components; creating greater space for respecting the specific features of certain nursery schools. For the first time in the history of education programmes for nursery schools, the current state education programme does not have areas (nor subordinate curricular concepts like aims and standards) structured according to age categories.

Problems of early childhood education in Slovakia in the context of educational reform. In terms of creating and implementing a two-tier curricu-

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

95

lum for ISCED 0, specifically regarding the process of formulating school education programmes, the management of nursery schools has shown greater flexibility than their counterparts at higher levels of the schools system. Equally teachers at nursery schools have welcomed the opportunity to be involved in creating the curriculum. Ongoing problems with the evaluation of the outputs of the education process, which are present at even the nursery school level, are a legacy of the Slovak curricular tradition, which has emphasized defined inputs and compulsory contents. Teachers at nursery schools, however, represent a group of professionals for whom creativity and flexibility are an internally felt need and are a natural part of their daily work. Openness to new trends in education creates space in early childhood education in the Slovak Republic for the unimpeded implementation of school reform.

4. Selected aspects of the transformation of primary education in Slovakia

Description of primary education in Slovakia. Compulsory school attendance in Slovakia begins with the child starting primary (elementary) school. The first level (ISCED 1) is joined with the second level (ISCED 2) to form one organizational unit; together the two levels make up a primary school in SR. The first four years of primary school represent schooling within the ISCED 1 framework; this first level is not subdivided. In Slovakia pupils are grouped together in classes according to their age – classes are homogeneous in terms of age and are coeducational. One teacher is responsible for each class at primary school and teaches all subjects. At the primary level of education in Slovakia, state schools are prevalent though there are also church schools and private schools. Education at the primary level in Slovakia is controlled by the state education programme in which normative requirements for pupils are set using educational standards. The content of primary education is divided into 7 educational areas that are derived from the definition of the content of education and of key competences. **The state programme uses the**

term *crossover themes*[7]. **These overlap with educational areas, connecting various fields of basic learning and contributing to the complexity of the pupils' education**. They can be taught within the framework of individual subjects, as separate courses or even as elective subjects.

Table 2. *Basic (core) subjects in educational areas*
at primary school – ISCED 1 with Slovak language teaching[8]

EDUCATIONAL AREA	SUBJECTS
LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION	SLOVAK LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE FIRST FOREIGN LANGUAGE
MATHEMATICS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	MATHEMATICS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
NATURE AND SOCIETY	NATURAL SCIENCE GEOGRAPHY
PEOPLE AND VALUES	ETHICAL EDUCATION / RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
PEOPLE AND THE WORLD OF WORK	PRACTICAL AND WORK SKILLS
ARTS AND CULTURE	MUSIC / FINE ART
HEALTH AND MOVEMENT	PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Table 3. *Crossover themes*[9]

CROSSOVER THEMES (THEMES)
PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
ENVIRONMENTÁL EDUCATION
MEDIÁ EDUCATION
MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION
TRANSPORT EDUCATION – ROAD TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION
LIFE AND HEALTH PROTECTION
REGIONÁL EDUCATION AND TRADITIONAL FOLK CULTURE
CREATING A PROJECT AND PRESENTATION SKILLS

---

[7] Slovak equivalent – „prierezové témy".

[8] <http://www.statpedu.sk/sk/Statny-vzdelavaci-program/Statny-vzdelavaci-program-pre-1-stupen-zakladnychskol-ISCED-1/Uvod.alej>, 15 April 2012.

[9] <http://www.statpedu.sk/sk/Statny-vzdelavaci-program/Statny-vzdelavaci-program-pre-1-stupen-zakladnychskol-ISCED-1/Uvod.alej>, 15 April 2012.

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

97

The framework teaching plan is a document which sets time allocations for subjects taught. These are defined by the Schools Act for the whole level of education; dividing the time allocations across the different years is the task of the school, as is dividing the subject matter according to year, though the average age is taken into consideration. The content of education is based on education standards. The original framework teaching plans of 2008 have been replaced by a new framework of teaching plans that have been in force since 1 September 2011.

The education standard for ISCED 1 is made of two parts: a content standard and an attainment standard. *The content part* of the education standard determines the minimum content of education, its main purpose being to unify, coordinate or guarantee the compatibility of minimum educational content at all schools. The content part is made up of subject matter which can be learnt and understood by all pupils. This subject matter is divided into four categories: *factual knowledge* – the basic element of knowing; information pupils must know if they are to be familiar with a certain discipline; *conceptual knowledge* – knowing the mutual relationships between facts learnt and understood; *procedural knowledge* – how to make or do something, methods of testing; *metacognitive knowledge* – cognition and thinking in general. The attainment part of the education standard is a set of tasks to be performed that will determine the level at which the pupil can master or attain the minimum (basic) subect matter which is taught[10].

Problems of primary education in Slovakia. Questions related to the development of primary education in Slovakia during this period of transformation are analysed in the following sources: Kosová, Porubský (2011a, 2011b); Zimenová, Havrilová (2011). Kosová, Porubský (2011a) stress the fact that from the beginning, the transformation of primary educations has been accompanied by certain restrictions, many of which have their roots in political decisions that were made earlier.

---

10   *Ibid.*

A) The structure and organization of education. In the mid 1990s, primary education was extended from eight years to nine years. Despite objections from pedagogic experts and psychologists, an extra year was added to the lower secondary level to create a final ninth year. Slovakia is thus one of only a few countries with a lower secondary stage of education that is longer than its primary stage. The length of primary education in Slovakia (4 years) is not ideal; the transition from the 4th to the 5th year is, according to teachers at both levels, a problematic one with the 5th year being especially demanding for pupils. The first level remained a four-year period despite the fact that the introduction of a five-year primary level was contained in the government and parliament's approved national educational programme of 2001.

B) Curriculum. Curricular politics at the first level of primary school remained essentially unchanged up until the Schools Act of 2008, and was managed by central teaching plans and syllabi with a mandatory number of lessons taught per week. From 2003 there were five ministry approved curricular variants for the first level (the basic curriculum, one with extra natural sciences, two with additional foreign language teaching and one with IT) and 16 for schools with pupils from national minorities. In Slovakia there were a small number of alternative schools approved after a long experimental period of testing …"The unclear situation indicated the inappropriacy of central decisions about curricula being made for every class and school and also showed that the time was right to introduce a compulsory state curriculum alongside an elective school one" (Kosová, Porubský, 2011a, p. 41). The new Schools Act of 2008 introduced for the the first level of school two types of state education programme: one for schools which taught in the Slovak language and one for schools which taught in national minority languages. The teaching syllabi of all subjects were gradually upgraded from 1993 to 2007, together with the education standards for individual subjects, which was first implemented in 1999. The standards mainly mirrored the syllabus content, though a few also described the abilities and skills which pupils had to achieve. They were, however, criticized for being 'maximalistic', as

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

99

ARTICLES

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

they were overloaded with detail, memory orientated, isolated and limiting in terms of the integration of subject, and tending to ignore the development of competences (see Kosová, Porubský, 2011a).

C) Aims of primary education. The main programme aims of primary education (currently formulated in the state education programme) are the development of key faculties in pupils. The European reference framework of key competences has influenced the selection of these, and has been elaborated in response to the values and needs of our school system. The key competences have a cross-subject character and overlap with one another. A pupil completing primary education should have acquired the following key competences:

- social communication competence,
- the competence to apply basic mathematical thinking and basic cognitive skills in the area of science and technology,
- competence in IT and communications technology,
- the competence to learn,
- the competence to solve problems,
- personal, social and civil competences,
- the competence to perceive and understand culture and express oneself using cultural language.[11]

Hauser (2008, p. 7–9) states, however, that although the Slovak educational framework for primary schools clearly describes the profile of a primary school leaver, it is not clear whether the set of competences laid out is intended to be the standard and mandatory minimum for pupils or merely a guideline. Given the tradition here of seeing a class as a relatively homogeneous group of individuals, it is clear that together with the use of predominantly frontal methods of teaching, issues of differentiation and an individual approach to pupils need to be further

---

[11] <http://www.statpedu.sk/sk/Statny-vzdelavaci-program/Statny-vzdelavaci-program-pre-1-stupen-zakladnychskol-ISCED-1/Uvod.alej>, 15 April 2012.

addressed in Slovak education. The monolithically formulated curricular requirements may become a barrier to achieving realistic educational goals with weaker pupils or those with learning difficulties.

After passing of the new Schools Act, we consider the most important issue in primary education to be the development of the curriculum on two levels. It is necessary at the state education level to initiate change in the existing approach to pupil assessment; it will then be necessary to upgrade education standards by specifying the exact descriptors for the levels of pupil outputs. At the school level, it will be necessary to devote attention into developing the professional competences of teachers in order to ensure that they are able to fulfil the demands of the new law and plan their teaching programmes accordingly. This can only be done, however, by changing the conception of a teacher's professional preparation and by offering retraining courses to in-service teachers.

Conclusion

This article outlines the processes and effects of school reform and the curricular transformation in Slovakia in the context of the post-1989 social and economic changes, and describes the basic problems of moving away from a centrally managed schools model that has been in existence for several decades, to one which is partially decentralized. We do not in general paint an idealized picture of school reform, which includes the areas of early childhood and primary education, but instead show how it has been a process of trial and error influenced by a lack of experience of systematic and complex education reform in the Slovak context. As Swing, Schriever and Orivel state (2000), abolition of a uniform school system and a centralized educational administrative structure are the most visible aspects of the transformation of the school system in the former socialist countries. Marxist theory is rooted in the ideal of a socially homogenized society which is centrally managed by the state, a uniform school system being seen as an essential tool in maintaining this degree of homogeneity. Within the processes of the current educa-

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

101

tion reforms in the post-socialist countries, the principle of uniformity is being replaced by one of plurality and differentiation. As Zimenová and Havrilová emphasize (2011), the effectiveness of a two-tier model for projecting the general content of education, with the basic education framework being defined on the state level (state education programmes) and their specific form and application at the school level (as school education programmes) depends above all on a division of responsibility across both tiers. According to these authors, an ideal division of competences between the state and schools has not been achieved at the regional level; they also criticize the state education programme for making the basic subject matter too binding. The number of compulsory subjects and the time allocations for them have led to in-service teachers to complain about the lack of time, and about how it limites their autonomy in the education process. Another problem is the fact that teachers lack the basic support mechanisms which would make the process of curricular transformation easier for them. "In the school system there is an absence of inspiring new didactic models, of new teaching materials and textbooks reacting to the new requirements, of good quality methodical help and programmes of further education, as well as of material and financial provision fufilling the real needs of schools during the different phases of the transformation process. […] Both the time scale for implementing the reform and the easily misinterpreted automony of the schools were reflected in the unreasonable demands being placed upon teachers. The space between the state education programme and the school programmes should have been bridged with adequate support for teachers; instead, however, a vacuum has built up creating an illusion of freedom for schools" (Zimenová, Havrilová, 2011, p. 10).

Despite the fact that the focus of this article has been on connections between the development of early childhood and primary education in Slovakia, it has not been possible to avoid some chronological analysis of general reform trends. Early childhood and primary education have been affected by all aspects of the reform processes in Slovakia. This has made it impossible to isolate one filter of the transformation period that has operated as a determinant of the current state of ISCED 0

and ISCED 1 in SR. In the early phases of the post-communist transformation we were witnesses to a certain pendulum effect, i.e. automatic negation of the previous regime without fully conceived approaches leading to systematic change. Early childhood and primary education have not been spared these somewhat improvised efforts of reform, leading to a decline in institutionalized early childhood ducation and the closure of nursery schools as well as to more positive trends in the search for and demonstration of new pedagogic thinking in enthusiastic teachers. 'Mini-reform' has been carried out at the classroom level, though the teacher-reformer has often been misunderstood by their own colleagues as well as by the school headteacher. Nearly 20 years elapsed before the passing of the new Schools Act created space for teachers to devise their own methods; but this came at a time when once-enthusiastic teachers were approaching the age of retirement. New teachers today are not so marked by the post-revolutionary enthusiasm for change as their older colleagues once were, and a large number of teachers have burnt-out at the peak of their careers or surrendered during the endless battle with the ever-changing reform proposals, proposals which, alas, have never really taught the teachers how such changes can be successfully implemented.

Undoubtedly both Slovak early childhood and primary education bear the signs of reform, typically in the form of 'wanting and feeling the need to change'. Sufficient space remains, however, for upgrading and improving the quality of education in schools, the outlines for which have been indicated in this article.

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

103

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

ARTICLES

Bibliography:

Bennis W.G., Benne K.D., Chin R., *The Planning of Change (4th ed)*, New York 1985.

Európska komisia, Výbor pre vzdelanie a kultúru, *Správa o kvalite školského vzdelávania v Európe*, Prel. Eva Schwartzová, Prešov: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum, 2002.

Eurybase – *Slovenská Republika – (2007/08)* [online] Eurydice. The Information Database on Education Systems in Europe. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Aktualizácia 2009-06-11 [cited 2009-06-28]. Available at <http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/ressources/eurydice/eurybase/pdf/section/SK_SK_C2.pdf>.

Hauser J., *Štátny vzdelávací program pre 1. stupeň základnej školy v Slovenskej republike : ISCED 1- Primárne vzdelávanie* [online]. Štátny pedagogický ústav. [cited 2009-06-28]. Available at <http://www2.statpedu.sk/buxus/docs/kurikularna_transformacia/isced1_jun30.pdf>.

Konštantín : Národný program výchovy a vzdelávania (druhá etapa) [online]. Ministerstvo školstva a vedy Slovenskej republiky: (1994) [cited 2009-06-28]. Available at <http://noveskolstvo.sk/article.php?80>.

Kosová B., Porubský Št. (2011a), *Profesia učiteľa v teoretickom a legislatívnom rámci*, in: Kasáčová B. et al., *Učiteľ preprimárneho a primárneho vzdelávania*, Banská Bystrica 2011.

Kosová B., Porubský Št. (2011b), *Slovenská cesta transformácie edukačného systému po roku 1989 na príklade primárneho vzdelávania a prípravy jeho učiteľov*, in: "Pedagogická orientace", Roč. 21, č. 1, p. 35–50.

MILÉNIUM : Koncepcia rozvoja výchovy a vzdelávania v Slovenskej republike na najbližších 15–20 rokov [online] [cited 2009-06-28]. Available at <http://www.modernaskola.sk/directories/file-upload/unoviny/Reforma-skolstva/Koncepcie/MILENIUM.pdf>.

Průcha J., *Moderní pedagogika*, Praha 1997.

Pupala B., *Ideologické podhubie vo vnímaní výchovy a školy: bojíme sa konzervativizmu?* in: "Pedagogické rozhľady", Roč. 15, č. 1, p. 1–4, Banská Bystrica 2006.

Správa o plnení dokumentu Ďalší rozvoj Československej výchovno-vzdelávacej sústavy výsledky, problémy na jednotlivých druhoch a stupňoch škôl a školských zariadení, (1983) [online]. Slovenská národná rada, in: *Společná česko-slovenská*

digitální parlamentní knihovna [cited 2009-06-28]. Available at <http://www.
psp.cz/eknih/1981snr/tisky/t0073_01.htm>.

Srogoň T. et al., *Dejiny školstva a pedagogiky*, Bratislava 1986.

Steers J., *The National Curriculum: Reformation or Preservation of the Status Quo?*
in: "Journal of Art and Design Education", 14 (1995), p.129–137.

Sherman Swing E., Schriewer J., Orivel, F. (eds.), *Problems and Prospect in Europen
Education*, Westport 2000.

ŠVP, Štátny vzdelávací program [online database] Štátny pedagogický ústav (ŠPÚ)
[cited 2012-04-05]. Available at <http://www.statpedu.sk/sk/sections/view/
vzdelavacie-programy/statny-vzdelavaci-program>.

Vzdelávacie programy [online database] Štátny pedagogický ústav (ŠPÚ) [cited
2012-04-05]. Available at <http://www.statpedu.sk/sk/sections/view/vzde
lavacie-programy/skolsky-vzdelavaci-program>.

Zimenová Z., Havrilová M., *Štart k novej kvalite vzdelávania*, [online] [cited
2012-04-05]. Available at <http://www.noveskolstvo.sk/upload/pdf/2011_Zi
menovaHavrilova_Start_k_novej_kvalite_vzdelavania.pdf>.

Abstract

The aim of this contribution is to assess selected aspects of the development of early childhood education and primary education in the Slovak Republic (SR) during the last twenty years in the context of the process of the transformation of the Slovak education system. Our aim is to emphasise: 1. the formation of a legislative framework for education reforms in SR; and 2. the development of a curriculum for early childhood and primary education. The contribution outlines various mechanisms for curricular transformation which are dependent on mutual configurations and the characteristic components of this difficult process. In the contribution we name the basic factors determining the conditions for the preparation, the implementation process and the assessment of results of education reform in early childhood and primary education. At the end of the article we offer suggestions which we feel could lead to the successful modification or further implementation of education reform in the Slovak Republic.

Selected Aspects of Early Childhood Education
and Primary Education in the Slovak Republic during
the Period of Transformation of the Slovak Education System

105

Keywords: educational reform, early childhood education in SR, primary education in SR, state educational programme, school educational programme

Information about the authors:
Iveta Kovalčíková Assoc. Prof, PhD
University of Prešov in Prešov
Faculty of Education
ul. 17. novembra 15, 08001 Prešov, Slovak Republic
Iveta Kovalcikova is professionally affiliated with the Department of Pre-school and Elementary Padagogy and Psychology, Faculty of Education, of the University of Presov. She is a national coordinator for the Slovak Republic in the CiCe network – Children Identity and Citizenship Education in Europe (London Metropolitan University), former Fulbright research scholar at the Center for the Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise (PACE CENTER) Yale University, USA. Her research focuses on: Cultural-psychological research of minorities and dynamic testing of abilities, Compensatory education of the pupils with social handicap and cultural deprivation – with particular emphasis on cognitive and executive functioning.
Contact:
University of Prešov in Prešov
Faculty of Education
ul. 17. novembra 15, 08001 Prešov, Slovak Republic
phone: 00421905566790
e-mail: iveta.kovalcikova@unipo.sk

Juraj Kresila, PhD
University of Prešov in Prešov
Faculty of Arts
ul. 17. novembra 1, 08001 Prešov, Slovak Republic
Juraj Kresila is a lecturer at the Institute of British and American Studies, University of Presov, the Slovak Republic. In his PhD dissertation he analysed the educational provisions of the English and Slovak state curricula. His previous publications concerning the above topic include 'Curricular Reform in Slovakia in a

Comparative Context', *Journal of Pedagogy*. Currently, his research orientation also involves the cultural aspects of place semiotics.

Contact:
University of Prešov in Prešov
Faculty of Arts
ul. 17. novembra 15, 08001 Prešov, Slovak Republic
phone: 00421905566790
e-mail: juraj.kresila@unipo.sk

Monika Miňová, PhD
University of Prešov in Prešov
Faculty of Education
ul. 17. novembra 15, 08001 Prešov, Slovak Republic
Monika Minova is a lecturer at the Department of Pre-school and Elementary Pedagogy and Psychology, Faculty of Education, the University of Presov, and is currently a president of the World Organization for pre-school education in Slovakia (OMEP). Her research interests include pre-school education issues, the management and marketing of kindergartens and an alternative approach towards pre-school education. Her PhD. thesis examined the development of Romany children and their adaptation, from family and kindergarten, to primary school.

Contact:
University of Prešov in Prešov
Faculty of Education
ul. 17. novembra 15, 08001 Prešov, Slovak Republic
phone: 00421905566790
e-mail: monika.minova@pf.unipo.sk

Ján Gunčaga
Catholic University in Ružomberok, Slovak Republic

Motivation for the Use of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) at the Slovak Minority School in Hungary

CLIL – Integrated teaching of minority languages and non-language subjects

The motivation for the implementation of CLIL – the integrated teaching of minority languages and non-language subjects – is the result of the European Commission's recommendations, particularly the Office of the Commissioner for Education and Culture. European Commissioner Ján Figel stated in 2006:

"Multilingualism is at the very heart of the European identity, since languages are a fundamental aspect of the cultural identity of every European. For this reason, multilingualism is referred to specifically – for the first time – in the brief of a Commissioner. I am honoured to be that Commissioner." (CLIL, 2006)

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is an educational method for teaching non-language subjects in a minority language. It is an innovative approach that changes the ways in which students are introduced to the curriculum, and that accelerates the acquisition of basic communication skills in a minority language.

Project results and comparisons show that this way of learning accelerates and increases the quality of teaching in general – both academic and vocational subjects, as well as language training. CLIL strikes a balance between language and vocational training. A non-language subject is developed through a minority language, and the minority

language by a non-language subject. The minority language is used as an educational tool, not only as the result of teaching.

The objective of this method of teaching is to improve the abilities and skills of students in the minority language by using the language as a tool of communication and not as a separate subject. CLIL can be considered as an educational method by which the EU promotes linguistic diversity, and has a positive impact on language learning.

The Origin and development of CLIL

The need for linguistic diversity in Europe began to appear as early as the 1950s. This is when the process of European integration began to take off. It was the integration and free movement of peoples that raised the issue of education and the active use of foreign or minority languages in practice. The teaching of foreign and minority languages has become an important part of the education system in many countries.

During the years 1970 and 1980, the development of this type of teaching was influenced primarily by the Canadian experiment. The first initiative came from English-speaking parents living in the province of Quebec, who considered it to be important to be proficient in French in a French-speaking environment. They understood that providing their children an education in this language led them to the acquisition of important language skills.

The integration of a minority language with non-language content into one whole seemed to be a suitable solution, which created a dual-focused education; education that was focused on the subject or topic as well as on the minority language. This educational approach has been known in different countries under different names – bilingual, dual focus, enhanced language learning, teaching through a foreign or minority language. In the mid-1990s, the European Commission in collaboration with expert groups accepted a single name with the acronym CLIL.

CLIL is an appropriate method for multilingualism – the EU's priority objectives in language learning. This approach to language learning is

Motivation for the Use of Content
and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
at the Slovak Minority School in Hungary

109

increasingly gaining prominence in the contemporary educational practice of the EU.

Why CLIL?

This teaching method has several advantages within minority schools. At this point we would like to mention a few.

- When teaching with CLIL method, the focus is on the particular activity that is being taught and not the minority language itself.
- This approach provides the opportunity to learn to think in that language, and not only learn the language as such. CLIL allows students to practice the minority language when learning another subject.
- CLIL presents an opportunity for graduates to develop their skills using foreign or minority languages and therefore to increase their personal potential for an advantageous position in the labour market.
- The curriculum can be explained first in Hungarian and later extended to the Slovak language, or vice versa.
- The activities in both languages should be complementary.

CLIL has several beneficial consequences, including the following:

- an overall improvement in student communication skills in the minority language,
- a deeper awareness of the minority language, the official language and other languages,
- increased student motivation as a result of real educational situations in the teaching of minority languages,
- increased fluency of expression, and a wider range of vocabulary,
- active involvement in lessons,
- a positive attitude towards the minority language,

- development of their own national and cultural awareness,
- preparation for the practicalities of life and work in a multicultural society,
- CLIL provides opportunities that allow students to use a minority language naturally, in such a way that they gradually forget about the use of minority languages and focus only on content,
- in the CLIL method the minority language is associated with other objects. In the classroom there are two main goals: one is the subject and the other is the language,
- this is the reason why CLIL is sometimes referred to as dual--focused teaching,
- CLIL can achieve many different outcomes: it can increase the willingness and ability to learn both the minority language and the non-language subjects.

The process of gaining knowledge as a sequence of five stages

The model of the process of gaining knowledge is based on five stages (Hejný et al., 2006, p. 15). It starts with motivation and at its core are two mental lifts: the first leads from concrete knowledge to generic knowledge and the second from generic to abstract knowledge. The permanent part of the gaining of knowledge process is crystallisation, i.e. inserting new knowledge into the existing mathematical structure.

The whole process can be described by a scheme.

abstract knowledge ➡ crystallisation

⬆ abstraction

generic model(s)

⬆ generalisation

motivation ➡ isolated models

Motivation for the Use of Content
and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
at the Slovak Minority School in Hungary

111
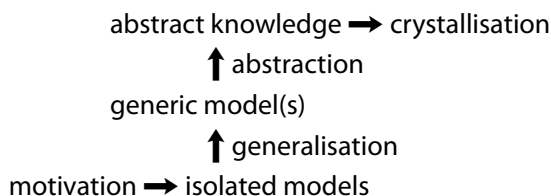
Motivation is the tension which occurs in a person's mind as a result of the discrepancy between the existing and desired states of knowledge. The discrepancy comes from the difference between "I do not know" and "I need to know", or "I cannot do that" and "I want to be able to do that"; and sometimes from other needs and discrepancies, too. For example, in the parking lot, there are two cars and three more will come, how many cars will there be?

Isolated models – models of a new piece of knowledge come into mind gradually and have a long-term perspective. For instance, the concepts of a fraction, a negative number, a straight line, congruency or a limit develop over many years at a preparatory level. For our example we can use concrete objects from real life, such as two yellow apples and three red apples, two chairs and three other chairs, and so on.

Generic model – the scheme of the process of gaining knowledge is placed over isolated models which indicate its greater universality. The generic model is created from the community of its isolated models and represents these models. For example fingers or bullets on a counter represent chairs, apples and other objects.

Abstract knowledge gives birth to abstract knowledge. It is a deeper view into that knowledge. New knowledge, relationships, concepts and dependencies between objects are defined and provide independence. A student at this stage is verifying the new knowledge produced by the used model.

Crystallisation is the phase, in which the pupil, after his entrance into the cognitive structure of a new piece of knowledge, begins to look for relationships with the existing knowledge. If the pupil understands, for example, that $2 + 3 = 5$, it is easy to ascertain through the models that $5 - 2 = 3$ or $5 - 3 = 2$.

Automation occurs after the above mentioned five phases. At this stage we try to calculate with the pupils without the models. The fact that a student answers quickly, correctly and with confidence does not imply that his/her answer is based on the appropriate image. For instance, the pupil knows that $2 \times 4 = 8$ but he/she cannot answer how much he/she has to pay for 2 lollypops each costing 4 crowns, or what 3×4 is without

going back to the beginning of the 4 times table. His/her knowledge is burdened with formalism; by this we mean the characteristic feature of mechanical knowledge. In this case it is very important to use isolated and generic models. If the teacher finds in the pupil formalism or non-understanding of some notion, it is important to return to the isolated and generic models. Teachers often make the mistake of not using these models, and when they encounter pupils' problems they do not have the possibility of returning to these models.

The CLIL method in school mathematics

This method can also be applied to mathematics both in the preparation of future minority teachers of mathematics, and also in Slovak primary and secondary schools in Hungary. The existence of bilingual grammar also serves as an inspiration for new teaching methods that can be applied to the Slovak language in the educational process at a minority school in Hungary. According to Beardsmore (2008) the results of CLIL research show that monolingual students seemed to be stronger in their acquisition of knowledge of facts, whereas bilingual students were better at acquiring the mathematical operations. In other words, the research revealed a difference between informational knowledge and operational knowledge for the two groups of subjects. Informational knowledge refers to the capacity to memorise, or *knowing that*, whereas operational knowledge refers to the capacity to apply what one knows to new circumstances, or *knowing how*. Operational knowledge is important for creativity, whereas informational knowledge serves more as a tool upon which creativity must be built. The studies on the learning of mathematics in a bilingual context were confirmed amongst different school populations, both in primary and secondary education, and even amongst beginners in second language programmes.

The study Domínguez (2011) shows one example of using the CLIL method in mathematics when teaching with text tasks. This teaching was in English and Spanish:

Motivation for the Use of Content
and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
at the Slovak Minority School in Hungary

113

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

ARTICLES

Tu maestra de arte te dio 3 paquetes de papel construcción para que hagan banderitas de México. Un paquette es de hojas verdes, uno es de hojas blancas, y uno es de hojas rojas. ¿Cómo podrías hacer 60 banderas de México?	Your art teacher gave you 3 packages of construction paper to make the flags of Mexico. One package has green paper, one has writing paper and one has red paper. Each package has 25 sheets. How do you make 60 flags?

In our case, we tried to formulate some CLIL activities with future Slovak minority teachers at the Faculty of Education in Szarvas, Hungary. We used the figures prepared from tangram parts. First we analyze the tangram parts from a mathematical point of view, and we find their names in the Slovak and Hungarian languages, and later we try to formulate sentences in both languages.

Figure 1.
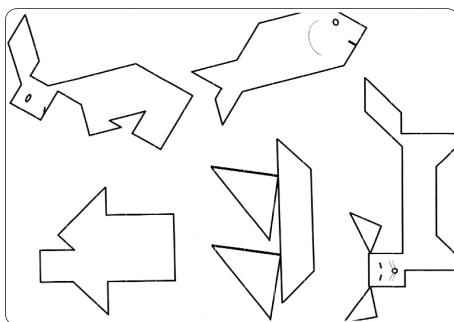
Table 1. Figures and tangram parts

Štvorec	Négyzet	Square
Trojuholník	Háromszög	Triangle
Rovnobežník	Paralelogramma	A rectangle
Rovnoramenný trojuholník	Egyenlő szárú háromzög	Isosceles triangle
Pravouhlý trojuholník	Derékszögű háromszög	Right triangle
Obdĺžnik	Téglalap	Rectangle
Dom	Ház	House
Komín	Kémény	Chimney
Pes	Kutya	Dog

Table 2. Sentences

Zajac beží pred domom.	A nyúl fut a ház előtt.	The rabbit is running in front of the house.
Pes naháňa zajaca.	A kutya kergeti a nyuszit.	A dog is chasing a rabbit.
Ryby sú v akváriu.	A halak akváriumban vannak.	The fish are in the aquarium.

Figure 2.
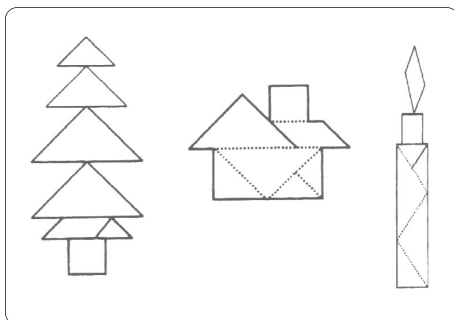
Table 3. Tangram figures

Dom	Ház	House
Komín	Kémény	Chimney
Strecha	Tető	Roof
Smrek	Fenyő	Spruce
Strom	Fa	Tree
Sviečka	Gyertya	Candle

Table 4. Sentences

Prasiatko vyšlo z domu a vyliezlo na vrchol stromu. Vlky ho nechytili.	A kis malac kiment a házból és felment a fenyő tetején. Farkasok nem csapták öt be.	The pig came out of the house and climbed to the top of the tree. The wolves did not catch him.
V dome svieti sviečka.	A házban ég a gyertya.	The candle shines in the house.

Motivation for the Use of Content
and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
at the Slovak Minority School in Hungary

115

ARTICLES

These activities support not only the building of mathematical notions by the students, but they provide the possibility of expressing their knowledge in the Slovak and Hungarian languages and to develop their communicative abilities.

Conclusions

According to Beardsmore (2008) bilingual children have at their disposal a greater faculty for creative thinking. They perform significantly better in tasks which do not require the finding of a single correct answer to a question, but instead where they are asked to imagine a number of possible correct answers: for example, giving the maximum number of interesting and unusual uses for a cup. The activities with future Slovak minority teachers can prepare them for bilingual work with pupils. Mathematics serves this purpose not only for Slovak language teaching, but also for developing pupils' activities. It is possible to find such suitable activities in Billich (2008), Krech (2009) and Uherčíková, Vankúš (2010). We finish with the ten commandments for a mathematics teacher according to Polya (1971).

The teacher should:
1. show an interest in the technical content of his teaching,
2. be well aware of the technical content of his teaching,
3. know his subject to the core and know that the best way for the teacher is the one that the teacher discovers himself,
4. know the expectations of students: What do they expect? What is difficult for them?,
5. not only to pass on his expertise to the students, but he should develop their working skills (such as the proper order and fairness of the procedure),
6. teach students to discuss the subject between themselves,
7. teach students to formulate arguments,
8. develop pupils' heuristic method for solving problems, show them general hidden structures in specific situations,

9. not show students a solution ahead of each task, but the teacher should let the students themselves discover it; this will strengthen their thinking skills.

10. not force students with many theses contained in the curriculum, but to encourage and motivate them to learn with understanding.

*Motivation for the Use of Content
and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
at the Slovak Minority School in Hungary*

117

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

ARTICLES

Bibliography:

Beardsmore B.H., *Multilingualism, Cognition and Creativity*, in: "International CLIL Research Journal", Jyvaskyla University, (1) 2008, p. 4–19.

Billich M., *The use of geometric place in problem solving*, in: *Teaching Mathematics: Innovation, New Trends, Research*, Ružomberok 2009, p. 7–14.

CLIL-Obsahovo a jazykovo integrované vyučovanie (CLIL) v škole v Európe, Európska kancelária Eurydice, Brussels 2006, in: <http://www.eurydice.org>.

Domínguez H., *Using what matters to students in bilingual mathematics problems*, in: "Educational Studies in Mathematics", 76 (2011), p. 305–328.

Hejný M. et al., *Creative Teaching in Mathematics*, Univerzita Karlova v Praze, Pedagogická fakulta, Prague 2006.

Krech I., *Prawdopodobieństwo w pewnych argumentacjach na lekcji matematyki*, in: *Autentické vyučovanie a využitie medzipredmetových vzťahov vo vyučovaní matematiky. Zborník príspevkov*, Pedagogická fakulta UMB, Banská Bystrica, 2. konferencie učiteľov matematiky 2000, p. 57–61.

Pólya G., *A problémamegoldás iskolája*, Budapest 1971.

Uherčíková, V., Vankúš, P., *Netradičné metódy vo vyučovaní matematiky*, in: *Dva dny s didaktikou matematiky: Sborník příspěvků*, Univerzita Karlova, Praha 2010, p. 83–85.

Abstract

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) can support the use of a minority language in different subjects. In our paper we present this method in the case of school mathematics. First, we describe the process of gaining knowledge in teaching mathematics. We will then present some students' work who will be future Slovak minority teachers.

Keywords: Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Slovak minority school, primary education, mathematics education

Information about the author:
doc. PaedDr. Ján Gunčaga, PhD
Catholic University in Ružomberok,
Faculty of Education, Department of Mathematics
Hrabovská 1, 03401 Ružomberok, Slovak Republic
&
Szent István University
Faculty of Education
Szabadság út 4, 5540 Szarvas, Hungary
e-mail: jan.guncaga@ku.sk

REPORTS
& REVIEWS

Agata Fijałkowska (reviewer)
University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce, Poland

Anna Klim-Klimaszewska
Preschool Pedagogy. The New Core Curriculum
Erica, Warszawa 2010, 376 pages

"Preschool Pedagogy. The New Core Curriculum" is a unique title on the Polish publishing market written by Associate Professor PhD Anna Klim-Klimaszewska. The author manages the Department of Preschool Education in the Institute of Pedagogy, at the University of Natural Science and Humanities in Siedlce. She is the author of over 150 scholarly and popular science publications, which have been published in Poland and abroad. The most important are: "Preschool Pedagogy", "Adaptation to the Preschool Environment", "Support of Children's Adaptation Process to Preschool Environment" and "From the Practice of Preschool Education".

The book "Preschool Pedagogy. The New Core Curriculum" brings up issues that constitute the basis of work with children at a preschool age. This title is intended for teachers, students of pedagogy, parents and for anybody interested in this subject. The author adapted the content to consider the ongoing reforms in the Polish educational system and the requirements that have resulted from adjusting the educational system to the standards of the European Union. The book consists of ten chapters. In the first nine Klim-Klimaszewska presents the theoretical basis of children's education at preschool age. They contain the most important preschool upbringing issues and problems, and give basic information that is indispensable when taking practical action in preschool, which forms the basis of the methodological influences. Readers can get an in-depth insight into a new conceptualization of preschool upbringing in the contemporary educational system, which offers a contrast to the historical background in a number of areas, including: its biopsychological

basis, functioning base, environment organization, pedagogical activity, curriculum content, the preparation of children to start education, as well as the education activity of a teacher and pedagogic innovations in pre-school education.

Chapter ten focuses on practice. The author here presents some methodological solutions in the form of lesson plans. Each of them relates to the formation of specific skills of small children. Models of practical solutions worked out by experienced experts on preschool education are presented in these lesson plans , such as The Method of Good Start, by R. Labana, C. Orffa, W. Sherborne, P. E. Dennison's, A. and M. Kniessów.

Klim-Klimaszewska covers new issues in her book: she discusses preschool education in a reformed educational system and in the countries of the European Union, its legal conditions, the teacher training of preschool teachers, their workshop, and also preschool help.

The book is a synthesis of theoretical and practical knowledge about preschool education, disorders, development stimulation, teachers' organizational skills and their creative attitude.

Without doubt I can say that "Preschool Pedagogy. The New Core Curriculum" is a rich guide for preschool teachers for organizing the didactic and educational process, and also for students undertaking teacher training, in that it will help them during classes of preschool pedagogy. Parents can also greatly benefit from this book because they can obtain valuable advice, such as how to prepare their children for preschool education, how to ease children's difficulties when adapting to preschool, understanding the interaction between the preschool and family environments, how to prepare children to take on students' responsibilities, and much more.

Ewa Jagiełło (reviewer)

University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce, Poland

Mária Podhájecka
Cognition of the World through Didactic Games
Elpil – Jarosław Pilich, Siedlce 2011, 263 pages

The book by Doc. PhD. Mária Podhájecka, CSc entitled "Cognition of the World through Didactic Games" is a trial that emphasizes the importance of games in shaping a child's personality at a pre-school age.

A child from the very beginning of his or her life is put into the educational-didactic process. The first institution undertaking this duty is the family and the close environment around the child. However, it is not always the case that loving people who possess suitable pedagogical knowledge have children. Thus the next important institution is kindergarten. Here, under direction of well-qualified pedagogical staff, a child is able to extend its knowledge extensively and systematically. A professional teacher's work, which shapes the active and creative attitude of a small child, is connected with searching for didactic methods and tools. This problematic is undertaken in the reviewed monograph; the author describes 169 didactic games through which a teacher is able to achieve the planned goals.

As the author writes in the introduction: "An essential part of the educational process in kindergarten is the game: everything depends on it; it is the base of various activities which influence the development of a child in different educational areas."

A rich catalogue of various didactic games, which are published in this book, can be an excellent addition to the large collection of those that already exist in the educational field. The author insinuates that this list is not closed, and she offers a chance to complete it. According to her, a professional teacher should create different kinds of suggested games

and introduce new ones. This kind of work ought to encourage teachers to create an inspiring and creative educational space.

This monograph consists of ten chapters. The first one refers to introductory games and their appliance in the area of didactic activities. Mária Podhájecka within the first few sentences mentions the positive virtues of games and their function in the proper preparation of children for life. According to the author, a game is the most important activity in a child's life; it enables the child to acquire vast amounts of knowledge in a natural way. She compares games to an information gate through which a vast amount of feelings, experiences or impulses go; then, in a further stage, they are transformed into knowledge. Moreover, the author emphasizes that through playing games a child can in a clear and understandable way (for the child) express their needs. Of greatest importance is the fact that it is a good means of communication, both externally and internally.

In the introduction to the second part the author reminds us of the basic classification of games, which is divided into two kinds: games with rules (educational and skills-based) and those without rules. She emphases that the second kind dominates in kindergarten education. Children create rules on their own; sometimes during games they assign compulsory rules in a certain place, time and area. Of greater importance when using these tools in an educational and didactic process is to achieve educational goals. Mária Podhájecka, using her experience, believes that every game has educational potential; the difference lies in its quality and sphere of activity. Games invented by children, through good management and advice, can be transformed into educational games.

To continue, the author describes in some detail the expression "educational games". She quotes the definition, mentions elements of the educational structure, and arranges realized problems that have resulted from the educational essence. As the first person, she introduces educational competence to the structure of the educational game. She answers the question: When is it possible to use educational games in the educational process? She mentions the skills which educational games can develop because of their dynamic character. As a means of estimating the

effectiveness in applying educational games, she presents an assessment of various authors, including, among others, Bloom. She strongly emphasizes the necessity of applying educational games systematically to achieve planned educational effects.

The third chapter entitled "The Pedagogical tendency of educational games" refers to a process of managing an educational game which involves: planning, organizing, motivating, carrying on reversible information. Mária Podhájecka concentrates her studies on teachers, their professionalism in preparing games and the professional management of participants. The author emphases that it is not an easy task, because small children lose motivation easily and become bored, which requires a sudden intervention by the teacher. The author goes on to mention over twenty questions directed to a teacher, to which he or she should know the answer, and be able to choose correctly the tools of work.

In the introduction to the fourth chapter, the author continues her studies on the educational process, evoking the expression of the teaching process. She describes it as a planned and conscious goal of a teacher's activity which enables the development of cognitive processes and it is directed to the pupil in order to acquire new knowledge systematically.

Mária Podhájecka emphasizes that an educated person cannot exist without teaching. Thus, there is a close connection between goals, contests, education, subject, as well as theory and practice. The complexity of the discussed problem assures a higher position to the teacher's job. Only a well-planned educational strategy guarantees success and the further development of pupils.

The fifth chapter was devoted to an exact presentation of the Alternative program entitled Child and World which is supportive for the comprehensive development of a small child. After a penetrating analysis of its contests, one can state that the author relies on the rule of connecting science with playing methods. She takes into consideration the important role of games in the development of key competences, as well as diagnostic tools. The contents included in the program are resilient and can be applied in such a way as to respond to children's creative possibilities at different age groups. It is essential that every teacher establishes

a relationship between the educational program and pedagogical diag-
nostics. In kindergarten conditions the diagnostics can be used for every-
day educational and didactic situations, and therefore of the child's
individual 'look'.

The next part of the discussed book involves a catalogue of games
for the whole didactic year of education (10 months). One hundred and
sixty-nine games were grouped according to the realization of educa-
tional tasks. Each of them plays an educational role; a child who partici-
pates within it acquires or develops certain key competences. Due to an
extensive catalogue of games, the teacher is able to adjust them to the
subject and sub-subject, follow the rule of transforming them from the
simple to the complex. The proposed games have a complex character.
This means that they are not concentrated only with the acquisition and
development of knowledge within one educational area, but simultane-
ously allow the achievement of social, perceptive-motorist, personal com-
municative, cognitive and informative competences.

The author highlights the important role of the ideas of Komeński
from the sixteenth century; they continue to be alive and well in con-
temporary pedagogy. One of them is the idea of a school game. Assum-
ing that the game is a part of every activity undertaken in organizational
form frames, the author emphases the important role of the teacher. The
teacher should be occupied with complex knowledge, skills, abilities and
efficiency connected with competences in a game sphere. This should
be understood as a perfect means of acquiring numerous activities which
reflect the positive effects within pre-school education. The means for
a teacher to achieve perfectionism is complex and difficult. The selection
of games for the development of applied knowledge and skills requires
perfectionism and continuous study.

Danka Lešková (reviewer)

Prešov University, Prešov, Slovak Republic

Liptáková Ľ. et al.
Integrated Didactics of Slovak Language and Literature for Primary Education
Prešov University, Faculty of Education, Department of Communication and Literary Education and Department of Research into Children's Language and Culture, 2011, 580 pages

Complexity allied to integrity is one of the key principles of primary education. In the teaching of the Slovak language and literature in Slovakia, the need to combine language, literature and communication/compositional elements in order to create one working unit has proven to be productive. Our university textbook *Integrated Didactics of the Slovak Language and Literature for Primary Education* successfully presents, elucidates and justifies this unitary approach. It is a book which has emerged as an output from a similarly named research project involving collaboration between the Department of Communication and Literary Education and the Department of Research into Children's Language and Culture, both within the Faculty of Education of Prešov University in Prešov. The group of authors, led by Ľudmila Liptáková, have created a conception of teaching at primary school, the mother tongue and literature in a way which sensitively unifies the development of communicational and literary competence.

The textbook is divided into fifteen chapters. The introductory chapter presents the conception and theoretical basis for the integrated teaching of the Slovak language and literature at primary school. In so doing, it respects current tendencies and viewpoints on a range of educational aspects and draws from many Slovak and international academic sources.

The next chapter reflects the specifics of didactic and classroom communication in the teaching of the Slovak language and literature, while the third chapter addresses the natural laws governing the cognitive and verbal development of a child and the correlation between the projected cognitive and verbal abilities of young pupils, and development of their communication competence. The next chapter outlines the analytical and interpretational features of a young pupil in relation to a literary text. It looks at such issues as children's reception of art and their aesthetic-psychological potential (for instance by looking at the compatibility of a genre and the age of a child). The chapter entitled *The Process of Developing the Pupil's Cognitive, Communicational and Literary Competence*, deals primarily with the psychological and didactic aspects of teaching and the methodology of teaching in the mother tongue and literature (applying the cognitive and communication framework: Evocation – Realisation of the Meaning – Reflection). The next chapter focuses on the receptive textual competence of young pupils, the complex development of their literacy and the processes of text reception at primary school. Productive textual competence and the processes of developing productive communication skills (speaking and writing) are the focus of the seventh chapter, while the eighth chapter looks at development of pupils' phonetic/phonological knowledge, orthoepy and spelling competence, as well as their writing and speaking skills. The cognitive-communicational approach to the development of the primary school pupil's morphological competence is demonstrated in the following chapter through the topic of proper nouns in children's communication and the educational process at primary schools. In terms of linguistic logic the next chapter naturally follows the previous ones by focussing on the development of lexical, syntactic and pragmatic competence as a means of developing the child's textual competence. The eleventh chapter deals with determining the functions of artistic literature for young schoolchildren and focuses on the use of a reader (specifically a textbook with an illustrated anthology of texts), other sources of reading, and possible approaches to literary texts in terms of didactic communication. The twelfth chapter looks at the formation of a cultured and sensitive young

Liptáková, Ľ. et al
Integrated Didactics of Slovak Language and Literature for Primary Education
Prešov University, Faculty of Education, Department of Communication and Literary
Education and Department of Research into Children's Language and Culture, 2011, 580 pages

129

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

REPORTS & REVIEWS

reader, revealing the role of literature in the child's world, the process of interiorization, the phases of reception of a literary text, and the cognitive and non-cognitive bases for the formation of a literary culture. Attention is focussed on verbalizing the reading experience and choosing texts for children to interpret, as well as on current research into children's reading habits and the search for an answer to what it is that leads children to read literature. Dramatic art and children's theatre (drama as a learning tool and the dramatization of literary texts) are the subject of the university textbook's thirteenth chapter. Specific learning difficulties and therapeutic and formative approaches towards dealing with them, as well as the multicultural and emotional education of pupils are the main themes of the fourteenth chapter. The final chapter proposes a curriculum of subjects for the Slovak language and literature at primary schools, with content aimed at developing the pupil's communicative and literary competence, and looking at the selected pupils' ability levels at the end of primary education.

The print version of the textbook intertextually and hypertextually combines with the textbook webpage at <http://indi.pf.unipo.sk>. The webpage contains various sources as examples of integrated educational projects and their implementation in school, other publications about the teaching of in the mother tongue and literature, which are also the result of research projects, a public discussion forum, addenda to the textbook, other useful references, links, information about the authors, and video samples of educational units.

The texts for integrated didactics of the mother tongue and literature are also unified in their outward form: the book is organized clearly and coherently, its structure giving readers easy guidance and logical progress through the individual language issues and principles described, as well as displaying a high-level of expertise. The above mentioned integration prevents inappropriate preference of interconnecting elements at the expense of discrete ones, so neither the Slovak language nor its literature lose their central role; on the contrary, integration enables them to come closer together. The layout of the individual texts respects the logic of didactic communication, which moves from the

existing knowledge we have (given at the start of each chapter) to new knowledge which is reinforced in the process of reading. Explanatory texts overlap with interactive and illustrative materials, graphic and visual aids, diagrams and a wide range of methods, such as working with exercises. The textbook also poses a number of questions, giving space for discussion about the value of teaching in the mother tongue and literature at the primary school level. For example, in the first chapter we meet with the need for self-evaluation of all the benefits and shortcomings of hitherto existing conceptions of teaching, the search for answers as to how and why the taught themes are integrated etc. The textbook also offers a wide range of sources from the areas of linguo-didactic and litero-didactic research.

That the team of authors (Ľ. Liptáková, Z. Stanislavová, Ľ. Sičáková, B. Hlebová, J. Kesselová, M. Klimovič, R. Rusňák, K. Vužňáková, M. Andričíková, A. Mitrová, E. Pršová, M. Tkáčová, A. Sochovičová, D. Cibáková, A. Matušíková) realize the difficulties of an integrated approach in teaching the mother tongue, and this is demonstrated by the sensitive methodological approach of the individual authors towards integration, and by their belief in the value of this approach. The reader discovers that apparently discrete elements in the teaching of the mother tongue and literature are in fact much closer to each other than they seem.

Katarzyna Szewczuk (reviewer)

Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland

J. Karbowniczek, M. Kwaśniewska, B. Surma
The Basics of Preschool Pedagogy with Methodology
Jesuit Publishing House WAM, Krakow 2011, 392 pages

A reform of educational system, that was enacted in 1999, introduced a number of changes in the functioning of the Polish education. Initially, the reform mainly referred to the transformation from a two-level system of education to a three-level structure.

It also referred to preschool education, emphasising the compulsory one-year preschool foundation for every 6-year-old child. An amendment introduced in 2009 again influenced pre-school education. The lowering of the school-age resulted in several changes in the organisation and functioning of kindergartens and nurseries. Pre-school education teachers now find themselves in a new situation, which may create some difficulties, concerns and questions. Numerous publications on preschool pedagogy may be helpful for the teacher's continual professional development. One of these publications is the book entitled *The Basics of Preschool Pedagogy with Methodology*. Why is it worth reading a book relating to this subject matter?

The book has been written by professionals, people who have direct contact with children, teachers and kindergarten student teachers. Professor J. Karbowniczek is a pedagogue specializing in early childhood education. M. Kwaśniewska, PhD is *inter alia* an author of educational programmes and books for children. While B. Surma, PhD specialises in the pedagogy of M. Montessori. Through their publication, the authors have joined in "the discussion about contemporary problems of preschool education. They have attempted to present their theoretical and methodical point of view on not only recent achievements. but also on the present challenges in this field." (see p. 7).

The launched publication has a synthetic character. However, it contains a compendium of knowledge concerning preschool pedagogy that is much needed for students and teachers. The authors have aptly combined historical knowledge with the contemporary period, presenting changes in upbringing, education and preschool pedagogy teaching programmes. While reading the publication, we can familiarise ourselves with the views and concepts concerning child upbringing of such distinguished figures, such as Plato, Aristotle, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Mikołaj Rej, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and John Dewey. The contemporary representatives of preschool pedagogy have also been mentioned along with their interests and the type of research they are involved in. J. Karbowniczek has undertaken a difficult task to familiarise the reader with the most important events directly or indirectly connected with the upbringing and education of kindergarten-age children (see p. 60). Although the historical dates, which are presented in the chronological order, will definitely not exhaust the discussed subject, they provide general knowledge as well as an opportunity to think about and form personal thoughts and opinions concerning changes in preschool education. The tendencies in preschool education programmes have also been presented from the historical point of view.

Apart from the historical facts, readers may be interested to learn more about the present state of pre-school education in Poland. According to M. Kwaśniewska, we can observe paradigmatic transformations that general pedagogy in Poland is currently undergoing. These transformations refer to the change from the technological orientation to the humanistic alternative, which is also reflected in preschool pedagogy. This peculiar bi-paradigm of preschool pedagogy may become its new integral value leading to educational pluralism. Pluralism, on the other hand, assumes "consent for the variety of theoretical approaches and subsequent various practical applications of the educational process." (p. 104).

The section prepared by B. Surma complements the historical and contemporary knowledge of pre-school education. Parents interested in their children's education will find here information concerning the division of preschool institutions as well as the way in which space should

J. Karbowniczek, M. Kwaśniewska, B. Surma
The Basics of Preschool Pedagogy with Methodology
Jesuit Publishing House WAM, Krakow 2011, 392 pages

133

REPORTS & REVIEWS

Contemporary Tendencies in Preschool and Elementary School Education

be organised in these institutions. From these book sections, they will familiarise themselves with a kindergarten's functions, the various ways in which they can be applied, as well as the appearance of the classroom, cloakroom, sanitary rooms, garden and the kindergarten building (p. 189–214). Parents will also find synthetic information concerning M. Montessori preschool education institutions. A parent acquainted with this kind of knowledge will be able to make a more conscious choice concerning the future kindergarten for their child. While a teacher, owing to the sections by B. Surma will find them useful when composing general kindergarten daily schedules. The author notices, however, that the exact daily schedule depends on the opening hours of a kindergarten or another form of preschool education institution, as well as on homogeneous-age group division or or mixed-age groups (p. 205).

The greatest strength of the book is the methodology that it employs. The authors have professionally and competently combined theoretical knowledge with its practical application, which is essential for an inexperienced teacher today. The methodology of preschool education can be found in the following sections of the book:

- *Teaching Methods* – the authors have not only contained the description of their various typologies but have also characterised chosen activating methods applied in kindergartens. They have provided a compendium of knowledge relating to innovative methods, which can be applied by teachers in the course of preschool education.
- *Teachers' Pre-school Education Programmes* – it contains a description of the requirements that such a programme should fulfil, as well as its planning procedure. The programmes awarded and distinguished by MEN (Polish National Ministry of Education) in "The Best Preschool Education Programme" contest have been mentioned. They may be an inspiration for teachers' individual work.
- *The Structure of Monthly Plans of the Educational Process* – it contains information concerning the criteria, contents and the structural requirements a correctly constructed plan has to fulfil.

- *Activity Schedule Constructing* – it presents detailed information that will be useful for students, containing the description of the planning procedure stages as well as the model structure of the activity schedule.
- *Methods and Diagnostic Tools* – this section of the publication contains a table presenting a classification of techniques and research tools that can be used in the assessment of kindergarten--age children's development. It also contains the diagnostic tools that can be used to assess the current stage of child development and to determine the course of the kindergarten adaptation process, as well as for the school readiness tests.

The language used by the authors is clear and comprehensive, and will be suitable for a wide range of readers. The contents of the book were determined by the requirements of academic teaching, therefore one may have the impression that the book was aimed mainly at students. However, I believe it may be useful for kindergarten teachers as well as parents of kindergarten-age children. The authors themselves hope "the book would help students and teachers working with kindergarten-age children by applying the authors' inspirations in their teaching practice" (p. 392).

The Basics of Preschool Pedagogy with Methodology is a publication that is synthetic in its character, and contains the main issues within the discussed subject matter. The authors describe the issues contained in the seven chapters of the book in a matter-of-fact and, at the same time, concise way. The reader will not be disappointed. Precise and relevant advice, numerous footnotes as well as a rich bibliography will allow the reader to gain further insight into the discussed matters. They can also become the basis for individual research and independent analysis of issues that will be interesting for the reading public.