# CONTENTS

# FOREWORD

*Dear Friends, dear Readers, Scientific Workers, Teachers and Doctoral Students!*

*You are probably surprised by the title of the journal which you are holding in your hands. Yes, we have changed its name. The owner of the journal, our school has a new name too, since January 2017, it is called DTI University. In such a context, the Editorial Board has decided to make some changes as well. A new title – **Acta Educationis Generalis (AEG)** has been chosen. With the new title, new ISSNs were registered – ISSN 2585-7444 (online) and ISSN 2585-741X (print). We have a new e-mail address as well: aeg@dti.sk. The scope of the journal remains the same, it is oriented on education in general (generalis), in every scientific field, from every aspect and on all levels of education, including kindergartens and lifelong learning. We assume and expect this change to bring even more readers, categorization within scientific fields and a higher citation rate both in Slovakia and abroad. This is our wish. For the summer issue of the journal, the Editorial Board, in cooperation with our independent peer-reviewers, have selected high quality studies, literature reviews and scholarly articles. We continue with the presentation of the Czech "scientific school" and some Slovak and Hungarian authors.*

*The distinguished Czech scientist, Professor Jiří Mareš, in his literature review entitled "Prosocial Behavior Education in Children", deals with a specific topical issue, i.e. how children's sensitivity to helping other people develops and how children acquire competences in helping. The author claims that it is paradoxical that more attention is currently paid to the negative features in children's and adolescents' behaviour (aggressive behaviour, bullying) than to the positive ones (helping, social support).*

*It is the education of young students that Jana Majerčíková and Barbora Petrů Puhrová deal with in their study entitled "Everyday Family Experience: A Child's Home Preparation for School". In their qualitative research, they revealed that completion of homework in the parent – child interaction is an implicit part of everyday family life, it requires the parents' participation and is also time-consuming and gender-marked.*

*Helena Vomáčková in her study "Multiplication Relations of School Results on an Example Taken from History" informs about the partial results of a research (on the sample of 1819 pupils) focused on the broader context of the reasons of school success of 7th grade pupils, which can be related to academic achievement, and as a curiosity, also to selected independent variables, such as region, family background, or value orientation, etc.*

*In the study "Children's Initiations in Communication with Preschool Teachers", Hana Navrátilová brings a qualitative analysis of real communicational situations in kindergartens which is still rare in the Czech pedagogical discourse.*

*The environment of kindergartens is in the centre of attention of the next study – "Physical Games as a Means of Developing Children's Social Skills in Kindergarten" by Viktor Pacholík and Martina Nedělová, who focus on the development of children's social skills based on physical activities. It is a topical paper oriented on children's mental health.*

*The section of scholarly articles is opened by Jana Vašíková and Iva Žáková, who, in their paper "Speech Therapy Prevention in Kindergarten", introduce some of the*

results of a qualitative research from the field of speech disorder prevention in preschool children and highlight the importance of teachers' sufficient training in this field. This is the first time that Acta gives space to the issues of speech therapy on its pages and we are glad to do so.

Mária Mehešová in her contribution "Social-Emotional Health of University Students and the Importance of Its Research" pays attention to the social-emotional health of Slovak students, its optimal development and the possibilities of its measurement using a new tool. The mental health of young people is the priority of the Slovak National Treating Program for Children and Youth, as emphasized by the author.

The next paper "Education of Elderly Patients Within Nursing Care in Slovakia" which deals with the issues of the education of seniors, was submitted by the Czech author – Petra Kaduchová. She, in her international research realized in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, points out the importance of high-quality training for nurses in the role of the educators of seniors.

Szilvia Simándi from Eszterházy Károly University in Eger, Hungary, pays special attention to the possibilities of study circles working in the online educational environment, i.e. in a non-formal environment which can supplement, replace or raise an individual's knowledge and skills gained in the school system to a higher level. It is entitled "Study Circles in Online Learning Environment in the Spirit of Learning-Centered Approach".

The group of scholarly articles is closed by the paper "Family as One of the Most Important Factors in a Child's Upbringing" by Jaroslav Oberuč and Ladislav Zapletal. They accentuate the importance of the family environment and parents' positive responses, focus on the role of a parent and on the child's social inclusion.

In this issue of Acta Educationis Generalis, we are pleased to congratulate to two distinguished pedagogues. The personality of the Slovak pedagogue doc. Valentína Trubíniová, CSc. and her contribution to the development of preschool pedagogy are highlighted by Viola Tamášová in her paper.

Hana Lukášová and Tomáš Svatoš dedicated their paper to the outstanding Czech pedagogue and psychologist Prof. PhDr. Jiří Mareš, CSc. from Charles University in Prague. The Editorial Board of Acta Educationis Generalis would like to congratulate to both personalities (who are among our authors as well) and wish them pleasant and creative personal and professional lives.

Dear Readers, find inspiration in our studies and articles, develop them and keep sending us the results of your research and recommendations for the educational practice, but also new educational theories and philosophies.

Wishing you a nice day,

Viola Tamášová
Editor-in-Chief

# STUDIES

## Prosocial Behavior Education in Children

### *Jiří Mareš*[*]

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* It is paradoxical that more attention is currently paid to negative features in children's and adolescents' behavior (aggressive behavior, bullying) than to the positive ones (helping, social support).
*Purpose:* This literature review describes how children's sensitivity to helping other people develops and how children acquire competences in helping.
*Methods:* The literature search was conducted in databases using keywords "child", "prosocial development" and "prosocial behavior". Publications (papers or monographs) published in English or Czech between 1989 and 2016 were retrieved.
*Conclusions:* The study identified the following sources of prosocial behavior: use of fairy-tale motifs in the case of babies (e. g. the motif of good deeds) and targeted family education with the use of direct and indirect procedures. Targeted education of children in preschool was accomplished by experienced teachers. Education in providing help and social support to schoolmates (including the so-called partnership and peer teaching) at elementary school was identified as a special case.

**Key words:** child, education, prosocial behavior, social support, helping; comforting.

## 1   Introduction

Helping other people, providing social support to those who are coping with stress situations are competences that children should be taught at school. Helping other people is the skill a person needs throughout the life. Based on these skills, families, work groups and communities work. As Wentzel (2015) notes, prosocial behavior was related positively to perspective taking and theory of mind abilities, empathy, and emotion regulation skills.

How the terms of prosocial behavior and altruism are defined? There are many definitions, so, we will choose only two of them. "Prosocial behavior refers to voluntary actions that are intended to help or benefit another individual or group of individuals. Prosocial behaviors are defined in term of their intended consequences for others; they are performed voluntary rather than under duress" (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 3). "Prosocial behavior is such behavior the target of which is to improve the situation of

---

[*]   Jiří Mareš, Charles University, Faculty of Medicine in Hradec Králové, Hradec Králové, Czech Republic; mares@lfhk.cuni.cz

another person, whereas the helper is not obliged to provide the help and the receiver of the help is not an institution but an individual" (Záškodná & Mlčák, 2009, p. 49).

Developmental and evolutionary psychologists have identified various domains of prosocial behavior, such as informing, helping, sharing, comforting, cooperating, volunteering, that are protecting someone from harm or bullying (Spivak & Durlak, 2015). According to specialists (e. g. Penner et al., 2005) we can think about prosocial behavior and study it in details at three different levels: micro-level, mezzo-level and macro-level. How do they differ? The micro-level takes interest in the genesis of prosocial behavior in individuals and also in differences among people, at the time when their prosocial tendencies are just being formed. The mezzo-level goes further and it deals with the behavior of the couple: the helper – the receiver of the help; it also deals with the situation in which social behavior takes place. Let us add that this is the level, which is studied in psychology and pedagogy most frequently. The macro-level concentrates on that prosocial behavior, which runs in social context, inside a group, class, school, or institution.

Besides the term "prosocial behavior", professional literature uses the term altruism. "Altruism refers to one specific type of prosocial behavior – voluntary actions intended benefit another that are intrinsically motivated … as concern and sympathy for others, or by values and self-rewards rather than personal gain" (Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989, p. 3).

Where is the origin of prosocial behavior and helping others? In other words: when and how does the children's sense for social support develop and take form? In which situations and from whom children learn to receive and provide social support? In the search for answers to these questions, we are interested not in "completed", advanced support, but in support that is just arising, only forming itself. The problem is that the formation and functioning of "positive phenomena" is searched much less than the formation and functioning of negative ones. Reasons for that, in the case of children and adolescents, were clearly expressed by Burleson and Kunkel (1996): to understand the positive behavior of children and adolescents, to support it and develop it seemed in the past less important than to understand children's aggression and to reduce its incidence.

## 2   Social support providing preparation of a child

We have ranged in the level of psychological categories so far. If we consider how the child used to be prepared for helping other people during past centuries, we cannot avoid - apart from targeted education in family – also telling fairy-tale. It presents natural indirect form of education which accompanies the child from a very young age.

What are the specifics of fairy-tales and in which way does helping others occur in their motifs? In his analysis, the Czech writer Karel Čapek expressed, in a slight overstatement, the main features of fairy-tales, when he wrote:

"They are neither magic nor supernatural, only a little bit unbelievable; they are too lovely, too successful, too happy for us so that we would be able to immediately and fully to accept them as real … Literary theory of fairy-tales often deals with the question, where fairy-tales come from: if from India or Arabia, from prehistoric cosmogonies or literary sources. I would like to comment upon this that a whole range of fairy-tale motifs does not need to come actually from India but from the source a bit closer, actually from the general human experience" (Čapek, 1984, p. 115).

From many used fairy-tale motifs, K. Čapek set aside 11 general themes which occur in many world fairy-tales: fulfilled wish, gift, chance, discovery, magic wand, help, obstacles, success, excess, alien world, good deed. We will pay attention to the last-mentioned motif. Čapek writes about good deed in fairy-tales:

"Good deed. Give alms to a humped old woman, roll a stone aside the route, help the ant or baby bird in danger; every good deed will repay you by a big and mysterious reward, just at the moment you will most need it. But even we want to win the favor of fate by our good deeds; something inside us says, that it may be entered to our credit at some occasion, that we may bring about a kind of a positive change in the Universe or in our own life. It is not calculation, but a very quiet voice of trust; it is one of real fairy-tale feelings we experience in this sober world" (Čapek, 1984, p. 121).

Karel Čapek seems to have depicted several aspects of the education of children to helping other people; reciprocity of help; change to the good, which happens to the child himself; change to the good, which happens to a being in need; positive feelings of a helper, feeling which accompanies frankly intended and correctly provided help. Frequent occurrence of a good deed in fairy-tales (or condemnation of its absence) also indicates that human community has, since a long time ago, regarded helping to those who need it (and who deserve it) as a right thing and has inculcated it naturally into further generations.

## 3   Child education in family

How parents put emphasis on prosocial values, and how they show in particular prosocial behavior as examples for a child has been were widely researched, however, with ambiguous results.

A strong influence of parental value hierarchy on prosocial behavior of children was found in the case of both parents, sometimes only in the case of father, sometimes it was not found in any parent. The age of children also probably comes into play – small children are usually more influenced by parents, in the case of adolescents, parental influence weakens and the influence of peers is getting stronger. Copying prosocial behavior of parents is frequent at children's pre-school age, later causal relationships are more complicated. Numerous young people who participate in prosocial voluntary activities, however, state that they gained the basis of altruistic behavior and willingness to help other people in their families. Also, the uniqueness of a community, in which a particular family lives, membership in specific cultural, ethnic or religious group, come into play.

Köster, Schuhmacher and Kärtner propose "two prototypical pathways for the development of prosocial behavior, a relational and an autonomous pathway. Culture may be understood as shared meanings (cultural interpretations) and shared activities (cultural practices), which meet the ecological demands and the social structure of the environment" (Köster, Schuhmacher, & Kärtner, 2015, p. 73).

The relational pathway towards interpersonal responsibility can be met in small village communities where close neighbor relationships prevail. These cases are typical for the less developed areas. Parents provide living for a large family and children must take care of younger siblings and old and ill members of the family. As soon as they get older, they are led to hard work. They are inculcated with values like: to fulfil promises, to finish unfinished work, to share with others, to try hard to achieve good relationships with other community members. Parents socialize their children by inculcating them

with such rules as: it is necessary to be obedient, to fulfil instructions and commands of older people, to help the poor and needy, to do housework for the family so that the family and community can thrive. Parents, especially mothers, give tasks to their children clearly and briefly, they do not tolerate any discussion about the given tasks. They also do not allow any postponement of tasks or any dealing with anything else. In such background, the child is moving up the social scale step by step and starts to be accepted in the community social network. The child is getting more responsible, starts to understand the purpose in work and is motivated to prosocial behavior.

The second possibility is the autonomous pathway towards personal choice. Communities living in developed countries, in urban environments are a typical example of this eco-social context. Such family is usually not large, parents have their jobs and the child is not considered to be a welcome working force (as was the previous case), but he/she is considered an individual who should develop into a personality. Socialization is in progress through the children's duty to become independent, duty to update their assumptions, gain their professional skills, can make independent and correct decisions, stand up to the competition with others. Parents rather choose requests and explaining to set their tasks. They admit discussion, they try to solve the opposition and resistance of their child by amicable settlement. They lead their children to help within their family, afterwards even out of it step by step. They cultivate the feeling, that it is necessary to help people, that it is something like an obligation. The child starts to realize that there are situations, where a person must spontaneously, without an external invitation, it means in their own decision, help another person (Köster, Schuhmacher, & Kärtner, 2015).

After this general explanation, we can now proceed to the specific level. Educational procedures which parents apply to develop prosocial behavior in their children, form a specific group. We are presenting two types of them: direct and indirect procedures.

Among direct, explicit educational procedures belong: clear formulation of general requirements for the child's behavior and a clearly expressed parental expectation of morally acceptable behavior of the child. The child or adolescent must know what exactly is expected from him, what are the "game rules". Further, we also give more details for a child to get to know what will happen if they do not meet the requirements.

Giving concrete instructions regarding what the child is to do is a frequent educational procedure. Researches show that if children are given the instruction to help somebody, to share something by their parent, they will most likely do it. There are authors who suppose that a milder instruction, which includes the chance of option (it would be good to do it; you should help him but you don't have to) rather than a directive one, brings about stronger prosocial behavior in the child. The command effect, actually lasts, in the case of children, only for a shorter time (studies indicate a range of 11 days to 4 weeks), and then it is fading. More directive formulations are more suitable in younger children because their ability to understand the emotional world of other people, and their skill to orient themselves in changing social situations, are still limited. On the contrary, in the case of adolescents, rather milder formulations combined with individual parental example are more efficient. In the case, when the child or adolescent interprets some social situation in the way that they are personally responsible for its results, and that it is necessary to help somebody, then they try to help; especially when that can use that type of help they have learned by training. They are sure they will manage it.

The next type of direct educational influence is instructing children about what they should do or, on the contrary, should not do. Adults explain specifically how to act, in which situation such conduct is suitable and why it is necessary to act in such a way. On one hand, the child learns how the specific prosocial behavior is causally interrelated, and on the other hand, the child learns about the consequences brought by such behavior. Researchers are, besides other things, interested in the parental ways of explaining and using arguments. They stated that parents appeal to children's sense of justice, and they point out the impact of child's behavior on other people, they refer to the social standards or to authorities. Some parents moralize, some factually analyze contexts with their children. These are usually just mothers who form the basis of prosocial behavior in their children. At the age of 2–3 years, mothers explain them what is usually done and what is not, whereas the explanation is not about neutral speech, but on the contrary, it is emotionally very rich and thus effective.

For both educational procedures, it stands that they develop prosocial behavior in children more effectively if they are not forced by parents, only "from the position of power", but as a part of democratic education. Developing the independence and responsibility of children, their inner moral standards' acceptance is also kept in mind.

The second distinctive category is formed by the indirect educational procedures. They include the explanation of intentions or strategic contemplation explanation. A parent is in the position of an example, of a model of behavior, talks with a child about their own consideration in a specific situation. What goes through their mind before they decide to give help to another person. Although it is a less effective procedure than the demonstration of the real action to a child, it is valuable as well because it gives a child or an adolescent the opportunity to look into those thinking that are important for prosocial behavior.

Persuading a child is another procedure. The parent performs as an expert in specific norms and tries to influence the knowledge of a child as well as their attitudes. The parent appeals to the child's feelings but leaves the final decision to the child. The child's or adolescent's attention is concentrated by the parent on the positive effects of prosocial behavior towards other people as well as towards a child him/herself (help reciprocity, positive response of other children and things like that).

The next option is joining helping activities by children. The child is invited by a parent or an older sibling to cooperate in the activities, the aim of which is to make a complicated situation easier for other people by helping them, by giving them some advice or by taking a concrete action. In an unforced way, within ordinary living situations, the child experiences what it means to help others, gains direct experience with supportive behavior and with positive response to their action.

For the time being we have put aside the problem that parents – however they are trying to educate their child – are in fact amateurs in the role of educators. In all the cases where some educational problems arise even at the pre-school age of a child, parents should ask professionals for help, who should afterwards work purposefully with these parents. From the professional point of view, we speak about behavioral parent training and it is considered an effective intervention method for pre-school and school-aged youth with behavior problems.

The program called IYPT – Incredible Years Parent Training (Webster & Stratton, 2001) is typical example of it. There exists a meta-analysis, which studied effectiveness of this type of program and it included 39 studies (Menting et al., 2013). Among others, it

evaluated the context (treatment, selective prevention or indicated prevention), intervention characteristics (training components, the number of IYPT sessions offered, the total number of sessions offered to parents, and the number of sessions attended), child characteristics (age, gender, initial severity of child behavior, the extent to which the behaviour was considered a problem, and clinical symptom levels), family characteristics (single parenthood, ethnic minority, education, and being at-risk). Analyses of studies revealed that the IYPT is effective in diminishing disruptive behavior and increasing prosocial behavior, according to parents, teachers, and observers. Positive effect-size was found for disruptive behavior (d = 0.27) and prosocial behavior (d = 0.23).

## 4   Education of a child at school

Children do not live only in their own families. Gradually they integrate into other communities besides the family. A child usually first enters a kindergarten. Before dealing with the prosocial behavior education of a child in kindergarten in more details, it is necessary to recall its contribution. Prosocial education "… not only for compassionate society but also for classrooms. In view of the accumulated evidence suggesting that young children's prosocial behaviour makes important contributions to their long-term school adjustment, academic success, and social and psychological wellbeing, prosocial development is highly relevant for early education and intervention." (Spivak & Durlak, 2015).

In the kindergarten, the child stays for long time in the group of peers and without parental presence for the first time. Peers are of various personal peculiarities, from different social and cultural backgrounds and the child must learn to get on with them. For the child and for the professional team as well, a new specific social situation arises.

Not surprisingly, kindergarten teachers must have a special training and they should go through further education. Let us show that on the example of a publication for kindergarten teachers and for parents. It is a handbook on pre-school children's prosocial behavior education (Beaty, 1999). The author promotes the attitude, which tries to develop primarily positive behavior, not only to prevent manifestations of negative behavior. It shows, how to cultivate right types of prosocial behavior in children: self-confidence, empathy, friendship, generosity, willingness to comply with wishes, self-control, cooperation, respect for others. The handbook includes a questionnaire looking into prosocial behavior of a child as well as a questionnaire inquiring teacher's prosocial educational procedures. Both questionnaires diagnose how successful developing of prosocial behavior in children is, and where the possible shortcomings are.

The importance of the detection and development of prosocial skills in children, already in kindergartens, is shown in the longitudinal research by Jones, Greenberg and Crowly (2015). The total sample size was 753 children (non-high-risk, normative group, n = 386 and high-risk group, n = 367). Associations between measured outcomes in kindergarten and outcomes 13 to19 years later (1991–2000), were evaluated. Statistically significant associations were found between measured prosocial communication skills in kindergarten and key young adult outcomes across multiple domains of education (participants graduated from high school on time, completed a college degree), employment (obtained stable employment in young adulthood, employed full time in young adulthood), criminal activity (early prosocial skills were significantly inversely

predictive of any involvement with police before adulthood), and mental health (results were mixed).

A child advances from kindergarten to elementary school and becomes a pupil. Elementary school education should teach a pupil to be able to share experiences with other children, to participate in collective work, communicate properly, cooperate, and help. This is usually prevented by traditional classroom teaching, where pupils learn "next to each other" and they are not to cooperate (see usual appeal "it's every man for himself"). For prosocial behavior development, cooperative teaching and learning are much more suitable (Kasíková, 1997). To be more precise, it is such a form of cooperation, which is, by the author, called cooperation in the form of assistance, when one pupil helps the other. The relationship between the helper and receiver of the help is usually initiated and directed by the teacher; the social roles of pupils are divided: one pupil (usually of the same age but more competent or older and more competent) teaches and the second pupil tries to learn under their leadership – this is peer teaching.

M. Webb (1987) states that this type of teaching newly defines the role of a teacher. The teacher is not the only one who teaches pupils anymore. The pupil in the role of the teacher has specific pros: they are closer to his peers in terms of age, they can understand their problems connected with learning better, they can more easily put themselves in their way of thinking.

Pupils are not shy to seek help, they are not afraid to confess their ignorance. They identify with them as with their models more easily because it is, from the children's point of view, easier to approach the level their peer has gained than the level of their teacher. Their schoolmates can provide feedback more often than the teacher and are able to provide it in a more understandable and acceptable way for them.

Peer teaching is not profitable only for the pupil being taught. The pupils who teach their schoolmates are gaining as well. In his role of the tutor, they develop their knowledge and skills (they do not want to get embarrassed), their self-confidence, self-respect and self-trust are growing. They experience the feeling of responsibility for the quality of their help and for results of his charges. He himself deepens his view of schoolwork by explaining it, by reacting to various mistakes and naive questions.

Peer teaching improves the school results of pupils, usually of those who are weaker, and also of pupils who do not master the language of the majority very well, pupils from the disadvantaged social background and pupils of different cultural and ethnic origins. It also improves the pupils' attitudes towards learning, the subject and the school generally. It also has a positive impact on pupils which have some problems in establishing and maintaining relations with schoolmates or lack the ability to cooperate. Peer teaching, thus, works on the principle of mutual reward among children or adolescents and this way it contributes to the development of the skill to be a social support to another person.

Except peer teaching, another form exists – reciprocal helping among pupils. This is a relatively complicated phenomenon which is not much empirically investigated at our schools. In the school life reality, the spontaneous, more permanent and positive cooperation among pupils is not so common.

However, "illegal" cooperation is more common – prompting or copying during oral or written examination (Mareš, 2005; Vrbová, 2013). It is not only the fault of pupils themselves, but also of some teachers' inappropriate demands, schools putting emphasis only on performance-related indicators and not on understanding the schoolwork, using

of school report grades as the main criteria for being admitted to higher levels of schools. At the same time, there are still only a relatively few pedagogical situations, when pupils can or even must officially cooperate.

So, it is no wonder that we meet with some complaints. Statements of pupils of the 8th grade of elementary schools are examples of that. A boy: If a person needs some help, they don't much want to help … A girl: They are not interested in the fact that I need to get an advice. In case they need, then I am good for them. At school, most people are interested only in their own grades …

We have described how teaching at schools is realized (or could be realized) to help to develop prosocial behavior within various school subjects. Except this, since September 1, 2010, the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport inserted into The Frame Educational Program for elementary and secondary education a new additional educational subject – Ethical education. As concerns its subject matter, ethical education includes ten different topics – two of them explicitly concern our problem: topic no. 9 – Prosocial behavior in personal relationships. Help, sharing, cooperation, friendship; and topic no. 10 – Prosocial behavior in public life. Solidarity and social problems. Schools thus have the opportunity to introduce prosocial behavior to pupils with a concrete goal and also to develop the relevant skills for that.

In other countries, intervention programs designed to prevent aggression among pupils through developing their prosocial behavior have already been verified. The Canadian preventive and intervention program called Roots of Empathy (ROE) is one of them. This is a program for children from kindergartens to the 8th grade which lasts for 9 months. Four different curricula are available: kindergarten, 1st to 3rd grade, 4th to 6th grade, and 7th and 8th grade. The main goals of ROE are to 1) develop children's social and emotional understanding; 2) promote children's prosocial behaviors and decrease their aggressive behaviors, and 3) increase children's knowledge about infant development and effective parenting practices (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012). Empiric research included a quasi-experimental control-group pre-test–post-test, multi-informant design with 585 4th- to 7th-grade children from 28 classrooms. And what are conclusions of this research? Children in intervention classrooms showed significant improvement across several of the domains assessed: self-reports of causes for infant crying, peer nominations of prosocial behaviors, and teacher reports of proactive and relational aggression. Self-reported empathy and perspective taking showed no significant changes (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2012, p. 1).

## 5   Czech school investigation

One of the few Czech studies was inspired by the research of the German author G. Lind (1997). The aim was to identify the frequency of reciprocal helping among elementary school pupils and to study, by a hypothetical situation, the relationship between pupils' willingness to help a schoolmate and the degree of sense of responsibility for the fail rate of a schoolmate being in danger of failing. The pilot research (Mareš, Ježek, & Ludvíček, 2003) indicated that in the sample of 185 pupils of 6th and 8th grade elementary school pupils, helping among pupils at school is not a common matter. However, pupils attach quite high importance to reciprocal helping. They feel some moral duty to help their schoolmates in trouble and they obviously were (to a certain extend) willing to help. However, the question if a pupil would be willing to help their schoolmate is not unambiguous. It includes at least three aspects which

complicate the situation: 1. Motivation to help the schoolmate who is in trouble; 2. The pupil's subjectively perceived self-efficacy in the given school subject, 3. The pupil's subjectively perceived self-efficacy to help other people. Their motivation to help a schoolmate and the lack of self-efficacy were just disputed in the case of many boys: I would quite like to help him, but I guess I would be of little use for him.; I am not much better than he is.

In the case of Czech pupils (as well as the German ones), distortion, which, long ago, Allport called pluralistic ignorance, appeared: majority of pupils in the class said that they would have helped their schoolmate. At the same time, each of them individually thinks that they will be only one of a few willing to help a schoolmate in trouble, whereas most of others are probably not willing.

What did the solution of this hypothetical situation show? Provided the schoolmate in trouble does not receive help in the class and failed, nearly half of the pupils would rather considerably feel own co-responsibility for that failure. Differences in pupils' opinions obviously depend on gender as well – girls considered reciprocal help at school more important than boys.

They also felt a greater duty to help and they were more willing to help. If the schoolmate failed, they would experience higher rate of co-responsibility for his failure than boys. In this research, differences in opinions may also depend on age – younger pupils were much more willing to help than the older pupils.

## 6    Conclusions

In the Czech Republic, the topic of prosocial behavior of pupils and its development has officially got into elementary school curriculum. In the view of many teachers, these are only the "soft skills", which can be practiced and verified only with difficulties. Contrary to more developed countries, in our country, neither intervention programs nor empirical studies of prosocial behavior of children and adolescents appear in a considerable number. However, this is the task which should not be postponed for a long time.

## References

Beaty, J. J. (1999). *Prosocial Guidance for the Preschool Child*. Prentice Hall.

Burleson, B. R., & Kunkel, A. W. (1996). The socialization of emotional support skills in childhood. In G. R. Pierce, B. R. Sarason, & I. G. Sarason (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Support and the* Family (pp. 105-140). New York: Plenum Press.

Čapek, K. (1984). Několikero motivů pohádkových. In *Marsyas; Jak se co dělá. Karel Čapek, Spisy XIII* (pp. 115-121). Praha: Čs. spisovatel.

Eisenberg, N., & Fabes, R. A. (2006). Prosocial development. In W. Damon & N. Eisenberg (Eds.), *Handbook of Child Psychology. Vol. 3. Social, Emotional, and Personality Development* (pp. 646-718). New York: Wiley.

Eisenberg, N., & Mussen, P. H. (1989). *The Root of Prosocial Behavior in Children*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jones, D. E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early social-emotional functioning and public health: The relationship between kindergarten social competence and future wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, *105*(11), 2283–2290.

Kasíková, H. (1997). *Kooperativní učení, kooperativní škola*. Praha: Portál.

Köster, M., Schuhmacher, N., & Kärtner, J. (2015). A cultural perspective on prosocial development. *Human Ethology Bulletin – Proceedings of the XXII. ISHE*

*Conference in Belem (Brazil)*, *30*(1), 71-82.

Lind, G. (1997). *How Morale is Helping Behavior?* Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, 1-27.

Mareš, J. (2005). Tradiční a netradiční podvádění ve škole. *Pedagogika*, *55*(2), 310-335.

Mareš, J., Ježek, S., & Ludvíček, J. (2003). Ochota pomáhat spolužákům a žákovský pocit odpovědnosti. In J. Mareš, et al., *Sociální opora u dětí a dospívajících III.* (pp. 220-229). Hradec Králové: Nucleus.

Menting, A. T., de Castro, B. O., & Matthys, W. (2013). Effectiveness of the Incredible Years Parent Training to modify disruptive and prosocial child behavior: A meta-analytic review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *33*(8), 901–913.

Penner, L. A., Dovidio, J. F., & Piliavin, J. A. et al. (2005). Prosocial behavior: Multilevel perspectives. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 56, 365-392.

Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Smith, V., & Zaidman-Zait, A. (2012). Promoting children's prosocial behaviors in school: Impact of the ''Roots of Empathy'' program on the social and emotional competence of school-aged children. *School Mental Health*, *4*(1), 1-21.

Spivak, A. L., & Durlak, J. A. (2015). School intervention and prosocial behaviour. In *Encyclopedia of Early Childhood Development*. Retrieved from http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/textes-experts/en/4447/school-intervention-and-prosocial-behaviour.pdf

Vrbová, J. (2013). „Co mi ve škole vadí víc: podvádění, či klamání?" Postoje žáků k nečestnému chování ve škole v kontextu školního podvádění. *Studia paedagogica, 18*(2/3), 93-107.

Webb, M. (1987). Peer helping relationships in urban schools. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education*, New York. ED 289949, 1-3.

Webster-Stratton, C. (2001). *The Incredible Years: Parents and children videotape series: A parenting course* (BASIC). Seattle: Incredible Years.

Wentzel, K. (2015). Prosocial behaviour and schooling. In *Encyclopedia of Early Childhood Development*. Retrieved from: http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/prosocial-behaviour/according-experts/prosocial-behaviour-and-schooling

Wu, H. T., Tseng, S. F., Wu, P. L. et al. (2016). The relationship between parent–child Interactions and prosocial behavior among fifth- and sixth-grade students: Gratitude as a mediating variable. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *4*(10), 2361-2373.

Záškodná, H., & Mlčák, Z. (2009). *Osobnostní aspekty prosociálního chování a empatie*. Praha: Triton.

# Everyday Family Experience: A Child's Home Preparation for School

## Jana Majerčíková – Barbora Petrů Puhrová[*]

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* The family life of a child of compulsory school age is influenced by the way that a child's educational career is discussed and practically supported. This is transmitted into normal family life through the completion of the child's homework and any other school-related responsibilities. The parent is considered an actor who contributes significantly to the supervision of the child's homework.
*Methods:* This research project explored how parents and children describe their experience of homework through semi-structured interviews with elementary school pupils and their parents. The results are presented in our study. Seven, mostly university-educated parents and six pupils were interviewed at the start of compulsory schooling, when the bonds and interaction are the most intensive between parents and children in the context of homework. The transcribed interviews were analysed using the technique of open coding. Codes identified were repeatedly read, reviewed and subsequently grouped into categories with the aim of description and explanation.
*Results:* The survey revealed that the completion of homework in the parent - child interaction is an implicit part of everyday family life. Homework and advance home preparation are considered to be the responsibility of the parent as well as the child, on the other hand, the home preparation is also time-consuming and gender-marked.
*Limitations:* The limitations of the study relate primarily to the construction of the research sample. The intentional sample of parents was determined by socioeconomic status and quantity and also by the parents' willingness to share their parenting experience, and for the child by the extent of data gathered. In further research, this will be supported by observation in the home setting.
*Conclusions:* The research findings contribute to a description of the child's life in the family and confirm the importance of inevitable parental participation in their educational socialization at the beginning of compulsory school attendance.

**Key words:** home preparation, homework, parent, child.

## 1 Introduction

Today, an ideally functioning family is still considered an original and important social unit. Looking at the phenomenon of families through the prism of functionalism is consistent with the interpretation that the normal everyday life of a family is tightly

---

[*] Jana Majerčíková, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; majercikova@fhs.utb.cz
Barbora Petrů Puhrová, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; petru_puhrova@fhs.utb.cz

bound to the fulfilment of its function – especially when taking into account the needs of society and individual family members. The particularity of this situation also depends on the age structure of the family. Families with school-age children are also determined by how education and schooling career of their youngest members are being promoted and practically supported. Children's school agendas have several dimensions in a family, one of them being home preparation and the fulfilment of school duties.

What happens in school remains hidden from parents who can only rely on how schools and teachers include them in the socialization of their children. Another important aspect is the semantics of any information provided by the children on school and activities that take place there. What, however, creates an interesting picture of the school and the child itself and re-emerges in family constellations is also the daily preparation for school. In the present text, the phenomenon of home preparation is described based on the experiences and opinions of its participants, in the parent-child dyads.

## 2    Theoretical framework

The moment one becomes a parent, one takes on a certain kind of responsibility. It is a commitment to perform a number of purposeful activities to ensure the survival and overall development of the child (Hoghughi & Long, 2004). This practical and broad concept of parenthood is the starting point for fulfilling the goal of uncovering the context which will be of primary concern in the present text. This context includes the circumstances related to the role of a pupil in the home environment.[1] It is clear that the ways in which parents perform their parental roles also model the childhood of their offspring.

What happens in a family reflects the interaction of its members. In the home environment, children's responsibilities, which are associated with their role as pupils, are saturated in co-operation with their parents. This is especially the case at the beginning of compulsory education when children must adapt to this situation and thus, the parenting supervision and tutoring play the most important and most intense role. The extent of parental involvement in their children's school issues is decreasing with the increasing age of the child, with the most important being the involvement of parents in the learning activities of children at home (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

*2.1 Home preparation, homework, home learning*

The terminology used, related to the issues of preparing children for school in the home environment, is mainly connected with the concepts of home preparation, homework and home learning. The meaning of these concepts is intertwined and applied in similar contexts. In agreement with Maňák (1992), home preparation, including homework, is considered to be a part of schooling and a continuation of school learning. Jursová

---

[1] We consider it necessary to remind the readers that the following text cannot ignore the aspects of parenthood provided by related social sciences such as psychology, sociology, law or biology. For example, sociology teaches us that parenthood is an important organizational principle of the family life cycle (Možný, 2006), which is also evident in the relationship of a family and parents to the institutional education of their children. From psychology, we know that the issues of the quality of mutual intergenerational relationships, the nature of emotions, understanding, motivation or mutual needs are also among the aspects that promote the child's schooling career in the family. Furthermore, parents are required by law to monitor their child's school attendance, etc. It has its own justification because each of these disciplines provides a link that is needed to explain what is happening between the parent and the child during the time of home preparation.

(2011) describes home preparation as activities that have not been directly assigned by the teacher but that will facilitate the pupil's work at school (preparing and checking supplies, repeating and practicing, possibly broadening the curriculum, etc.). The pupil performs these activities at home in order to be ready for learning. Homework usually has a direct relation to teaching and its content is intended to support the processes of learning, deepening and repeating. Schools set their own rules for assigning and doing homework, what form and scope it takes as well as setting assessments and possible sanctions for noncompliance.

Thus, home preparation involves more than just home duties in the form of individual homework assignments. In primary education, it is considered to be a systematic and repetitive activity carried out in co-operation between children, parents and teachers. This co-operation is conditioned by parents and children spending their time effectively. Through home preparation and homework, children have a chance to acquire habits and experiences of independence and responsibility. The assignments can also stimulate them and often force them to tackle the frustrations they cause.

*2.2 Parents in their children's school*

In a family with a school-age child, a certain harmonization of the family life in relation to the child's school duties is expected. This involves, above all, adapting the conditions for the fulfilment of the work-related and other obligations of the parents and the school duties of their children (Carvalho, 2001).

The parent's participation in the home preparation of their children can be divided into several levels. We will use an analogy for the symbolic structure of the school organization. At times, parents create a school environment at home. They may act as a director who performs overall supervision and monitors the home preparation activities. They are also a janitor, involved in the preparation of physical and psychological background for doing homework and taking care of the spatial conditions for learning. The broadest position is undoubtedly that of a teacher, helping, leading, motivating, exemplifying, evaluating and sharing his or her own experience, knowledge and skills. Another important aspect is the emotional support of a child who may be provided by a teacher but also by a school psychologist who is involved in solving school problems and assessing children's development in relation to their developmental potential. Motivation and emotional saturation is, however, where parents can best fulfil their potential thanks to the power of family relations which allows them to separate the world of family and school more clearly.[2]

Children in the family world do not only lead their private lives in their home environment: their childhood is, at the same time, institutionalized by the fact that they spend a considerable part of their time in a school environment where they are pupils in the school world. Children's home preparation is thus an instrument for creating collaboration between the two domains school and family (Holte, 2016). Even for parents, home preparation is an instrument for understanding a certain part of their child's life. According to Gill and Schlossman (1995, as cited in Carvalho, 2001, p. 130), homework is the parents' eyes and ears: home preparation is the primary and sometimes the only communication channel for information about the academic mission

---

[2] To establish this framework, we used an explanation of parental involvement in home preparation by Walker, Hoover-Dempsey (2004).

of schools." The circumstances of home preparation and completion of the assigned homework give the teachers, of course, a similarly important message and feedback about the pupils and their families. The issue of home preparation for school thus appears to be extremely interesting and well connected to many obvious influences and circumstances. It is considered a strong, emotionally rooted learning experience that structures learning behaviour and relationships between children, teachers and parents, while reflecting the identity of the parents (usually mothers) and the children themselves (Hutchison, 2012).

*2.3 Children as pupils in the family*
The pupil's role in the family is, among other things, undoubtedly fulfilled through homework. This role may modify the attitudes of parents to children, the style of family life. The aspects that accompany parent-child relationships are based on individual parental demands for good school results and home preparation.

The educational parenting style contributes to the strengthening, but also to the weakening of the child's autonomy in home preparation. Parental support is expected to strengthen the child's autonomy in order to enhance family cohesion, helping the child get a respected and firm position in the family structure (Šulová, 2014). On the other hand, it is also necessary to take into account the negative effects of parenting. Some children are bothered by their parents' participation and stressed by the mere presence of a parent during home preparation. In essence, it is more about the quality factor, in relation to the motivation and emotional experience and expression, that the parents bring into communication with children during school preparation. Even the very first question, "What is your homework?" or "What do you have to learn for school?" may carry connotations that can influence the current situation and create a certain atmosphere during home preparation. The parent attributes motivational and emotional meaning to home preparation: it is an important aspect of social prestige children bring to school (Vágnerová, 2014).

We have reasons to assume that the attitudes of pupils to homework depend on their personality, experience with school and teachers and undoubtedly on their success at school. As for parents, their significant position was confirmed, especially when motivating and helping their children meet the goals of home preparation. The positive relationship of children to home preparation correlated with parental support based on meaningful motivation (Froiland, 2011). Children's attitudes towards homework also involve their beliefs about the usefulness and meaningfulness of homework. Corno and Xu (2004) found that pupils quickly discover the differences between homework that need to be done right away and others that they can complete according to their own preferences. Although a positive correlation between the intensity of home preparation and the pupils' good school results has not been confirmed (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001), its minimum aim is to help develop the pupils' ability to organize their time and space, cope with common problems, avoid distraction, lack of interest and fatigue (Corno & Xu, 2004).

The specific situation of pupils at the beginning of compulsory education is also related to the level of parental support in home preparation. There is an indirect proportion, similar to the degree of parents' involvement in all school-related issues. The older the pupil, the less frequently parents interact with school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). When doing homework in the home environment at the beginning of compulsory

education, parental involvement is an implicit part of the family's life, and later, at the next stages of education, personal responsibility and autonomous behaviour of the pupil will be required. Apart from relation to the developmental dispositions of a child, it is also the expectation of parents who count on such reciprocal behaviour of their children in the future.

## 3  Methodology

We tried to contribute to the problematics of home preparation at the beginning of compulsory education in the family, based on the focus of two key participants in it: adults and children.

*3.1 Research goals and questions*

As we have already indicated, the relevant issue is more complex. At this early stage, we chose a descriptive approach with the ambition to explore family circumstances while completing homework and in the context of targeted preparation for education. The main objective of the research was to uncover the experiences and opinions of parents and children with homeworking. The research questions further specified and concreted our research efforts. We stated the following questions:
1.  How do the parents reflect home preparation in the family?
2.  What kind of behaviour accompanies the homeworking both in parents and children?
3.  How do children perceive the homeworking with the regard on themselves and their parents?

*3.2 Method of data collection and processing*

To gain empirical data, a half-structured interview with parents and children has been used. The interviews had a similar theme structure: both groups of participants had to capture the attitudes and approaches of a parent and a child to homeworking, eventually to each other.

The data source was formed by the transcripts of recorded interviews with individual participants. When choosing the content analysis procedure that is offered in several versions, it is necessary to take the character of the data (in our case, the obtained transcripts) into account. These were passages that were thematically linked to the set structure. They differed in the range and complexity of declared opinions of participants. The transcripts were divided into segments, the meaning complex. Consequently, the meanings were identified using open coding in the segments and the meanings were marked with codes. The individual segments were repeatedly read, the codes were modified and revised with the intent to capture the range of data obtained at the best. It was followed by a grouping of the codes into categories with similar meaning, followed by their description and explanation.

*3.3 Research sample*

For the purposes of the research we focused on the field of primary education, in which the level of involvement of parents gains the highest intensity (Šulová, 2012). The entrance of a child in compulsory education at elementary school is an important milestone not only for the child but also for the whole family, especially for parents.

The interviews with seven parents, five of whom had a university education and two of whom had high school education, were carried out. Six mothers and one father were

intentionally chosen, with the main criterion of their choice being their willingness to share their opinions and parental experiences with their child's home preparation and to uncover the family situation in relation to the school's duty of children.

A further view of the subject was provided by the interviewed children. These were six children – primary school pupils. The interviews were conducted with four girls and two boys. All children were from full and functional families and all showed excellent and very good school results. One of the girls was the best pupil of her form and one of the boys was warned by a class teacher because he was forgetting written homework constantly. Each of the questioned children had minimally one sibling.

*3.4 Research investigation limits*

Before the results of the research are presented, it is necessary to reflect what limitations are needed to cope with in this context. As we have already advised, the research limits mainly concern the construction of a research sample. The intent of parental choice in terms of socio-economic status and number was determined primarily by their openness to mediate their opinions, but also to share the normal family activities during homework. They were, above all, parents with higher education who were in favour of giving us feedback on how they manage their parenting and co-operation with a child as part of their schooling.

The survey also confirmed that barriers during obtaining objective information must be surmounted when examining a family. The barriers are mainly mystification (white lies) and idealization of reality, declarativeness, time selectivity (the so-called memory optimism) or deliberate selectivity (conscious concealment, incompleteness etc.) (Guráň & Filadelfiová 1994, p. 5). It was revealed as a demanding task for researchers to gain valid empirical data, which meant penetrating the privacy of the parents and families. Compared with immediate and relatively naive children, parents tended to act (especially when recording testimonies) as those who manage their parenting responsibilities well and those whose home preparation management is carried out according to the prepared strategy and under the working supervision. Only after a well-executed rapport, the researchers managed to validate the data obtained.

Seven parents, mostly college-educated, entered the research survey. All parents declared the functional environment of a complete family, interest, possibilities and home conditions to supervise the home preparation of their children. From this point of view, the results of the survey appear to be monochromatic, revealing a certain part of the family spectrum in relation to the family typology and the background that they can create for the support of school children's careers.

On the children's side, limits have been identified concerning the limited range of data material. It has turned out that it is necessary to repeat the interviewing of children and to triangulate ways to obtain empirical data. In further research, the data will be supported by observation and ongoing interviews in the family home environment.

## 4   Results

As it emerges from the research questions, it was reasonable to choose a descriptive approach when analysing the data obtained from the interviews. In the introduction of the result section of the study, we present a summary of the categories (Table 1) that arose after the arrangement and coding of the data material

Table 1

*An overview of categories describing experiences and opinions of parents and children with home preparation.*

| Name of category | Category characteristics | The example which represents the category |
|---|---|---|
| home preparation - part of family life | every day, obviousness, the duty of both parent and child | *the homework is a duty; you cannot avoid it* |
| the reasons of parental participation in home preparation | Control, perspective of the child's independence in home preparation, ambition of child success, prevention of failure at school | *I do it so that E' will not be given a frowning face sign, I do not want her to be given a frowning face sign* |
| the reasons of positive approach of parents towards home preparation | positive habitude, regular and systematic work, the perspective of the child's self-sufficiency in life, acceptance is obvious for children | *there must be some kind of systematic and regular preparation…; my mother was expressly glad that we had homework* |
| negative emotions – the reasons and consequences | conflict, screaming, disagreements, family disharmonies, children's procrastination, quarrels, bans | *he will be angry, he will scream; and he argues that it is so (argues in blood) and that you are really completely stupid, because it is so – we've been fighting really badly…* |
| demanding parenting | burdening, responsibility for the child; time demand; child psychology | *there is no time for ourselves; fatigue after coming back from the office; I did not feel like somebody worked so hard with us and when I did not handle something, I do not have good memories; I must estimate the right mood of my elder son* |
| complicated childhood | increased school demands on the child, the perspective of the future | *when I come late from the course, I do not have time and this is the homework for the next day, I do not want to do this homework, but I make myself do it* |

From the results presented, it is clear that parents consider the supervision and participation in the home preparation of their children an obvious part of their upbringing. The normal working day of the family is then undoubtedly inevitably linked to the writing of homework; home preparation is obligatory - for both the child and his parents. In words of two of the parents:

*I would say it's just a duty – something was given and you have to do it.*

*Mostly we have set it up so that I have duties and then fun, otherwise we would not get to it: the day is only 24 hours and we would not be able to do it.*

The fact that home preparation is an integral part of family life has its reasons, of course. It is the expected quality of parenting, which includes support for a child in home preparation. Parents clearly declare their interest in and responsibility to contributing to their child's success at school or to prevent problems and failures associated with their school career through their intense participation in homework. One of the mothers says:

*Yes, of course, I do not understand that a lot of parents leave it alone on the backs of the school and they do nothing at home with their children: it cannot do any good. This child, especially at this age, is not so conscientious as to prepare himself, (s)he has to be pushed mentally to do it: it won't happen by itself.*

Parents' responsibility is also evident from this statement: *A good parent in home preparation is such a parent who, when the child needs it, will help the child, but surely the parent does not do everything for the child. The parent must lead the child to independence, just to let the child know that there is someone to turn to, but not to have his/her parents as a servant who will do it all for him/her. I just think there is a need to work with these children and that they cannot be alone, we have to lead them a little bit, but they have to realize that if they do something wrong, it will have consequences.*

Another reason in this context is to consider oneself as a supervisor of preparation. An intense interest in facilitating a child in home preparation also has its own personal goals. By supporting a child, parents follow the acquisition of such children's skills that guarantee and independent and responsible processing of homework and other responsibilities associated with the school in the future:

*Yeah, in the first class we sat and prepared with him; I do not know if it helped, but in the fourth grade he must be responsible for his homework... he will be in the second grade soon and there will be no one to take care of him.*

Home preparation also reflects the ambition and personality tuning of parents. As the father says:

*I'll always have time. I'm an above-average parent in home preparation. It matters to me when he goes to school unprepared.*

Among the interviewed parents, we did not find those who would refuse homework and day-to-day training for school. The coincidence that the educational activity of their children at home is beneficial was justified by its potential to create incentives and space for systematic activity, acquiring the skills to organize your own time, duties or interests, even in the longer term. One of the interviewed mothers expresses this as an urgent need:

*I think they should definitely have them (tasks)! The child needs to get used to some preparation. At school, they are up to 12 o'clock and then in the afternoon, they must, must, must get used to; ... they will practice it, they have to be with that parent, I'm all ten for homework and home preparation... There has to be homework, systematic and regular... The kids think about it differently, but they will accept it. Nothing else is left to them: it is a part of the day.*

Such parental convictions were also apparent in the interviews for children who perceived positive attitudes of their parents, even though it might have been a burden on parents.

*That it is good for practicing and repeating, that they think it is important, but some parents ask why should they do it and that it is annoying for the children. I think, that my parents agree with homework.*

If our interest was also focused on revealing the family's homework experience, it was interesting to see what parental and child behaviour was. It has turned out that fulfilling homework obligations is also a source of discomfort on the part of parents and children, which ultimately causes a conflict accompanied by a quarrel or shout:

*Sometimes my nerves go away, and when I raise my voice ... and I tell them I do not want to, I do not want to be like that, and you (the children) are forcing me to do it ...*

Children do not always want to do their homework: the adults often become procrastinating, parents are tired or stressed in time. The result is unmanaged emotions and relationship problems. Thus, homework is also the source of disharmony in family life. Parents and children comment on it:

*Yes, I had to be harder sometimes, there was even a scream, I remember it ...*

*Well, Mom's upset, often, she just wants me to have it right and well written, but I mind it so much, then I do not want to do it at all.*

Overall, we can conclude that home preparation in the family also has a negative connotation. Home preparation is a burden, a duty, that is hard to fulfil. On the parent's side, it indicates new parenting demands, according to that parental supervision is undoubtedly expected. It means interference into the leisure time of parents who could and often would like to devote this time to themselves or their family and to the children themselves, but in activities that are more attractive to them. One of the mothers complains:

*Yeah, when I'm really tired, when I am tired from my office, my head is like a balloon, and now all three children are coming and it is only... I need this and this here ... and now it's too much at once, so either gradually or it simply washes over me.*

The other says: *I do not like when they start to say to me: mum, it does not work as it is; it has to go, I personally hate the word.*

The difficulty of a parent's position in home preparation also lies in the way how he/she has to deal with the child's reactions related to its psychological settings or character traits and, accordingly, to choose appropriate strategies for working with this child. It is presented by the following parental statement:

*I have to guess a moment, when my elder son is well-tuned... so, it is pretty difficult to get him into a good mood...but when he is in the good mood, he eats well, circumstances, now you must use it for the purpose, take it, look and take a note...My husband wants something from him, but he does not know the children so much, because he is not with them for the whole week and he treats them sometimes badly; and I tell him, if he wants anything from him, that he is too pushy and our son would be angry and you personally would be angry, you will scream, try to motivate him in a different way, you make it all wrong. No, he simply says, that we need to do it now, so it will be now. And of course, so they can understand to be happy with themselves to say, now we've done it, now it's fine, we can enjoy our free time now, enjoy it your way, it is not important for me.*

However, the claims are not only for parents, they were also identified from the point of view of children when one of the girls said:

*When I come late from the course, I do not have time and this is the homework for the next day, I do not want to do this homework already, but I make myself do it and I will have all evening free. Some say (classmates) that they remember at midnight and go to do the homework at midnight.*

Not entirely answered, however, in this context, the question remains, whether these are the demands of a teacher, school, society, or whether the demands are the result of the ambitions of the parents themselves. Parents naturally see their resources at school, but also in their justified efforts to bring their children to such an education that will prospectively ensure them a certain quality of life. This is evident in the statement of two of the parents:

*I'm trying to predict things forward, in the future, that I do not do it for my own consumption, the need, but for him to make it better in the future. This is related to the fact that I have a clear idea.*

*So, I try to help him, especially lead to him because I tell him that it is for his life, he will have some tasks; even if he does not go to school, he will have to learn. Have a good job, because what he is learning now, it will not be lost.*

So, the parent acts as a supervisor, support and expert who is willing and ready to help the child, but not to take on the child's responsibilities. From the beginning, it leads to the fact that the tasks are his current and lasting duty, and the parent or others are only helping him with this duty.

As shown in the discussion, the research results are not unique. However, related to the conditions of the Czech Republic or the Slovak Republic, they show signs of originality, because the attention paid to this topic is not intense in home conditions. In the Czech Republic, this topic is discussed e.g. by Maňák (1992), Solfronk and Bělohradská (2001), Šulová (2012; 2014), eventually Pospíšilová (2011) and the latest study comes from Pohnětalová (2015).

## 5 Discussion

The results of the survey do not reverse the well-known theory of parental participation in home preparation, especially at the beginning of the child's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001); rather, they move it to the next level. Even for parents, it is a duty, a fulfilment that is a part of parenthood at a certain child's age.

Examined parents perceive homework as a benefit for the child. This is particularly true as regards their autonomy, the ability of adopting rules of systematic work: they are expecting habits in personal management. Similarly, it is also seen by Bempechat (2004), when he is talking about the need for faith and belief in success and the acquisition of behavioural habits that are developed through homework. In connection with the socio-economic status of the author's family, it does not matter whether the child is from a poor or rich family: all children need to be guided, pushed forward somehow.

In the research, it turned out that parents must reflect the personality characteristics of the child in a good timing of fulfilling their homework and choose a rather sophisticated approach to homeworking cooperation. Šulová (2013), in this context, talks about parental didactics, which is only owned by parents themselves in some kind of teaching in an environment outside the school. Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) even offer some categories presenting the quality of parental involvement in homework, where parents focus on the actual process of accomplishing the task and on the actor

him or herself: the child, or the positive and negative effects of homework. They provide evidence that a sophisticated parenting approach to homeworking is one of the parenting dimensions of the child's compulsory schooling age.

According to parents' and children's announcements, homework carries also a sign of a certain burden. It is about fulfilling the duties. On the part of children, there are school-related responsibilities; on the part of parents there are parental responsibilities, as a result of their parenting. For parents, the burden is due to its time requirement as well as the to the expectation of physical and mental availability after workload. Lacina-Gifford and Gifford (2004), Bruce (2007, as cited in Farell & Danby, 2015) came to the similar conclusion, that homework is a negative matter which makes children and parents busy, has an impact on family and family time and is a source of unnecessary stress.

Kralovec (2001) paid attention to the negative aspects of homework in families where the conditions for its preparation may not always be the same. Disadvantages include, for example, stressful or demanding occupation of parents who need to relax at home after work, not to attend to the child, to write essays or other assignments with him/her right now. The stated time requirements for home preparation are presented as an obstacle also in other research surveys. Kohn (2007) discloses factors that reduce the positive effects of homework, including, in particular, little time for further activities. According to him (Kohn, 2007), parents are the ones who complain about homework that requires their time and even acts as an intrusive factor of their relationship with the child. The negative connotations of home preparation are, according to our findings, also caused by the fact that it is often accompanied by negative emotional manifestations. Kohn (2006), in her research, also confirms that shouting, worrying and nervousness, especially if the child cannot handle everything without problem, and a parent as a teacher who cannot handle it, is a part of home preparation.

We know a little about children involved in homeworking, not just according to our survey. Warton (2001) also points to the lack of research. But a few years later, Hutchison (2011) conducted video-ethnographic studies and called for reflection on how children perceive their school responsibilities and how their everyday experiences with the school are reflected in their personal lives. It appeals, and also challenges us, that visual methods have a lot to offer to researchers, as these methods have the potential to structure children's experiences in their day-to-day reality of school attendance.

## 6 Conclusion

Education and upbringing are key processes resonating not only in the school's educational environment. They also have a place in the ordinary life of families with school-age children, a fact which was confirmed in the presented research. Finally, we would like to offer a reminder that our results reflect the situation in middle-class families, where support and participation in school socialization of children is purposeful and perceived as an important part of parenting and family life. Parents with college education have ambitions and relevant cognitive resources.

Depending on how parents reported themselves, we can state that they are aware of the irreplaceable position in preparing a child for school at the beginning of compulsory education. Every day, they count on having to support the schooling of a child and to help him or her manage school issues – in many ways. In addition to partial and practical actions and interventions in the family environment, as Šulová (2014) agreed, they

provide the child with necessary models of behaviour, they support the child in case of failure and try to lead the child to the use of what the school offers. They presented it as a difficult task.

Reflected experiences of parents and children with homework naturally correspond with the context in which the family lives, the personality characteristics of parents and children or the demands of the school. However, these experiences are intense because they accompany their family life daily, especially on working days. But they do not avoid the connotation of the problem, of a certain burden not only for children but also for their parents. Home preparation as a burden is the result of fatigue, child access and lack of time for other personal or family activities. It is also an obstacle for children because they, like the parents, want to use their time in the post-school period without it. Because parents know that the necessary support in home preparation for the child is essential, they do so. Children accept it. Parents care for children, so they organize their supervision and provide the conditions for home preparation, with good homework, good performance and success at school and acquiring the necessary skills for his or her next school career at the end of the journey.

## References

Bělohradská, J., Solfronk, J., & Urbánek, P. (2001). Problematika zatíženosti žáků základní školy domácí přípravou. In *Nové možnosti vzdělávání a pedagogický* výzkum (pp. 264-268). Sborník z IX. celostátní konference ČAPV s mezinárodní účastí. Ostrava: Pedagogická fakulta OU.

Bempechat, J. (2004). The motivational benefits of homework: a social-cognitive perspective. *Theory into Practice*, *43*(3), 189-196.

Carvalho, M. (2001). *Rethinking Family - School Relations. A Critique of Parental Involvement in Schooling*. New York: Routledge.

Corno, L., & Xu, J. (2004*). Homework as the Job of Childhood*. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3701525.pdf?_=1464772777131

Desforges, C., & Abouchaar, A. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: a literature review.* Retrieved from http://bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/files_uploaded/uploaded_resources/18617/Desforges.pdf

Farrell, A., & Danby, S. (2015). *How does homework work for young children? Childrens' accounts of homework in their everyday lives.* Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2013.814532

Filadelfiová, J., & Guráň, P. (1994). Postihnutí v rodine. Medzinárodný rok rodiny 1994 (Stála rubrika časopisu Práca a sociálna politika venovaná podujatiam v rámci Medzinárodného roku rodiny 1994). *Práca a sociálna politika, 4*(6), 20.

Froiland, J. M. (2011). Parental autonomy support and student leading goals: A preliminary examination of an intrisic motivation intervention. *Child Youth Care Forum*, 40, 135-149.

Hoghughi, M., & Long, N. (2004). *Handbook of parenting: theory and research for practice*. London: Sage.

Holte, K. L. (2016). Homework in primary school: Could it be made more child-friendly? *Studia Paedagogika*, *21*(4), 13-33.

Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Battiato, A. C., Walker, J. M., Reed, R. P., Dejong, J. M., & Jones, K. P. (2001). *Parental involvement in homework: A review of current research and its implications for teachers, after school program staff, and parent leaders.* Retrieved from http://www.vanderbilt.edu/peabody/family-school/papers/homework.pdf

Hutchison, K. (2011a). *Homework through the eyes od children: what does visual etnography invite us to see?* Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2011.10.4.54

Hutchison, K. (2012). A labour of love: mothers, emotional capital and homework. *Gender and Education, 24*(2), 195-212.

Jursová, J. (2011). *Domácí studijní činnost z pohledu žáků 2. stupně ZŠ*. Retrieved from http://duha.mzk.cz/clanky/domaci-studijni-cinnost-z-pohledu-zaku-2-stupne-zs

Kohn, A. (2006). *Abusing research: The study of homework and other examples*. Retrieved from http://alfiecohn.org

Kohn, A. (2007). *Rethinking homework*. Retrieved from http://www.alfiekohn.org/article/rethinking-homework/?print=pdf

Kralovec, E., & Buell, J. (2001). End homework now. *Educational Leadership*, 58, 39-42.

Lacina-Gifford, L. J., & Gifford, R. B. (2004). Putting an end to the battle over homework. *Education, 125*(2), 279-281.

Maňák, J. (1992). *Problém domácích úkolů na základní škole*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

Možný, I. (2006). *Sociologie rodiny*. Praha: Slon.

Pohnětalová, Y. (2015). *Vztahy školy a rodiny*. Hradec Králové: Gaudeamus.

Pomerantz, E., Moorman, E., & Litwack, S. (2007). The how, whom, and why of parents' involvement in children schooling: More is not necessarily better. *Review of Educational Research, 77*(3), 373-410.

Pospíšilová, R. (2011). *Role rodičů v domácí přípravě do školy*. Retrieved from http://www.phil.muni.cz/journals/index.php/studia-paedagogica/article/view/237

Škrábová, M., & Šulová, L. (2013). Psychologické aspekty domácí přípravy v prvních dvou letech školní docházky. *Československá psychologie, 57*(2), 170-178.

Šulová, L. (2014). *Význam domácí přípravy pro začínajícího školáka*. Praha: Wolters Kluwer.

Šulová, L., & Škrábová, M. (2012). *Czech study of Home Preparation for School in the First Five Years of School Attendance*. Retrieved from http://www.fupress.com/rief

Vágnerová, M. (2014). *Vývojová psychologie*. Praha: Karolinum.

Walker, J., Hoover-Dempsey, K., Whetsel, D., & Green, C. (2004). *Parental Involvement in Homework: A Review of Current Research and Its Implications for Teachers, After School Program Staff, and Parent Leaders*. Retrieved from http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/parental-involvement-in-homework-a-review-of-current-research-and-its-implications-for-teachers-after-school-program-staff-and-parent-leaders

Warton, P. M. (2001). The forgotten voice in homework: Views of students. *Educational Psychologist, 36*(3), 155-165.

# Grading of Pupils in History: One-Year Research in the Czech Republic

## Helena Vomáčková[*]

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* The aim of the research was to point to a wide range of factors of the pupils' grading in History classes and to find out if this grading on the given sample corresponds with the context of the independently selected variables: pupils' weight, inclination to the Socratic type of values, type of family, and parents' education.
*Methods:* A sample of 1819 7th grade pupils was made up of the pupils of randomly addressed primary schools willing to cooperate. In the course of one school year, a questionnaire survey was carried out on this sample: each of the 14 regions of the Czech Republic was represented by 5 to 9% of the respondents. Data were evaluated at a 5% level of significance by means of the Chi-squared test.
*Results:* In all the monitored cases, a statistically significant link was demonstrated between the dependent variable (pupils' grading) and independent variables, i.e. the results in History have a wide-spectrum effect.
*Discussion:* The research findings correspond with the results obtained by other scholars, and external factors (independent variables) significantly affect the pupils' school success regardless of their mental and intellectual dispositions.
*Limitations:* School success is simply monitored through numerical grading of pupils, which does not always and completely reflect the pupils' progress in terms of their development. It was not a longitudinal survey but only a single one-year research from which no major conclusions can be drawn.
*Conclusions:* It was confirmed that the results of pupils in History, or their historical knowledge, represent a broad-spectrum matter in which the multiplication effect of external influences must be counted. In the future, research should be carried out in longer time ranges and with a greater emphasis on the causality of the phenomena.

**Key words:** school achievement, grading, knowledge, skills, History.

## 1 Introduction

The level of school success, commonly expressed by means of a 5-degree numerical grading scale, does not represent an ideal form of evaluation (Helus, 2015). Its long-term and extensive use rather suits teachers' schematic approach as it is simple, it saves time and enables both teachers and pupils to standardize certain groups, from which the teacher does not like transferring a pupil somewhere else (Čapek, 2014). It is generally accepted that the younger the pupil is, the less efficient the numerical grading is, both

---

[*] Helena Vomáčková, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, Faculty of Education, Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic; helena.vomackova@ujep.cz

due to the insufficient range of the distinguishing level of pupils' knowledge and skills, as well as for the lack of sufficient feedback given to the pupil so that he/she can be aware of the roots of his/her problem (Kolář & Šikulová, 2009). Thus, this numerical grading scale cannot be regarded as sufficiently objective, it does not provide the teacher with the essential wider picture about the pupil and for the pupil, it is, in the right sense of the word, neither motivational nor educational. In addition to this, it creates a tendency to minimise the teacher's pedagogical optimism necessary for encouraging the pupil to obtain "good" marks, instead of encouraging him, for instance, to understand the nature of a phenomenon and its context, or to eliminate some procedural shortcomings with respect to learning, to acquire security and the feeling of confidence, or to achieve the desired goal, etc. Being under the sway of this numerical grading system, even the pupil finally gives in to this system of grading and starts striving more for a certain grade – i.e. the outer form – rather than for the internal understanding of the subject matter, his/her consideration of the subject matter in the context, the removal of misconceptions or the active acquisition of knowledge instead of mere learning/memorizing (Škoda & Doulík, 2011; Fraser & Garg, 2011).

Primary schools should, at least for the reasons listed above, work with the verbal form of assessment, which is, however, labour- and time-consuming for teachers. Also, at lower secondary schools (ISCED, 2011; 2012) for assessment, use of a scale of points or a percentage rating appears to be, in terms of the development of the pupils' personalities and strengthening their positive approach to cognition, more efficient and at the same time even more fair/just than the numerical form of grading. Both of them allow teachers to express the extent of the mastery of the subject matter, i.e. the degree of the fulfilment of the standards of education, or the level which should be reached by every eligible individual. The assessment by points in all subjects also gives teachers the option of a more comprehensive view of the pupil who, for example, is lagging – and achieves a low score, but is excellent in the majority of other subjects. The total score gives the pupil a chance to find compensation for his/her partial failure, and can assume the nature of a game in which the pupil is not reliant on a single subject as a source of point. No one needs to excel in everything, as it has typically been conceived in the case of top pupils, but every pupil can achieve success in another area.

Unfortunately, the common elementary schools in the Czech Republic work exclusively with this five-degree system of grading and in practice, they do not take into account the impact of its formative function (Nelešovská & Spáčilová, 2005). Years of teaching practice confirm that some "pure top learners" are excellent only because they do not go to school whenever they do not feel like getting a good mark on that day; and they prefer to devise a strategy as an excuse to escape a bad grade (Laznibatová, 2007). Thus, the essence of education – to master the educational content very well – remains on the side-line. These escape strategies of pupils may become, based on positive reinforcement (Plháková, 2004), the pupil's entire philosophy and approach to the solution of situations whenever they find the likelihood of becoming the winner very low. The said access is thus undesirable in relation to the fulfilment of the objectives of education: i.e. to raise an active, energetic and critically thinking person with a positive approach to life and to solving problems (Skinner & Holland, 1961).

In the above-described context, the issue of numerical grading of pupils is accompanied – both on the part of the pupil and his/her parents as well as on the teacher's side – by the phenomenon of the fundamental attribution error (Mareš, 2005). Its essence lies in

the fact that in the case of good achievement, people tend to ascribe it to themselves emanating from internal causes. In the case of any failure, there is an obvious tendency to search for causes outside themselves and put blame on external factors. In the school environment, similar situations occur when a teacher subsequently re-creates or re-shapes a pupil's auto-attributions by applying an erroneous causal attribution and thus, he can also change the conditions of the pupil's performance and so, even his/her achievement (i.e. grades) (Helus, 2006; 2011).

As it results from the above facts, the numerical school grading system is not quite an ideal form of school assessment and, as such, it has a number of pitfalls and weaknesses in terms of its efficiency. Despite that, due to the lack of any other adequate instrument, we used it in our research and we monitored final numerical grading in History in the context of selected variables in the 7th grade of lower secondary schools. The results of the research and their methodological design are approximated in the following two chapters.

For the 7th grade of lower secondary schools, the educational content of History is defined by the Framework Educational Programme for Lower Secondary Education (NÚV – National Institute for Education, 2013). It concerns, in particular, the educational areas of Man and His World, and Man and the Society, the content of which each school elaborates for individual subjects and forms by means of the School Education Programme. In general, it is expected that the pupils at lower secondary schools can find orientation in the timeline and in the historical map, that they can arrange the main historical epochs into a chronological sequence, they know where to find sources of information about the past, are aware of the importance of knowledge about history and that they are able to illustrate it by examples. The development of their competencies also depends on the educators' ability to link the educational content of different school subjects and on their ability to strengthen the cross-curricular relationships and contexts so that the pupils can create a complex idea.

## 2   Methodological context and nature of the research

The contribution focuses on the wider context of school success expressed in the form of the final school grades of students attending the 7th grade of lower secondary schools in History as an example. Its purpose is to broaden the view of school success as an independent variable by other contexts of independent variables, for instance, certain localities of the region in which a pupil attends his/her school, the type of the family which the pupil comes from, the highest educational attainment of his/her parents, the physical dispositions of the pupil expressed by the body mass index (Finucane at al., 2011), as well as the pupil's inclination to the selected value type. In the context of the entire spectrum of the value types monitored by the research according to Sekera (1994), this paper demonstrates the section of the research concerning the Socrates system of values. All relations between dependent and independent variables have been verified by means of the Chi-square test on the 5% significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. This contribution also introduces some selected results of the research, which was carried out on a sample of 1819 respondents from 42 lower secondary schools in the Czech Republic at the end of the year 2014 and the beginning of the year 2015.

The investigation was based on the assumption that numerical grading – despite its obvious limitations – shows, in the order of large numbers, the knowledge and skills of the students in a given subject rather than the impact of other variables. All respondents

answered the same questions in the paper version of an anonymous questionnaire, which consisted of 39 items. The first thirteen items were factual, for the rest of them, a four-degree scale was used ("Definitely Yes", "Rather Yes", "Definitely Not", "Rather Not") to indicate the degree of inclination to the given statement. In the context of the selected independent variables, it was examined whether school grades in History is statistically significantly related to them or not. For this purpose, the following five hypotheses were formulated:

H1    The distribution of the pupils' grades in History does not depend on the region, which means that the distribution of grades of these pupils across all the regions of the Czech Republic is well-proportioned;

H2    the distribution of the pupils' grades in History does not depend on the type of the family from which the pupils come, i.e. their knowledge of history projected in the final grade is not affected by the fact, for instance, whether the family is complete or incomplete;

H3    the distribution of the pupils' grades in history is not influenced by the level of education attained by parents, i.e. in terms of pupils' school results, this fact is irrelevant;

H4    the distribution of the pupils' grades in History is not related to the value of their body mass index (BMI), i.e. lower or higher weight is evenly distributed within the framework of the acquired school grades;

H5    the distribution of the pupils' grades in history does not depend on their inclination to the Socratic type of values.

The subsequent validation of the given hypotheses was carried out under simplified conditions, which are reflected in the interpretation of the obtained findings as well. The theoretical abstraction is based on the assumption that all teachers assess the pupils' knowledge and skills in History classes in the Czech Republic in a more or less similar way; that all teachers teach similarly; that all pupils have a similar interest in history; and that all pupils have similar predispositions for learning, etc. The research paper introduces the results of the verification of the defined research hypotheses under such simplified assumptions and opens the controversy to the causes of the ascertained statistically significant relations.

## 3    Research results

The Czech Republic is a relatively small community of people living in a relatively small space, which creates the impression of its uniformity and homogeneity. However, one cannot ignore the changes that have occurred in the last 25 years, e.g. in the social structure, in the lifestyle, in value preferences, in the extent of the activities within the concept of success, as well as in the accepted patterns and expectations, willingness to work on oneself, etc. Their influence is generally seen to be more centrifugal, with a tendency to cumulate similar things (Piketty, 2015).

The relations between the region in which pupils live and their final grade in History were examined in all 14 regions of the Czech Republic. The implied premise that the distribution of the pupils' grades across all regions of the Czech Republic is uniform is expressed in hypothesis H1. However, in the reference sample examined by us, this hypothesis was not confirmed since the value of the Chi-square distribution coefficient was reported far below 5% (the Pearson Chi-square: 127.432, $p = 0.00000$) – see Figure 1.

Knowledge about the historical context of events, i.e. the consequences of certain events or, on the contrary, their causes, can be considered the key issues in the context of humanities education. Didactically, when working with them, higher intellectual operations are being developed (Tollingerová & Malach, 1973) – e.g. the processes of evaluation, comparison and verification are developed in pupils, as well as their skills of interpretation, deduction, induction, etc.
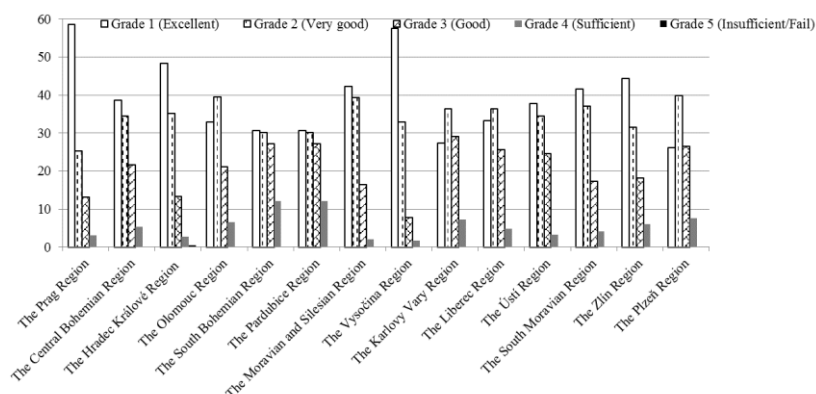


*Figure 1.* Regional distribution of the final grades in History (7th grade) according to regions.

The results referred to in Figure 1 depict the position of regions according to the frequency of the final grades at the end of the 7th grade:
- the "excellent" grade dominates in the Vysočina Region (54%), the Capital City of Prague (52%) and the Zlín Region (40%);
- the "very good" grade dominates in the capital city and the Karlovy Vary Region (48%), the Moravian-Silesian Region (47%) and in the Hradec Králové Region (41%);
- the "good" grade dominates in the Olomouc Region (33%), the Liberec Region (31%) and the Plzeň Region (29%);
- the "sufficient" grade dominates in the South Bohemian Region (13%), the South Moravian Region (11%) and the Pardubice Region (9%);
- the "insufficient" grade dominates in the South Bohemian Region (0.76%), the Plzeň Region (0.75%) and South Bohemian Region (0.70%).

The representation of the above-average pupils in all regions was more than 50%. The awarded grades in History in all regions reported more than 50% of "excellent" and "very good" grades. The most successful were the pupils in Vysočina Region (86%), Ústí nad Labem (78%) and the Hradec Králové Region (76%); the least successful among them were the pupils in the South Bohemian Region (57%). On the contrary, below-average pupils represented the minority in every region, the highest rate was reported in the South Bohemian Region (14%), the South Moravian Region (11%) and the Olomouc Region (9%).

On the basis of the findings, it was not possible to confirm Hypothesis H1 and declare that the grades in History were, in terms of all the 14 regions of the Czech Republic, evenly distributed. On the contrary, the reference sample of the respondents confirmed

the existence of a link between the grades and the regions and signalled an uneven distribution of pupils with good grades in History in the context of the Czech Republic. Similarly, the impact of the pupils' family background was partially tested, specifically the type of family – see hypothesis H2, and the highest education attained by parents – see hypothesis H3, on the final grades of pupils attending History classes in the 7th grade. The school success rate of pupils – including History – is generally associated with the influence of the family (e.g. Matějů & Večerník, 1998; Teleková, 2013; Vomáčková & Cihlář, 2013). In our research, we attempted to verify the dependence on two independent variables through the grades achieved in History. We distinguished between the following types of families: complete, incomplete, complemented and substitute (foster) family (Dunovský, 1986) and we observed the performance of their social and psychological functions (Helus, 2007). With respect to the low representation of certain types of families, we have assigned them to the "other" group (2%) and that group was statistically evaluated along with the complete family group (66%), that of the incomplete family (19%) and that of the complemented family (13%). The differences in the distribution of the achieved grades (grading) according to the types of families are evident not only visually but also graphically and statistically (the Pearson Chi-square: 59.2687, p = 0.000009) – see Figure 2.
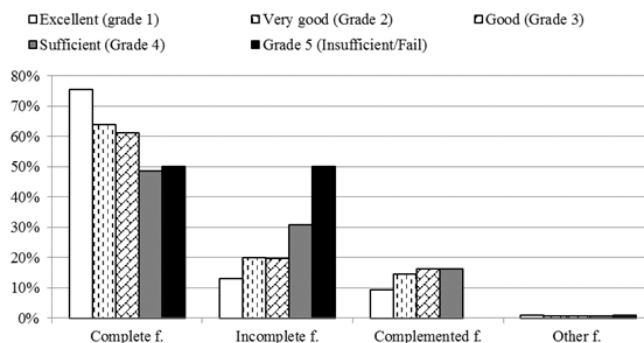


*Figure 2*. The relation between the type of family and the school success of 7th grade pupils in History.

Figure 2 illustrates that from the aspect of school success – namely the pupils' school grade in History – it really matters what family background the pupil comes from, i.e. there is a statistically conclusive connection between the type of family and the degree of success in this school subject. Thus, hypothesis H2 cannot be confirmed on the 5% level of significance. In our research sample, the assumption of family functionality in complete families is supported by frequent "excellent" grades and by the tendency of decline in the case of worse grades up to the "insufficient" grade. On the contrary, in the case of single-parent families and supplemented families, "excellent" grades are the least frequent, and the representation of worse grades grows as far as the "insufficient" grade (in pupils from supplemented and other families no "insufficient" grade was awarded at the end of the 7th grade). Although it is not in any way a unique finding, as it corresponds with the results of a whole series of similar research (e.g. Sobotková, 2001; Jedlička et al., 2004; Fischer & Škoda, 2008; Blížkovský, 1997), these results are not in fact reflected in the educational practice.

The second tested independent variable in relation to the pupils' school grade was the highest education attained by their parents. When processing the obtained data, two groups were created from the original 6 questionnaire variants: the first, in which at least one parent attained university education (41%) and the second, which included the pupils' parents who did not (59%). The reference sample of 1819 respondents proved the existence of a statistical link (Pearson Chi-square: 21.1298, p = 0.000299), and it can be stated that from the perspective of the school results in History it really matters how well educated the family from which the pupil comes is – see Figure 3.

The impact of the family on the student's academic achievement in History can be associated, for instance, with a more challenging and active family environment, with its adventure activities, with the level of communication, discipline, and rigor of the parents, with the education of the pupils, divergent and lateral thinking, social responsibility, cultivation of their will and perseverance in overcoming obstacles, but also with a growing interest in historical roots, etc.
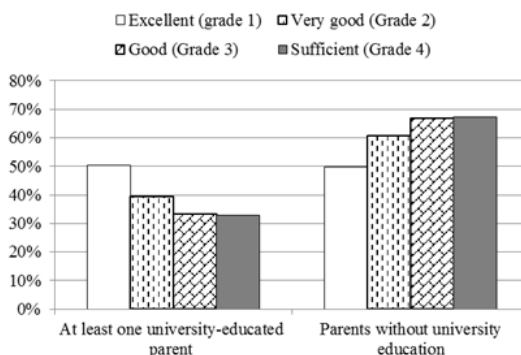


*Figure 3*. Correlation of the parents' educational level and the school success of 7th grade pupils in History.

As Figure 3 illustrates, in the families with at least one university-educated parent, there is an evident declining tendency from the "excellent" to the "sufficient" grade (shows the share of a given grade), while in families without a university-graduate, the tendency is just the opposite (for the clarity of the chart the "insufficient" grade was not included, it represented a mere 0.1% of all grades). From this perspective, the parents' highest attained education appears to be the fundamental prerequisite for success in the given sample of respondents. Based on the above, hypothesis H3, according to which the level of students' school success in History does not show a correlation with the level of education attained by their parents, must be rejected. The opposite is true and the family background in this matter gets to its quality or loses just with the level of the parents' educational attainment. However, this is not the only connection with this independent variable. For example, international comparative studies indicate that the highest educational attainment of parents is also closely associated with the likelihood that their children will receive university education (Chevalier, 2004).

A link to the final grade in History at the end of the 7th grade was investigated in relation to the physical predispositions of pupils measured by BMI. The current trend of decline in physical fitness and children's excess weight are associated with insufficient

physical activity, and poor eating habits developed in the family in the context of its lifestyle. Seemingly unrelated variables in the given sample of respondents showed a statistically conclusive correlation (Pearson Chi-square: 23.0452, p = 0.027357). In the Czech Republic, the best results in History were achieved by students with normal weight (examined in the aggregate frequency of "excellent", "very good" and "good grades": 94%) – see Figure 4. The results of our research investigation thus indirectly support the fact of cohesion between the cognitive, physical and mental factors of the personality of an individual (e. g. PIAAC, 2014; Mudrák et al., 2013).
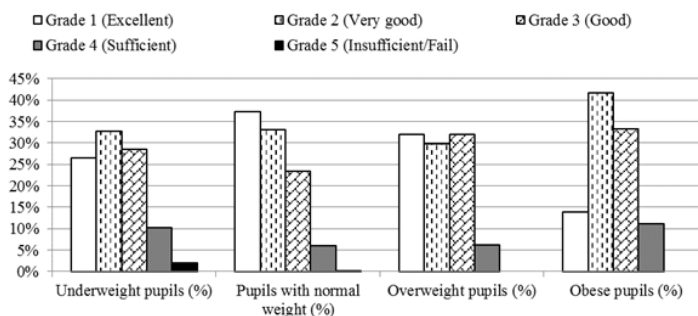


*Figure 4.* The relation between the Body Mass Index and the school success of 7th grade pupils in History.

As Figure 4 illustrates, a decreasing distribution of the spectrum of grades from the "excellent" grade up to the "insufficient" grade is demonstrated on the part of pupils with normal weight (they acquired the highest number of "excellent" grades and the lowest number of "insufficient" grades in History). The most "very good" grades in the whole monitored reference sample were acquired by obese pupils (42%), who also acquired the highest number of "good" grades (33%) and even the highest number of "sufficient" grades (11%). If we divided the entire sample of respondents into a group of above-average pupils (with total frequency of the "excellent" and the "very good" grade) and that of below- average pupils (the sum of the "sufficient" and "insufficient" grade frequencies), the most above-average pupils would be those with normal weight (70%), followed by overweight pupils (62%), underweight pupils (59%) and obese pupils (56%). In the group of below-average pupils, those with underweight would dominate (12%), closely followed by obese pupils (11%). As already mentioned, the grade "good" was the most frequent with obese pupils.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that pupils with normal weight in the reference sample showed a certain excellence in this school subject, while the pupils evaluated as overweight based on their BMI, can be characterized by standard or average performance. Even the fourth hypothesis H4, – according to which there is no link between the pupils' grade in History and the value of their BMI – was not confirmed.

In search for the possible correlations with the reported school results in History, we further tested the pupils' inclination to selected value types. The Socratic type of values was selected for this testing with regard to the content of History as a school subject and the goals of the educational process. This is a type of values focused on self-improvement and self-education, i.e. on the qualitative transformation of the individual,

the willingness to sacrifice to achieve the desired results. This pupils' inclination is demonstrated in the following two statements (or propositions) selected from the four propositions examined in our research:

   A. I have my book heroes and I want to be like them – see Figure 5,
   B. I have undertaken a lot of work on myself since the previous year (e.g. language improvement, improvement of physical prowess, progress in Mathematics) – see Figure 6.

In Figure 5, the direct correlation between the grades in History and the pupils' self-development by means of reading books (in this case, not only books dealing with history) is shown. By applying the Chi-square test, a statistically significant correlation was confirmed (Pearson Chi-square: 47.7882, p = 0.000003), the better grades pupils achieved, the more frequent their consent with the proposition was and vice versa.
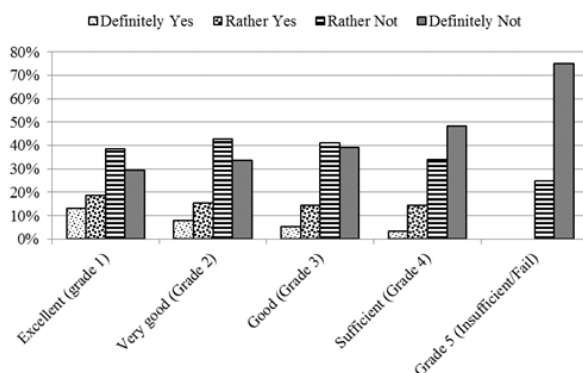


*Figure 5*. Correlation between the grading in History and the Socratic "A" type of values.

In the case of the "A" statement/proposition, the frequency of top pupils (those with "excellent" grades), whose unambiguous standpoint was affirmative (i.e. "Definitely Yes"), was at the level of 13%, with pupils who acquired the "very good" grade it was at the level of 8%, with pupils who acquired the "good" grade it was at the level of 5%, with those whose grade was "sufficient" at the level of 3%, and with pupils with "insufficient" grade a categorical consent did not appear at all. This structural distribution corresponds with some minor aberrations, even with other values in the scaling zones, i.e. when considering the overall affirmative statement ("Definitely Yes", "Rather Yes") the proportion of pupils gradually decreases on the scale from the "excellent" grade to the "insufficient" one, on the contrary, the proportion of pupils grows with the aggregate of negative statements ("Definitely Not", "Rather Not"). While 68% of top graders do not agree with statement "A", in the case of those with the "very good" grade it is 82% and none of the pupils with the "insufficient" grade agrees.

The reading comprehension skill, at the same time, belongs among the key features of literacy monitored by such international research as PIRLS and TIMSS 2011(ČŠI – Czech School Inspection, 2016), PISA, 2012 (ČŠI, 2013). When comparing the results of reading literacy between the years 2000 and 2009, on the international level, a statistically significant decline in Czech pupils was observed. In that period, the percentage of students with an insufficient level of reading competencies increased to 23%, which represents a ratio exceeding the international average (VÚP – Research

Institute of Pedagogy, 2011). This is related to the statement made by one third of Czech pupils, who think that reading is a waste of time for them. In those nine years a decrease in the number of pupils who read daily for a longer period for joy was also discovered in the Czech Republic.

The second tested proposition, by means of which the inclination of pupils to the Socratic type of values was observable, was the statement "B" – "I have undertaken a lot of work on myself since the previous year". On the examined sample of respondents, we could observe a connection with the awarded grades in History within the framework of the verification of Hypothesis H5 – the school success of pupils in History does not show any connection with the pupils' inclination to the Socratic type of values. Even in this case, however, the hypothesis was not confirmed (the Pearson Chi-square: 90.2910, $p = 0.000000$) and it had to be rejected at the 5% level of significance – see Figure 6.
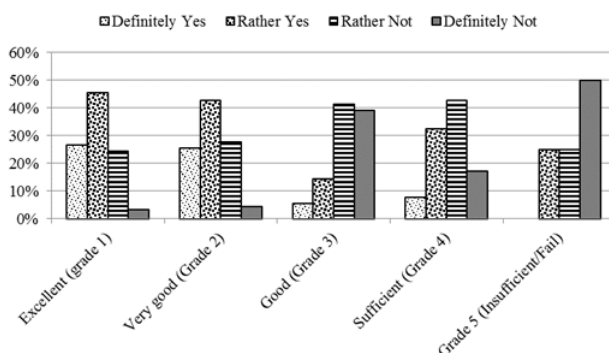


*Figure 6*. Correlation between the grading in History and the Socratic "B" type of values.

As it can be observed in Figure 6, the positive comments/statements of the respondents (the sum of "Definitely Yes" and "Rather Yes") drop down from the "excellent" grade (72%) to the "insufficient" grade (25%), which is in agreement with the previous statement, and the negative comments (a sum of "Definitely Not" and "Rather Not") increase from the "excellent" grade (28%) to the "insufficient" grade (75%). A deviation in the distribution of the responses can be seen in the case of respondent with the "good" grade.

## 4   Conclusions

The research paper pointed to some of the correlations between the pupils' school achievement in History at the end of the 7th grade of lower secondary schools in the Czech Republic. Although it was only a one-year research, it is impossible to overlook the multiplication effect of the observed factors (the independent variables) on the dependent variable – the final grade in History. In all these cases, statistically significant correlations were demonstrated, which confirms that the pupils' results in History (or historical knowledge, the ability to infer time and causality, critical drawing of conclusions based on studying sources, etc.) are influenced by a broad spectrum of issues in which it is necessary to reckon with a multiplication effect of seemingly unrelated phenomena, such as the pupils' BMI or the pupils' belonging to a specific region. It was proven that education cannot only make use of the cognitive plane

(mediating knowledge), but that it works on a significant psychomotor plane (learning to cope with problems, overcoming obstacles) and the affective plane (shaping properties, growing confidence, giving hope, assisting the search for meaning or the goal). Education in this broad sense is not just an issue for teachers and pupils, as it is generally conceived in a simplistic way. It is also the responsibility of parents, as well as politicians, who set up the legislative framework for its achievement. In particular, with compulsory education, which is guaranteed by the state, a standard level of education should be required, and the state should take advantage of all the tools – including the restrictive ones – to achieve it, which the current educational practice in the Czech Republic does not fully reflect (Vomáčková et al., 2015).

# References

Blížkovský, B. (1997). *Systémová pedagogika pro studium a tvůrčí praxi.* Brno: Amosium Servis.

Čapek, R. (2014). *Odměny a tresty ve školní praxi*. Praha: Grada.

ČŠI. (2013). *Hlavní zjištění PISA 2012.* Praha: ČŠI. Retrieved from http://www.csicr.cz/cz/O-nas/Mezinarodni-setreni/PISA/

ČŠI. (2016). *Srovnání charakteristik méně úspěšných a velmi úspěšných tříd. Sekundární analýza z mezinárodních šetření PIRLS 2011 a TIMSS 2011.* Praha: ČŠI. Retrieved from http://www.csicr.cz/cz/Dokumenty/Publikace/Mene-uspesne-a-velmi-uspesne -tridy-%E2%80%93-sekundarni- analyzy_PIRLS_TIMSS/flipviewerxpress.html

Dunovský, J. (1986). *Dítě a poruchy rodiny.* Praha: Avicenum zdravotnické nakladatelství.

Finucane, M. M. et al. (2011). *National, regional and global trends in body mass index since 1980.* Geneva: WHO. Retrieved from http://www.naos.aesan.msc.es/ va/naos/ ficheros/investigation/ National_regional_global_trends_body_mass_ index.pdf

Fischer, S., & Škoda, J. (2008). *Speciální pedagogika.* Praha: Triton.

Fraser, M., & Garg, R. (2011). Educational Aspirations. In *Encyklopedia of Adolescence* (pp. 807-812). New York: Springer.

Helus, Z. (2006). *Sociální psychologie pro pedagogy.* Praha: Grada.

Helus, Z. (2007). Kurikulum jako činitel žákovy personalizace. In T. Janík, *Absolvent základní školy* (pp. 10-19). Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

Helus, Z. (2011). *Úvod do psychologie: učebnice pro střední školy a bakalářská studia na VŠ.* Praha: Grada.

Helus, Z. (2015). Cílové orientace managementu vzdělávání s důrazem na uplatňování osobního zřetele. In *Management vzdělávání v současném diskurzu* (pp. 7-13). Praha: CŠM KU.

Chevalier, A. (2004). *Parental education and Child's Education: A Natural Experiment.* Discussion Paper No. 1153. Bonn: IZA. Retrieved from http://ftp.iza.org/ dp1153.pdf

Jedlička, R., Klíma, P., Koťa, J., Němec, J., & Pilař, J. (2004). *Děti a mládež v obtížných životních situacích.* Praha: Themis.

ISCED 2011 (2012). *International Standard Classification of Education.* Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Retrieved from http://www.uis.unesco.org/ Education/DOcuments/ isced-2011-en.pdf

Kolář, Z., & Šikulová, R. (2009). *Hodnocení žáků.* Praha: Grada.

Laznibatová, J. (2007). *Nadané dieťa, jeho vývin, vzdelávanie a podporovanie.* Bratislava: Iris.

Mareš, J. (2005). Motivace školy jako instituce ke zvládání problémů a ke změně školního klimatu. In *Psychosociální klima školy* (pp. 34-60). Brno: MSD.

Matějů, P., & Večerník, J. (1998). *Zpráva o vývoji české společnosti 1989–1998.* Praha: Academia.

Mudrák, J., Slepička P., & Houdová, V. (2013). Kognitivní funkce a některé faktory aktivního životního stylu. *Česká kinantropologie*, 17, 53-64.

Nelešovská, A., & Spáčilová, H. (Eds.). (2005). *Didaktika primární školy.* Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého v Olomouci.

NÚV. (2013). *RVP ZV – úplné znění upraveného RVP ZV.* Retrieved from http://www.nuv.cz/file/213/

PIAAC. (2014). *Výzkum dovedností dospělých. Průvodce výzkumem.* Retrieved from http://www.piaac.cz/attach/readers_companion_ CZE.pdf

Piketty, T. (2015). *Apoštol přiměřené nerovnosti.* Retrieved from http://euro.e15.cz/archiv/thomas-piketty-apostol-primerene-nerovnosti-1190074

Plháková, A. (2014). *Učebnice obecné psychologie.* Praha: Academia. 2014.

Sekera, J. (1994). *Hodnotová orientace a mezilidské vztahy v pedagogických sborech.* Ostrava: Repronis.

Skinner, B. F., & Holland, J. G. (1961). *The Analysis of Behavior: A Program for Self-instruction.* Mcgraw-Hill College.

Sobotková, I. (2001). *Psychologie rodiny*. Praha: Portál.

Teleková, M. (2013). *Faktory ovlivňující školní úspěch a neúspěch z pohledu studentů posledních ročníků Univerzity T. Bati ve Zlíně* (Diploma thesis). Zlín: Universita Tomáše Bati.

Tollingerová, D., & Malach, A. (1973). *Metody programování.* Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta.

Škoda, J., & Doulík, P. (2011). *Psychodidaktika.* Praha: Grada.

Vomáčková, H., & Cihlář, D. (2013). *Rodinné propylaje v pedagogickém nástinu*. Ústí n. L.: UJEP.

Vomáčková, H., Chytrý, V., Říčan, J., Šlégl, J., & Zilcher, L. (2015). *Výzkumný pohled na inkluzi a její determinanty*. Ústí n. L.: UJEP.

VÚP. (2011). *Gramotnosti ve vzdělávání. Soubor studií.* Praha: VÚP. 2011. Retrieved from http://www.vuppraha.cz/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Gramotnosti_ve_ vzdelavani_ soubor_studii 1.pdf

# Children's Initiations in Communication with Preschool Teachers

## Hana Navrátilová*

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* This paper deals with an important aspect of preschool teachers' everyday professional life – interacting with children during educational activities in kindergarten environment. The research of real situations in kindergarten, still rare in Czech pedagogical discourse, indicates the limitedness of preschool teachers' communication following already fixed communication structures and patterns. There is not much evidence that teacher-child communication in kindergarten is initiated by children with any frequency. The aim of our research study is to describe preschool children's initiations in communication with pre-service preschool teachers and identify teachers' strategies in mutual communication.
*Methods:* The research is based on qualitative analysis of data obtained through participated unstructured observation (37 video recordings of micro educational situations with the duration of 3 to 15 minutes were collected) and written reflection of pre-service preschool teachers (55 participants). Each part of the observation took place in a different class of a standard kindergarten. In one case, it was a homogeneous class of children aged 5-6 years, and in the second, a heterogeneous class with children aged between 3 and 5 years. Our data material in the form of written reflections and transcribed video recordings was then processed through the qualitative content analysis.
*Results:* Research results show children breaking the communication structure managed by the teacher, and the teacher's strategies in these situations. We identified five main circumstances of preschool children's initiations as communicating their own experiences or associations related to the topic presented by the teacher.
*Discussion:* Our findings show a certain range of responses of future teachers to children's initiation in interaction during educational activities. Besides evidence of releasing communication in terms of teacher management, less suitable kinds of responses to children's initiation appear. The teacher is not able to give up control over the ongoing communication.
*Limitations:* Selected research sample consists of pre-service teachers, who represent only a partial sample of potential interactions in the kindergarten environment. Thus, to some teachers, the findings apply only partially in practice; with other teachers, we could possibly expand our research even deeper. This choice to use only a partial sample reflects both practicality and the need to improve the competence of future teachers through recording their unscripted interactions with children.

---

* Hana Navrátilová, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; hnavratilova@fhs.utb.cz

***Conclusions:*** Children need teachers who are sensitive to their initiations and offer space for children to initiate communication. If we want to have students at the primary and secondary levels of education with developed life skills and the ability to discuss and argue, we need to offer such manner of communication as early as in kindergartens.

**Key words:** teacher-child communication in kindergartens, preschool teacher, pre-service teacher, children's initiation; communication structure.

## 1 Introduction

According to previous research studies about teacher-child interactions, early qualitative interaction affects and predicts the children's overall development (Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2011, p. 414). The teacher should give attention to children's attempts to express and share their ideas with the aim to develop children into people who are prepared to discuss problems and possible solutions, to deepen ideas and thoughts with confidence to try out new words in language development (Bruce, 2004, p. 81). The development of language and speech supports children's development of cognitive prerequisites. Preschool teachers do not often engage children in cognitively challenging conversation (Goh et al., 2012).

The teacher's role in supporting children's learning is based on adult-led tutoring but with less dominance as argued by Bruner in the terms of scaffolding. The teacher's strategies in preschool education should already contain the use of reflective co-construction and sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Knowing how to listen to, hear, and understand a child opens the space for children's stimulating questions about their hypotheses, not only for premature conclusions. Teachers and children explore together instead of rushing to fulfil the demands of the curriculum. Diversity of shared ideas can lead them out of the previously prepared plan without being stressed (Vujičic & Miketek, 2014).

The best help teachers (and adults in general) can give to children is to encourage them to ask their own questions. Allowing children to lead conversations is also important. Unfortunately, preschool conversations are often limited to the teacher's directives and one-word responses from children (Goh et al., 2012).

The analysis presented in research reports from the project focused on Effective Provision of Pre-school Education proposed four basic areas to be more thoroughly investigated. Among them are adult-child verbal interactions. A necessary condition is that both parties are involved in the learning process but such effective setting does not appear very frequently (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

## 2 Teacher-child communication structure and/or patterns in kindergarten

The aim or outcome of analysis of instructional communication is often to find out a certain sequence, whose repetition in instructional communication can be described as the existing structure of communication between the teacher and pupils in all possible variants of participation. Samuhelová (1988) defines the structure as the way in which communicants are arranged, including the relationships between them. This way, one- or bi-directional structures with varying numbers of participants are produced in a vertical or horizontal position. The structure that has been re-examined, revised and

supplemented since its initial description by the authors Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) is known by the acronym IRF (initiation-response-feedback). The next well-known variant of IRF is the structure with a variation of the last component of communication exchanges–E as evaluation instead of feedback as presented by Mehan and Cazden (as cited in Mareš, 2016).

The term "communication pattern," which can be found in some foreign studies, is the current equivalent of the term "structure" (Myhill, 2006; Rasku-Puttonen, 2012; Molinari & Mameli, 2015). The result of the study by Myhill is therefore the following definition: "teacher-pupil interactions operated in highly conventional discourse patterns with the domination of teacher talk" (2006, p. 24).

The Finnish research team Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012) focused on studying the structure of teacher-child interactions in kindergartens. The analysis of their data material was based on educational episodes of verbal exchanges captured through video recordings. The authors focused on whether the teacher gives children space for self-expression and whether teacher-controlled communication contains elements that belong to dialogical learning such as sharing ideas, developing children's answers, and teacher's open questions. The examined communication, as in the case of data in our research, was related to teacher prepared educational situations designed to develop selected areas such as Math or literacy. The authors identified three different types of interaction patterns:

- Demonstration of child's knowledge through a question-answer sequence. This case of interactions did not contain any elements of dialogical learning; exchanges between the teacher and children reflected the traditional structure of the IRF, where the teacher did not give a broader evaluation or explanation for children's answers. In some cases, the teacher interviewed the children in such a way that the children identified the way of their thinking in their responses, but mostly, the opportunities for children to participate were already limited by the teacher's questions requiring just one correct answer.
- Support of a child's engagement in interaction. In this structure, the teacher stayed the dominant participant who initiates communication. However, the teacher listened to children's answers, providing space for diversity of children's ideas about the given topic in instructional talk more than in the previous pattern.
- Opportunity for child's initiation. This structure included the active involvement of a child in discussions with the teacher, and other children in the class. Children were not only interested in communication about what they have learned and found out in previous days, but they also initiated their own ideas within the given theme. The teacher accepted the exchange of roles, listened to the children, and consequently developed their ideas. At the same time, however, the teacher remained the manager of the communication in order to fulfil the set goals of education.

Although current approaches to education emphasize the focus on the child/pupil, which should lead to weakening the teacher's dominance in the classroom, Myhill (2006) notes that many studies over the past few decades repeatedly have shown a strong tendency of the teachers to dominate the communication in the classroom. Communication generally has a power dimension. Dividing communication into content and relationships levels, as described by Watzlawick (2011), affects also the school environment. Likewise, McCroskey (2005) repeatedly states that a certain degree of the teacher's power in the

classroom is always present; this applies to all levels of education, including preschool education.

Scott and Mortimer (2006) use the term "communication approach of a teacher" (in terms of interaction with the students and at the same time, to what degree the teacher takes into account the students' ideas during a lesson). The authors demonstrate teachers' approaches through the recordings of instructional sequences, while describing both verbal and non-verbal cues of teachers and pupils. As the result of their analysis, they identify four types of communication approaches based on the dimensions expressed by pairs of opposites of interactive/non-interactive and dialogical/authoritative approach:

- Interactive-dialogic: the teacher and pupils are considering a range of ideas on the topic together; they pose appropriate questions. The ideas are then either developed or remain just possible points of view.
- Non-interactive-dialogic: the teacher repeats and summarizes the topic from different points of view.
- Interactive-authoritative: the teacher focuses on a specific point of view and leads students through a question and answer routine.
- Non-interactive-authoritative: the teacher only presents a specific point of view on the topic.

In the most effective settings, the importance of teachers extending child-initiated interactions is also clearly identified. As shown by the results of a project aimed at the conditions in effectively managed preschool institutions, almost one half of all child-initiated episodes which contained an intellectual challenge included interventions from the teacher to broaden the child's thinking. The evidence also suggests that adult "modelling" is often combined with sustained periods of shared thinking and that open-ended questioning is also associated with better cognitive achievement. However, open-ended questions made up only about 5% of the questioning used in even these "effective" settings (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

The structures or patterns of interactions between the teacher and children, described above, relate to educational situations. But even within the unprepared dialogues between the teacher and children, we do not have much evidence of initiating the communication by children (Makišová, 2010).

## 3   Methodology

The early years of children's learning have traditionally been an under-researched area (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Focusing on the area of interaction and communication between the participants of preschool education, authors of Czech and foreign professional discourse also repeatedly note the lack of research investigations. Preschool education remains a marginal point of interest to researchers. A large and still unsolved question concerns the features of the unscripted communication between teachers and children in kindergartens (Průcha et al., 2016; Suchodoletz et al., 2014). Discourse and the structure of dialogues are explored neither in preschool environment nor in primary education (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012). The conclusion is therefore that in the field of preschool education, the database of real situations of children communication in the kindergarten environment needs to be extended.

## 3.1   Research aims

The aim of the research presented in this paper is to offer the findings based on the analysis of data capturing just such situations in kindergarten for discussion. Researchers are becoming increasingly interested in looking at the issue through the perspective of a child. Despite the gradual rise in studies involving young children, their voices still appear to be marginalized (Vujičic & Miktek, 2014). The goal is to try to listen to the "voices of children" through their experiences in order to better understand their learning in preschool conditions. Given the focus on the teacher-child communication we are interested in the child as the main participant of this communication. The aim of the present research is to determine how a child enters the communication with a pre-service teacher in a kindergarten during didactically targeted activities, and also to find out how pre-service teachers work with a child's initiations in mutual communication. The choice of participants is limited to pre-service teacher instead of the already practicing teachers, is determined by two reasons. The first reason is the availability of data acquisition. Pre-service teachers are more willing to participate in recording their activities through video cameras, perceiving the need to reflect on their strategies in interactions with children in kindergarten. Records of these interactions provide them with the ability to track the development of their performance. The second reason is the related need to improve the communication competence of pre-service teachers, whereby the reflection on their practice can be an adequate means to improve their interaction with a child, providing him or her space for initiations and subsequent adequate responses. According to Petrová (2013), the use of video recordings in teaching pre-service teachers has a control function (presence of a university teacher, who can intensely monitor the development of his or her students), and the substitution function (in the absence of certain types of activities during the practice, which would nevertheless be helpful for the student teachers). The application of video records facilitates students' learning of the terminology associated with a given area.

## 3.2   Research methods

Data material for this research comes from of two sources. The first source consists of written reflections of pre-service teachers. Student teachers were asked to write their reflections about their experiences and perceptions concerning the interactions with children in kindergarten environment. The aim was to obtain detailed personal statements from respondents, reflecting their position as future kindergarten teachers. A total of 55 students in the degree course Preschool Teachers' Training participated in the research.

The second source consists of unstructured participated observation of pre-service teachers during their interactions with children in kindergarten. The data obtained is in the form of video recordings. The video recordings offer a range of options for the researcher, from microanalyses of separate situations in the classroom, which may possibly not exceed the duration of a minute, to extensive or longitudinal research projects. The authenticity and complexity of captured reality of education in kindergarten (and any other level of education) belongs to the positive aspects of the use of video. While observing the standard way, paying attention to the whole context of reported events is impossible. Audio recordings, although being an important clue to understanding the examined reality, lack all non-verbal interactions. During our research, data collection through observation was divided in two phases. First, we

recorded the communication between pre-service teachers and children in a kindergarten class during targeted didactic activities; these observations included all that was happening in the classroom. A total of 25 video recordings with the duration of 3 to 15 minutes were collected. Later, we decided to focus on the observation of the learning episodes in learning centers, where the communication took place during learning activities aimed to develop language and reading literacy, mathematical concepts, and science education for pre-schoolers. This phase of data collection provided 12 video recordings with the duration of 5 minutes each. Each part of the observation took place in a different class of a standard kindergarten. In one case, it was a homogeneous class of children aged 5-6 years, and in the second, a heterogeneous class with children aged between 3 and 5 years.

Our data material in the form of written reflections and transcribed video recordings was then processed through qualitative content analysis. The resulting categories indicate moments when the children become the initiators of the interaction with pre-service teachers, as well as the range of the future teachers' strategies following the children's initiations.

## 4   Results

We did not focus on the overall structure of the teacher-child communication in our research. Therefore, we did not attempt to provide empirical evidence that traditionally presented IRF structure, or any kind of pattern identified by the research team Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012), would be prevailing structure in our data. The object of our investigation is a child's initiation. We define it as the utterance entering the ongoing talk between the child and the teacher. The child decides to participate in the communication on his or her own initiative during communication previously controlled solely by the teacher. We consider both verbal and non-verbal initiations toward a teacher. Therefore, we do not deal with the more common passive role of the child being only a recipient in the communication determined by the teacher – in those cases, the child only responds to the teacher's questions. In some cases, we consider to be child initiations also such discourses which are in the communication structure in the position of the expected answer to the teacher's questions, but where the child suddenly changes the topic of the communication to a matter more important to him or her at the moment.

Our data analysis has resulted in findings in two areas corresponding to the examination of the interaction of two participants who should be partners – the teacher and the child. First, we identified the circumstances of situations when the child decides to take the initiative beyond the communication structures set up by the teacher. Next, we observed the pre-service teacher's strategies as he or she responds to the child's initiation.

### 4.1   Child as an initiator in communication

Although we were primarily interested in teacher-child (or group of children) interactions, we cannot omit that the child's initiation in the communication supervised by the pre-service teacher may not apply to only the teacher. Children naturally address their utterances to each other in the group. Especially for pre-service teachers, these situations are the moments to realize that it is not necessary to stay the main control participant in interactions. At the same time, there is a space to develop their ability to observe and comprehend the children's interaction and their varying peer relationships.

However, in their written reflections, student teachers expressed the feeling of insecurity about the situations where communication did not exactly follow their planned scenario.

*Children sitting on the carpet in the classroom in a circle with the pre-service teacher sitting between them. She asks questions about some riddles relating to the presented topic. The chosen riddles are too easy for the kids, so the pre-service teacher is trying not to entirely lose the children's attention, and she verifies their comprehension of the riddles' contents.*

*Pre-service teacher: Hm. (nodding her head) And who did she mean…who fluffs a feather?*

*Child 1: Hen! …fluffs a feather. (She shows fluff on her chest.)*

*Child 2 (Meanwhile, he jostles with a boy sitting next to him): No. She fluffs the eggs. Ha ha! (All the kids are laughing for a while).*

*PT[1]: (with embarrassment) I'll give you one more. (She means one more riddle.)*

Recorded children's initiations have also a different form than just verbal speech, of course. Children's speech is often replaced by non-verbal expressions, or these expressions are embedded as a part of verbal speech. This could mean gestures, gaze, stance, facial expression, or voice quality (Goh et al., 2012). So far, it is difficult for pre-service teachers to capture all these signals expressed by children because the teachers still focus excessively on the content of their own speech. We have not examined the field of non-verbal cues comprehensively in our research. In the recordings capturing interactions in whole class teaching, the data material including children's non-verbal responses to teachers would become extensive. The non-verbal cues of children, however, were more intensive if the pre-service teacher decided to work in the organization form of learning centers. The teacher's directive communication management was often taken over by a child who realized his or her communication non-verbally by actions. However, the pre-service teachers seemed as if they did not perceive such non-verbal initiations, or they deliberately waited until the child expressed the meaning verbally. The research team Goh et al. (2012) studied teachers' perception and understanding of non-verbal expressions as an important part of preschool children's language. The researchers observed teachers who applied a specific pedagogical strategy called Instructional Conversation (IC) with a modification especially for children aged from 2 to 5 years. Modifications included the support of non-verbal cues, so the child had a chance to express their ideas comprehensively through the combination of gestures and speech. The child would not be able to express the same content only by oral speech. The application has proved to be effective for the development of the dialogue between the teacher and the child, especially for children from bilingual families and children who attend kindergarten between 2 and 3 years of age. Both cases are relevant to the Czech preschool education. In the coming years, teachers will be facing the need to adjust the well-established strategies in interactions with children in kindergarten with respect to the communication abilities of children under 3 years of age.

We consider alarming the finding that dealing with the communication of children and pupils across the levels of education is not rare in research studies – only a few cases of kindergarten children's initiations are in the form of a question. The occurring questions had primarily the nature of organizational questions (e.g., "We will call our names?").

---

[1] We will use the acronym PT to mark the utterances of pre-service teachers in all presented examples from our data material.

One possible interpretation for the absence of children's questions as early as in preschool education is visible in the situations where a child asks a question that steers off the expected framework of possible answers given to a teacher. As we can see in the following example, a pre-service teacher copes with the child's question so that the communication returns to the name of a tree that she initially wanted to hear from children. Children adapt to the established communication scenario with the structures controlled by the teacher during interactions as early as in the preschool environment.

*Learning center for literacy development. The pre-service teacher shows children a story about Little Prince in different genres. Their dialogue concerns the images in comics they are viewing.*

*PT: What is the name of the trees on the planet, do you know?*

*Child: And what will Little Prince do?*

*PT: Well... (thinking for a while) It is just that there are those baobabs.*

The child's question indicates that he is interested in the topic, he wants to discuss the solution to the situation that is presented in the analyzed literary text, or that he, most likely, wants to hear the solution from the teacher. However, there was the opportunity for building understanding through discussion, which unfortunately was not utilized by the pre-service teacher. What other moments belong to the identified reasons why a child enters the ongoing classroom communication between the teacher and children?

4.1.1   The child wants to communicate the association or his/her own experience of the topic

In the previous example of our data, a child posed a question in the dialogue about the Little Prince. Despite the pre-service teacher's efforts to keep the dialogue continuing according to her prepared scenario, another child decided to move towards the topic of her own association: *And there are other princes too.* In this case, the prepared scenario finally evolved into discussion between the pre-service teacher and children based the on the girl's initiation during learning activities.

Sharing of experiences as a pattern of educational dialogue was identified by Muhonen et al. (2017). The pattern consists of dialogical episodes started by a student willing to share his or her experience, or by the teacher requesting to hear such experience with the presented topic. Even in our collected data there were children who initiated a new sub-theme in dialogical episode (often after the pre-service teacher's pause in speech):

*I saw once a wild boar. Tracks!*

*My sister found eggs on our tree that were not cracked, and she found a nest there.*

*I saw a real stork.*

These initiations are typically related to the children's experiences in science education topics that awakened their interest without the need for external motivation. Every teacher should appreciate initiations of children telling their own experiences and develop them in further discussion. The opportunity to watch the communication repeatedly recorded on video was valuable for the pre-service teachers in these cases. Only then they noted, for example, the significance of the word "real" in the statement of the child, which meant for them information about the perception of the uniqueness of this experience when a child living in a city could observe real animal in nature.

The proof of sharing experiences and associations for the child in interactions with a teacher can be found in the recorded exchanges where the child repeats his or her perception until the pre-service teacher finally pays attention.

*Learning center for the development of mathematical operations. Children create simple origami animals and so get to know the basic geometric shapes.*
*Child: (waving her origami) It looks a bit like a dragon.*
*PT (observes another child, who is taking longer time) Yes, yes, you're doing it right.*
*Child: (vehemently) It looks a bit like a dragon!!*

4.1.2   The child wants to introduce a new topic

In their written reflections, pre-service teachers often positively evaluated themselves for being able to spontaneously respond and accept the child's new topic in communication when the child wanted to introduce a new initiative. *"I enjoy adjusting the topic of communication to the one preferred by my children; I'm able to react promptly."* The teacher should perceive linking of discussed educational content to children's experiences as desirable also in those cases where the communication takes place, at least for a while, under the baton of the child.

Even when the pre-service teacher tries to start a discussion with the theme of nature in spring, the child comes with his own theme – an important experience from that day: "*Today, my daddy spilled water on me when he woke me up".* If the pre-service teacher applied an approach corresponding to the third identified interaction pattern by Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012), she could have developed communication about the child's experience for a while and then effortlessly move back to the intended educational content. In most cases, however, pre-service teachers feel tied to the prepared topic even in a morning community circle that serves as an introduction to the topic of the day.

4.1.3   The child wants to express disagreement or doubt

We can identify situations perceived as difficult by pre-service teachers in their reflections when the communication goes in a different direction than expected. It happens when a child makes a protest about the prepared activities: "*This is…these riddles are too easy".* The child thus enters communication by naming a weak part in the pre-service teacher's preparation, which is a sensitive issue for the teacher, of course, one which usually paralyses the subsequent discussion development. None of the pre-service teachers in our research thought to take advantage of the active participation of the child.

Teachers repeatedly face a lack of time as they try to cover most of the educational areas in the curriculum, and this causes another barrier for children's initiations in mutual communication.

*Based on discovered clues, children solve a "detective story"- they search for a place where the plush class mascot is hidden. The final discussion is strongly controlled by a group of pre-service teachers because the previous activities lasted much longer than expected. Although children have different views on possible solutions, pre-service teachers lead them quickly to the correct version of the solution.*
*PT: So, if everyone agrees with the bathroom, line up at the end of the carpet (pointing at the place).*
*(Children start running there.)*
*Child: Hey, I didn't agree with the bathroom.*
*PT: (hesitantly looks at the child, then she quickly moves to the rest of the group by the bathroom) Slowly... Is it in the bathroom? Nobody can run here. Everyone goes there*

*calmly. Now, slowly look to see if it really is in the bathroom. (2s) And careful, let's not frighten him.*

### 4.1.4   The child needs help

Children often need help with a problem, looking for the teacher's support, but they must trust the teacher. Pre-service teachers expressed uncertainty in their reflections as they often must balance between the "strict teacher" and a "friend". This is a usual dilemma for beginning teachers. They feel better and relaxed in the role of a friend; they discover that children then prefer to contact them spontaneously. At the same time, however, they have concerns confirmed by the experience of children losing the established behavior boundaries. This nervousness may be a reason for inappropriate reactions of pre-service teachers when they evaluate the child's initiation only from the point of view of self-doubt because the planned activities are not successful.

*Children and the pre-service teacher sit around two tables with prepared activities.*
*Child: What should I do?*
*PT: (mildly angry) If you do not like it here, go to another table.*
*Child: (surprised and offended) But I want to stay here!*

### 4.1.5   The child wants to persuade the teacher to change the activity

Student teachers reflect on this experience often as a weakness which arises from a loving relationship with the children. *"I really like my children, so they occasionally manage to persuade me, and then I give up on what I wanted to do. For example, I planned to go out with the aim to observe something but the kids made sad eyes and persuaded me to go to the garden just because they like it there more."* This kind of initiations overlap the previous cases of concrete communication utterances. Children's initiations are moving towards an active influence on the events in the kindergarten; they test their ability to influence the teacher to achieve their demands. Pre-service teachers re-evaluate the situation as a failure, as the loss of boundaries that should remain firmly in the hands of teachers: *"Children were sometimes able to trick and beg me, and I gave way and allowed what they wanted".*

### *4.2   The teacher's turn in initiated communication*

We observed two different organizational forms that were related to the fact that the video recordings were taken during targeted educational activities between pre-service teachers and children in kindergarten. The first form was based on the joint work of all the children and their teacher – the children sat in a circle on the carpet-defined tags. This form is one of the most common in the morning section of the teacher's work with children in the kindergarten on the topic specified in the weekly training plan. This arrangement seems to be natural for preschool conditions; however, teachers are limited by the children's ability to keep attention and stay in one place without moving. This arrangement (incorrectly referred to as "community circle" in Czech kindergartens) rather serves to prepare children for education in primary school. The organizational form proved to be a crucial factor in creating a barrier to children's initiations, and it is especially limiting the subsequent reactions of pre-service teachers. In addition to identifying situations where the child decides to initiate communication, we focused also on pre-service teachers' strategies when reacting to the children's initiative.

4.2.1   The teacher's control

The teacher's dominance (as the teacher is usually the main communicator who controls the communication in the school environment) does not provide enough opportunities for children to participate in communication spontaneously; rather, the children's spontaneity gets suppressed over time. Children adapt to dialogical situations in which they may speak only if they are asked to. Interactions between teachers and children in kindergarten are rich in encouragement and praise, but otherwise they are unfortunately too concise. These interactions are often based on the teacher's closed question and the subsequent correct responses by the children (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012). We find little support of teachers for children's efforts to develop the topic of communication; teachers' strategies are focused on specific outputs (Suchodoletz et al., 2014).

*PT: Now we will explain why this is so.*

*Child: I know why.*

*PT: (Just a quick smile and she begins with the explanation).*

4.2.2   Empty reverberation

The term reverberation or echo means merely a response that does not develop the ongoing communication. It describes the types of teacher responses to students' answers in instructional communication across levels of education (Gavora, 2005). A review of the child's answer might be useful if the teacher wants to get time for further reaction or suggests that the answer may not be correct, or if the teacher is caught off guard by an unexpected answer. The term "empty echo" in our case tries to suggest that the pre-service teachers in our data really only repeated the child's utterances without developing it further. This kind of a teacher's reaction cannot produce any helpful information for the communication participants.

*Child: I know it.*

*PT: (silence)*

*Child: I still know it!*

*PT: Well, you see, you still know it.*

4.2.3   Heard response

Not all the observed dialogical episodes pointed to undesirable teacher's strategies. The interactions accounting for release of the communication by the teacher also appeared in our data material. *"I like when children react differently than I expect. Then we have a germ of an unusual situation or conversation, which I can also go on."* Creativity in communication with the child and especially awareness of mutual benefits arising from communication, so teacher and child become true partners, are important steps on the road to promote child-centered teaching practice.

*Children sitting at the table where they are painting a picture with an Easter theme based on the story that they read before. The pre-service teacher is leading them to talk about their products.*

*Child: Alright. And Bob is climbing on these eggs. (She describes what the painted rabbit on her picture is doing.)*

*PT: Really? Why is he climbing there?*

*Child: I don't know. Perhaps he thinks that it's his chow.*

*PT: Oh, and what does Bob like to eat?*

*Child: Well… um…he eats baby carrots.*

## 5   Discussion and conclusions

The effectiveness of an instructional procedure can be assessed in terms of analyzing communicative practices (Poimenidou & Christidou, 2010). In compliance with reality-reflecting research strategies with focus on the child as an active communication participant, we tried to propose some views on how exactly children initiate communication in kindergartens.

The selected research sample consists of pre-service teachers, who represent only a partial sample of potential interactions in the kindergarten environment. Thus, to some teachers the findings apply only partially in practice; with other teachers, we could possibly expand our research even deeper. This choice to only use a partial sample reflects both practicality and the need to improve the competences of future teachers through recording their unscripted interactions with children. Many captured teacher-child interactions in the kindergarten in which we sought the initiation of a child, show unfortunately that teacher dominance is manifested as early as on preschool level, and that it also concerns pre-service teachers who are still preparing for the role of a teacher.

Authoritative communication controlled mostly by a teacher affects the possible participation of the child. The child, however, wants to become an active communicator. Data obtained in our research point to five circumstances that lead to the child's decision to enter the communication, even when the communication is managed by the pre-service teacher on the basis of prepared scenario concerning educational tasks. We can still notice spontaneity in children's speech when they introduce their own topic in communication. Sometimes, they do not hesitate to comment on the activity or course of work if they have objections. And it is certainly desirable that children have the opportunity to initiate a communication sequence related to their own experiences with the topic being discussed within the educational activities.

Children need teachers who are sensitive to their initiations (Myhill, 2006) – teachers who stop racing against time and offer space for children to initiate the communication. They need teachers who listen to children and gradually become able to integrate the requirements of the curriculum and children's need to learn with by the co-construction of knowledge, to apply communication patterns supporting children's initiations as presented by Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012). The teacher needs to know his or her own strategy in the role of a communication partner of a child in the kindergarten. Pre-service teachers (as well as already practicing teachers) can benefit from video recordings of interactions with a child because they are not able to observe the whole context of interactions while they are happening. Syslová and Horňáčková (2014) deal with the perspective of intentional reflection of future practitioners in kindergartens. The results of their research supported the need to introduce a systematic development of reflection as early as during the undergraduate education of kindergarten teachers at pedagogical faculties. Our records show a certain range of responses of future teachers to children's initiation in interaction during educational activities. Besides evidence of releasing communication in terms of teacher management, less suitable kinds of responses to children's initiation occur. The teachers are not able to give up control over the ongoing communication.

Practitioners in kindergarten could argue that there is not enough space to devote to each child's initiation in a dialogue with the standard number of children per teacher in one kindergarten class. Above all, this limitation concerns learning situations during the whole class teaching. But still, even during such a "power play", we can at least listen

and start with the suppression of needs to be the largely dominant communicator, and so overcome barriers of being focused solely on the transmission of knowledge.

One of the greatest pleasures of working with young children is to see their fascination by and eagerness for communication of many kinds. We owe them not to destroy or damage this faculty and to cultivate it (Bruce, 2004, p. 69). If we want to have students at primary and secondary levels of education with developed life skills and the ability to discuss and argue, we need to offer such a manner of communication as early as at kindergartens.

## References

Bruce, T. (2004). *Developing learning in early childhood*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Gavora, P. (2005). *Učiteľ a žák v komunikaci.* Brno: Paido.

Goh, S. S., Yamauchi, L. A., & Ratliffe, K. T. (2012). Educator's perspectives on instructional conversations in preschool settings. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *40*(5), 305-314.

Makišová, A. (2010). Verbálna a neverbálna komunikácia v materskej škole. *Annual Review of the Faculty of Philosophy/Godisnjak Filozofskog Fakulteta, 35*(2), 421-428.

Mareš, J. (2016). Zkoumání procesů a struktur ve výukové komunikaci: historie a současnost. *Pedagogika, 66*(3), 250-289.

McCroskey, J. C., Richmond, V. P., & McCroskey, L. L. (2005). *An introduction to communication in the classroom. The role of communication in teaching and training.* Pearson.

Molinari, L., & Mameli, C. (2015). Triadické interakce ve výukové komunikaci. *Studia paedagogica*, *20*(3), 7-19.

Muhonen, H., Rasku-Puttonen, H., Pakarinen, E. Poikkeus, A.M., & Lerkannen, M. K. (2017). Knowledge-building patterns in educational dialogue. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 81, 25-37.

Myhill, D. (2006). Talk, talk, talk: teaching and learning in whole class discourse. *Research Papers in Education*, *21*(1), 19-41.

Petrová, Z. (2013). *Prax v učiteľskom vzdelávaní. K otázkam praktickej prípravy učiteľov v študijnom programe Predškolská a elementárna pedagogika*. Trnava: Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis.

Poimenidou, M., & Christidou V. (2010). Communication practices and the construction of meaning: Science activities in the kindergarten. *Creative Education*, 2, 81-92.

Průcha, J. et al. (2016). *Předškolní dítě a svět vzdělávání. Přehled teorie, praxe a výzkumných poznatků*. Praha: Wolters Kluwer.

Rasku-Puttonen, H., Lerkkanen, M. K., Poikkeus, A. M., & Siekkinen, M. (2012). Dialogical patterns of interaction in pre-school classrooms. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 53, 138-149.

Sakellariou, M., & Rentzou, K. (2012). Cypriot pre-service kindergarten teachers' beliefs and intensions about importance of teacher/child interactions. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39, 413-420.

Samuhelová, M. (1988). Štruktúry v pedagogickej komunikácii. In P. Gavora et al., *Pedagogická komunikácia v základnej škole* (pp. 55-73). Bratislava: Veda.

Scott, P. H., Mortimer, E. F., & Aguiar, O. G. (2006). The tension between authoritative and dialogic discourse: A fundamental characteristics of meaning making

interactions in high school science lessons. *Science Education*, *90*(4), 605-632.

Sinclair, J., & Coulthard, M. (1975). *Towards an analysis of discourse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R., & Bell, D. (2002). *Researching effective pedagogy in the early years*. Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford. Retrieved from http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4650/1/RR356.pdf

Suchodoletz, von A., Fäsche, A., Gunzenhauser, C., & Hamre, B. K. (2014). A typical morning in preschool: Observations of teacher – child interactions in German preschools. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29, 509-519.

Syslová, Z., & Horňáčková, V. (2014). Kvalita reflexe v profesním myšlení učitelek mateřských škol. *Pedagogická orientace*, *24*(4), 535-561.

Vujičíc, L., & Miktek, M. (2014). Children's perspective in play: Documenting the educational process. *Croatian Journal of Education*, *16*(1), 143-159.

Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B., & Jackson, D. D. (2011). *Pragmatika lidské komunikace: interakční vzorce, patologie a paradoxy* (2nd revised ed.). Brno: Newton Books.

# Physical Games as a Means of Developing Children's Social Skills in Kindergarten

*Viktor Pacholík – Martina Nedělová**

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* The text presents the results of a study conducted in the years 2015 - 2016. The objective of the study was to examine a programme of physical activities aimed at developing children's social skills.
*Methods:* The research was conducted in a kindergarten. This was a deliberate choice on the basis of availability. The experimental group comprised of 24 children, the control group comprised of 11 children. A 12-lessons programme of physical activities was applied, with a frequency of 1 lesson per week. Entry and exit measurements were taken before the commencement of the programme and after its end, with the help of structured observation, CATO projective tests and interviews with teachers. The data were processed by means of a descriptive statistics level by comparing the average levels. The achieved changes in the level of social skills were subsequently displayed through percentage values.
*Results:* The results indicate that physical activities have a positive effect on the development of children's social skills. Although the changes are not significant, the experimental group recorded greater changes than the control group in all the evaluated areas; in terms of the overall results, it was actually more than twofold.
*Discussion:* The results cannot be generalized. The results are only valid for our group of children. The reason is the insufficient size of the research sample.
*Limitations:* A significantly limiting factor showed to be the low number of children in the control group. This caused a lack of balance between the two groups in terms of the number of children and their entry level. The length of the intervention program was another limit.
*Conclusions:* Despite the limits of the study, the authors view the results as positive. The reason is the improvement in all the children's social skills in all the monitored areas, and the more than twofold improvement by the experimental groups compared to the control group.

**Key words:** preschool child, kindergarten, physical activities, psychomotor games, social skills.

## 1 Introduction

The kindergarten provides an environment in which the child spends a large part of their day. The child normally spends seven to eight hours in this environment. During this time, children must function according to the rules of the kindergarten and the specific

---
* Viktor Pacholík, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; pacholik@fhs.utb.cz
  Martina Nedělová, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; m_nedelova@fhs.utb.cz

class which they attend. Children are in regular contact with other children and pedagogues, so they get into many situations which they must learn to handle, resolve or prevent. If we think of the openness and guileless sincerity of children at this age, it is evident that many situations which occur among children can be very unpleasant, and a child's reactions may seem harsh to another child. Life in the kindergarten, and the child's social contacts with other children and the teacher, can arouse intense emotions. If these emotions are negative, the associated experiences can reflect not only in the child's relationship with other children in the kindergarten, but also with the kindergarten as a whole.

The authors of the Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education (hereinafter FEP; Splavcová, Šmelová, Kropáčková, & Syslová, 2016) are also aware of this fact. Figure 1 shows the defined key competencies which children should achieve in preschool education. It is evident that the social area assumes an important place among them.
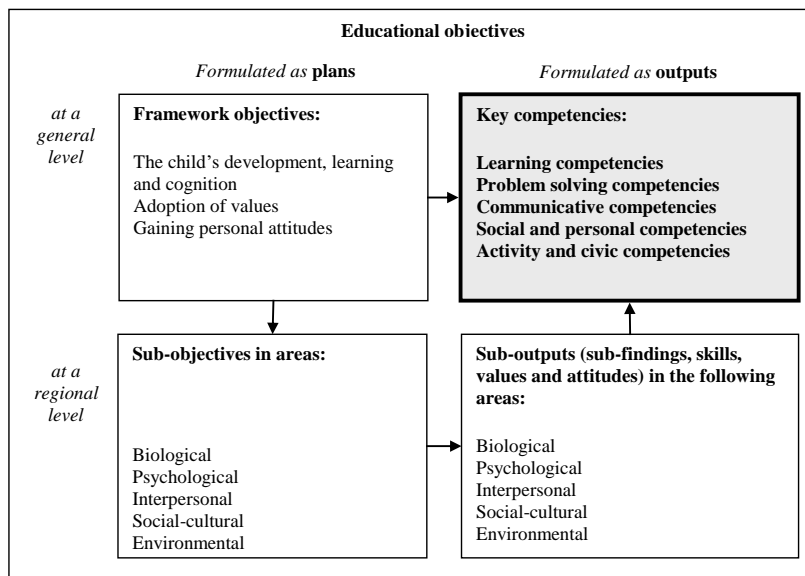


*Figure 1.* System of objectives in the FEP (Splavcová, Šmelová, Kropáčková, & Syslová, 2016, p. 9).

During their work in the academic environment, the authors of this paper discuss various themes with the teachers, including the issue of developing children's social skills. In these interviews, the teachers often mention that, in the effort to fulfil all the objectives stipulated by the FEP (Splavcová, Šmelová, Kropáčková, & Syslová, 2016) and all their other work obligations, they do not have sufficient time to apply the specific processes (activities) focused on developing the social skills of children. That is why they are usually limited to resolving conflicts which have arisen, and they try to reinforce appropriate behavioural models in the children, mainly in relation to these situations. However, we do not regard that as sufficient. The authors believe that targeted development is necessary, rather than random action based mainly on conflict resolution.

The second problem which we encounter with the teachers is their inner conviction that they are not sufficiently prepared for the targeted development of children's social skills. They complain about insufficient theoretical knowledge of these areas, and they also believe that they are not capable of leading and directing such activities, or reacting suitably to situations which can arise during them.

This led the authors to the idea of offering the pedagogues activities whose character supports the development of children's social skills, but which at the same time are not demanding in terms of time, space or specific aids and equipment, and which the pedagogue can manage with the abilities and skills that they normally apply during their everyday teaching.

*1.1 Terminological definition*

In connection with the development of a person's social aspect, we encounter considerable inconsistencies in the use and definition of terms. The most frequently used terms in this context include competence and skill.

Competences are normally perceived as a term superior to social skills. Průcha, Walterová and Mareš (2009, p. 129) understand competence as *"the ability, skill, and capability to successfully realize certain activities and resolve certain tasks, particularly in work and other life situations"*. This concept perceives competence and skill as synonyms. However, in specialized literature, we can encounter various interpretations. Basically, we can observe three approaches to understanding social competences:

- Authors who perceive social competences as effective social behaviour, and view social competences as the ability to successfully and appropriately choose and implement one's interpersonal objectives (compare with Guralnick, 1990). The success of these strategies is then usually put in the context of popularity, involvement in the group, and other people's positive evaluations.
- Other authors understand social competences as the cognitive processing of social information. In this sense, Rubin and Rose-Krasnor (1992) define social competence as the ability to achieve personal objectives in social interactions, while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships with others over time and across situations. Their model of processing social information is formed by the following steps:
  1. Selection of social objectives;
  2. Interpretation of context;
  3. Finding or creation of possible strategies;
  4. Selection of strategy;
  5. Evaluation of the strategy's results.
- The last concept perceives social competences as a set of social skills. In this sense, social skills are perceived as *"prerequisites for adequate social interaction and communication, gained by learning"* (Gillernová, Krejčová, Horáková Hoskovcová, Šírová, & Štětovská, 2012, p. 32). Průcha, Walterová and Mareš (2009, p. 59) state that although the term "skill" is one of the basic concepts of pedagogy, it has still not been sufficiently clarified. They also present a general definition, according to which it means *"a person's ability to perform a certain activity"* (2009, p. 59). Švec (1998) understands skill as a subject's capability to resolve task and problem situations, which manifests itself by observable activity, and which is saturated with abilities, experiences, learning styles, motives and other variables.

Caldarella and Merrell (1997) identified five dimensions of social skills:
- dimension of peer relationships;
- dimension of self-regulating mechanisms;
- dimension of skills associated with education and school attendance;
- dimension of mutual harmony;
- dimension of the skills of asserting oneself in interactions with others.

Gillernová et al. (2012) point to the fact that skills relating to the dimension of mutual harmony actually express skills connected with cooperation in many respects.

We believe that one must thoroughly distinguish between the terms social skills and social competences. After all, gaining a certain skill does not necessarily mean that it is effectively utilized. Thus, we understand "skill" more as the ability to realize a certain behavioural model. However, this can occur schematically, according to a learned pattern, without any change. On the contrary, the term "competence" indicates a kind of evaluation standpoint, and expresses the ability to adequately use specific skills in contact with others (Cook, Gresham, Kern, Barreras, Thornton, & Crews, 2008). However, in this text, we will deal mainly with children's observable behaviour in all kinds of social situations. We will not deal with the children's ability to effectively choose and utilize these skills. That is why, in accordance with many authors (compare with Cook et al., 2008; Čáp, 1997), the term "skills" will be used in this text in connection with the child population.

## 1.2 Development of social skills

As indicated above, the development of social skills in preschool children should be an integral part of a kindergarten teacher's work. The targeted and systematic development of the child's basic social skills already occurs during the preschool period. Some skills are based on general social rules. Greeting people and saying "please" or "thank you" should be a normal part of a child's behaviour before attending a primary school. However, other areas of the child's social behaviour must also be developed. Among these, Bednářová and Šmardová (2011) mainly rank:
- communication (verbal and non-verbal);
- appropriate reactions to new situations;
- adaptation to a new environment;
- understanding own feelings and self-control;
- understanding other people's emotions and behaviour; and
- objective self-concept and self-evaluation.

The experiences of pedagogues and many experts show that a one-time inclusion of a certain exercise or block of activities is not sufficient for an effective influence on the child's social area (compare with Gillernová et al., 2012, Hermochová, 2005, Hermochová & Vaňková, 2014, Mohauptová, 2009). Regular meetings of a shorter duration seem to be optimal. Gillernová et al. (2012) see the main advantage in a more long-term dosing, and the possibility of gradually including the newly-developed skills in real social situations. However, an essential condition for the successful training of social skills is the feeling of psychological security. Fulfilling these conditions allows participants to be sufficiently open and sincere. However, it is in this very condition that we see a considerable risk in a children's collective. Preschool children are naturally sincere, and cannot think through the impacts of their behaviour. That is why certain utterances by children, and reactions to others, can seem harsh, and can arouse fear of

open, sincere speech in the other child. That is why we consider it appropriate to use playful forms, whose character supports children's spontaneity and natural behaviour.

### 1.3 Social skills and physical games

In our work, we tended towards physical games. The starting point is the assumption that the concept of physical activities offers sufficient opportunities for developing the child's social skills, and building a healthy social group within the class. They usually take the form of a game, and so are engaging and entertaining for the child. The unconventionality of many activities and new aids with which the child can work and which enliven normal PE-oriented activities, also have a motivating effect.

Playful activities and unconventional aids (tools and equipment) support children's spontaneity, allowing the child to express themselves naturally while unintentionally experiencing the joy of movement, as well as the many different emotions evoked by physical activity. Thus, they offer the child the opportunity to become aware of their own emotions and reactions and orient themselves in them, thereby making work with their own experiences more effective. Orientation in oneself is an essential basis for getting to know and understanding others. *"Most physical activities and games consist of playing together which is why the expected outputs formulated in the interpersonal area can be realized in them"* (Dvořáková, 2011, p. 24). At the same time, physical activities are considerably variable in their demands on spatial, time and material conditions. That is why we believe that they can be integrated into the appropriate parts of pedagogical work, such as for example during physical education times, outdoor stays, PE lessons etc., completely without coercion and without significant time or other requirements.

Physical activities, particularly from the area of psychomotor games, offer a range of themes for developing children's social skills in kindergartens. Psychomotorics, as a system of physical activities aimed at enjoyment (Blahutková, 2003) is an optimal means of utilizing movement and the evoked emotions for deeper self-knowledge, but also of coping with intense emotions, desires and all kinds of conflicts among children. Adamírová (2006) defines "psychomotorics" as responsible training by movement. Under natural conditions, a child penetrates deeper into their experiences, tendencies and normal reactions, and learns to deal with them. However, they also get to know the reactions of others which provides them with valuable feedback in relation to their behaviour. Furthermore, the conditions of devising psychomotor activities, which Zimmer sets forth, create a suitable psycho-social environment for the development of social skills. According to Zimmer (2012), the child should, first and foremost:

- experience itself as a participant in the action;
- be able to relate successes and failures to themselves;
- create their own scale of values, and orient their own behaviour towards them;
- assume responsibility for their own actions;
- familiarize themselves with alternatives to disruptive forms of behaviour, and incorporate them into their own conduct.

To fulfil these plans, one can use all kinds of aids, tools and equipment, e.g. a psychomotor parachute, pedal walker, balance platform, skipping ropes, cables, skittles etc., by means of which children provide basic assistance to one another. Thus, they learn to sensitively perceive each other via verbal and non-verbal communication, develop empathy and own responsibility, and build a relationship of mutual trust among themselves. Apart from individual use (or use in pairs), these aids enable a number of

group activities. In some cases, however, it is a quite financially demanding equipment which a normal kindergarten can only afford in exceptional cases. However, a system of psychomotor activities offers a rich scale of activities and games with regularly available items (balls, skipping ropes, construction sets with large building blocks, benches etc.), objects of everyday use (PET bottle lids, yoghurt tubs, pegs), or alternatively completely without aids. Therefore, these activities become easily accessible to every kindergarten.

## 2  Methodology of the research

2.1  General background of research

In 2015 - 2016, the authors of this paper conducted research focused on the development of preschool children's social skills by physical activities. The research took place within the framework of the IGA (IGA/FHS/2015/10 Support for the Building of Social Relationships in the Children's Collective via Physical Activities) project at Tomas Bata University in Zlín. The main objective of the research was to examine the programme of physical activities from the area of psychomotor activities, and its effect on the development of the child's social skills in the kindergarten environment. Given the character and objectives of the research, a quasi-experiment design was chosen.

The original assumption was that the duration of the experiment would be 6 months. However, due to some fundamental changes in the project, there was a considerable delay. The research survey itself only took place in the last quarter of the 2015/2016 school year, and had to be completed by the end of the school year. Thus, the length of realization of the intervention programme had to be shortened to just 12 lessons, with a frequency of 1 lesson per week and lesson duration of 90 - 120 minutes. The finalisation of the survey shortly before summer holidays led to a significant reduction in the number of children in the control group. Thus, the shortening of the experiment and the date of its completion proved to be a considerable limit.

*2.2  Research sample*

The research was realized in a kindergarten. This was a deliberate choice on the basis of availability. The selected kindergarten had two classes of children 5 - 6 years of age. This was a major advantage which was utilized when compiling the experimental and control groups. The fact that all the children from both groups attended the same kindergarten guaranteed a very similar environment, material resources and overall institutional philosophy. Therefore, it was possible to eliminate one of the core disruptive variables, consisting of the institution's different effect on children from the experimental group and children from the control group. Of course, despite the considerable similarity of these conditions, one must be aware of the different approaches by the teachers in the two classes.

The plan was to work with all the children in both classes, i.e. 28 children in the experimental group and 29 children in the control group. However, as a result of the changes in the length and timing of the experiment described above, there was a reduction in the number of children. The research could only include children which underwent the entry and exit measurement and, in the case of the experimental group, also attended most of the lessons in the intervention programme. However, the conclusion of the research survey shortly before the holidays meant that, at the time of the exit survey, some of the children no longer attended the kindergarten. Thus, for these children, the exit survey could not be realized. This led to a considerable reduction in the

number of children in the control group. The final numbers of the children are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Numbers of children in the experimental and control groups*

|  | *Control Group* | *Experimental Group* |
| --- | --- | --- |
| *Girls* | 6 | 9 |
| *Boys* | 5 | 15 |

As the research involved minors, written informed consent had to be obtained from parents and legal representatives. After personal talks with the school management and the teachers in the classes involved, oral consent was also obtained from the kindergarten.

*2.3 Instrument and procedures*
Before applying the intervention programme, and after its completion, entry and exit measurements were realized using the following methods:
- Structured observation;
- CATO;
- Unstructured interview.

The main method for assessing the children's social skills was structured observation. An observation record sheet was created for the needs of the research. The authors were led to create their own observation structure by the fact that the available Czech assessment scales and similar methods are intended primarily for pedagogues in practice. That is why they place emphasis on the simplicity and speed of the evaluation; they usually work with a three-point social skill evaluation scale (copes - copes with difficulties/with help - does not cope). However, such an assessment is too wide for research purposes, and does not sufficiently discern the child's actual level.

The observation structure and evaluated items were based on tools with a similar focus (compare with Bednářová & Šmardová, 2011). The evaluation was based on 7 categories:
- Work, rules, respect towards authority;
- Targeted behaviour, self-reflection;
- Regulation of emotions;
- Communication;
- Openness towards people;
- Peer relationships;
- Cooperation.

Each category included 5 – 6 items (the child's specific manifestations) which were evaluated on a 0 (does not cope, does not occur) to 5 (copes without difficulties, manifests to a sufficient extent) scale. This relatively fine scale allowed the recording of even a partial improvement or deterioration by the child in a certain behavioural manifestation. The total number of points that could be obtained was 190. In the individual categories, it was 30 (in the case of the 5-item category) or 35 (in the case of the 6-item category).

We must mention that this is the first version of the observation record sheet, which will be further developed and examined more thoroughly. Thus, in terms of the creation of this tool, this is actually a pilot study, whose data will be used not only for the purposes of the study, but also for further increasing this tool's quality.

The CATO method belongs among projective tests. The objective is to *"gain as much information as possible about the interpersonal relationship in the child's family, and about situations and relationships outside the family which the child regularly experiences and which have a certain significance for him"* (Svoboda, Krejčířová, & Vágnerová, 2001, p. 253). In accordance with the authors' claim that, while working with this method, one can only focus on certain issues (Boš & Vágnerová, 2012), we placed emphasis primarily on the kindergarten environment (relationships with peers, perception of the teacher's authority etc.), and we also touched relationships in the family marginally, in order to illustrate and better understand the child's attitudes.

The essence of the test is working with images (1 introductory - initiation and 14 thematic), which depict a general, unspecified situation. The child is asked to describe the image, and try to interpret the situation in it. With the help of the pre-induced identification with one of the child characters in the image, the child's actual attitudes, experiences and social relationships are expected to be reflected in their interpretation of it (the projection principle).

The interview with the child took place (just like the administration of other methods) individually, away from the other children in the class. It focused on the child's subjective perception of the social environment of the class and kindergarten. The child's relationships with other children (the class as a whole) and some mutual relationships between specific children (friends, "enemies") were analysed. The interview also focused on the area of relationships with the teacher and other kindergarten workers.

The obtained interviews were not evaluated independently; they served primarily as a supplement to the previous methods for a better understanding of the situations and conditions under which the child moves in the school and in its family.

### 2.4 Data analysis

This section focuses only on the data gained by observation. The data were processed mainly on a descriptive level, as the size of the control group does not allow a statistical verification to be performed. Thus, the results were evaluated on the basis of a rough score obtained in individual items and categories. The overall score, obtained by adding up the points in all the evaluated items, was also evaluated. To evaluate the obtained data, we worked with the average numbers of obtained points for variously defined groups. The respondents were divided into groups according to the membership in the experimental or control group. However, the gender of respondents was also taken into consideration.

Based on the maximum number of points which could be obtained, the rough score was converted into a percentage. The percentage expression enabled a better assessment of the changes which occurred during the experiment. When assessing the achieved changes, the coefficient of determination, which *"determines the extent to which the action of an independent variable influences the variability of a dependent variable"* (Mareš, Rabušic, & Soukup, 2015, p. 223), was also taken into consideration.

## 3   Results and discussion

The results pointed to some typical differences in the general level of social skills between boys and girls (Figure 2). In terms of the overall results, the girls achieved better results than the boys, both at the start of the research survey and at the end. During the exit survey, the boys actually did not even reach the girls' initial level. This finding is in not surprising, as the research points to the generally better social skills of girls and women compared to boys and men (compare with Guralnick, 1990; Pohl, Bender, & Lachmann, 2005; Anme et al., 2010; Villa & Del Prette, 2013). However, the boys showed a greater improvement in the area of social skills then the girls. This result does not take into consideration the division of the children into experimental and control groups, but only into the group of boys and the group of girls across the entire research group. The reasons can be seen in the previous finding: boys achieved generally worse results, so the potential for development was also greater in boys than in girls. Furthermore, some of the girls from the experimental group proved as shy, which was not observed with the boys (this is the authors' subjective view, not a fact verified by the research study). This may have been the reason for the lower openness towards the influences in effect. Thus, with these girls, one could expect a lower level of social skill development, which a more detailed analysis of these girls' individual results confirmed.
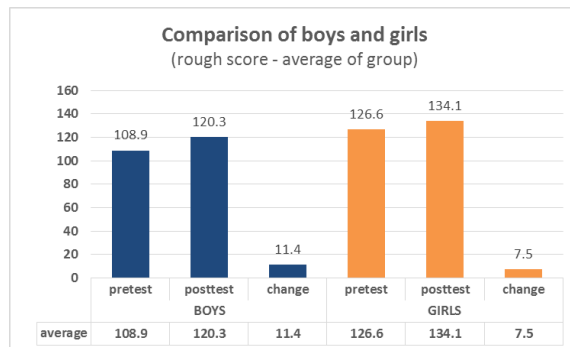


*Figure 2*. Comparison of the boys' and girls' results.

Furthermore, attention will be devoted to observing the changes in the control and experimental groups. Table 2 presents the average changes in the rough score in the pre-test and post-test in the control and experimental groups. Although the changes are not significant, it is necessary to draw attention to some rather important moments. In each of the monitored areas, a greater shift was recorded in the experimental group than in the control group. This difference was most significant in the area of cooperation. This is connected with another interesting finding: cooperation is the only area in which we could see worsening, rather than improvement in the results, and this was in the control group (an average deterioration of 0.7 points). A more detailed examination of individual children's results showed that the deterioration in the control group was caused by the significant deterioration of one boy. It can be assumed that situational influences played a significant role as the teacher did not mention such manifestations in the boy's behaviour in the subsequent interview. However, the boy could no longer be repeatedly observed. At the same time, in such a small sample, the boy's results could not be

excluded from the analysis. However, a core finding arising from the analysis can be considered to be the more than twofold improvement by the experimental group compared to the control group in terms of the overall results. While an average shift of 5.4 points was recorded in the control group, in the experimental group it was 11.8 points. Therefore, the experimental group showed a 6.4 points higher improvement in average than the control group. Subsequently, the coefficient of determination was calculated, which showed that 26.2% of the changes can be explained by the effect of the experiment, which can be regarded as a relatively large effect. The children's gender also had an effect on the changes in the score, as the coefficient of determination also shows that, for the boys, as much as 27.9% of the achieved changes can be explained by the effect of the experiment, while for the girls it is only 23.4%.

Table 2

*Differences in the point gain in the pre-test and post-test in the control and experimental groups (average number of points per group)*

|  | Control | | Experimental | | Difference | Coefficient Determination |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | *Average* | *SD* | *Average* | *SD* | *Averages* | *(%)* |
| Work, rules, authority | 0.8 | 0.9 | 1.3 | 1.1 | 0.5 | 5.4 |
| Targeted behaviour, self-reflection | 1.0 | 0.6 | 1.5 | 1.1 | 0.5 | 5.9 |
| Regulation of emotions | 1.0 | 1.1 | 1.5 | 1.1 | 0.5 | 5.5 |
| Peer relationships | 1.1 | 0.8 | 1.7 | 2.7 | 0.6 | 1.4 |
| Communication | 1.3 | 0.5 | 2.0 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 7.6 |
| Openness towards people | 0.9 | 0.7 | 1.7 | 1.3 | 0.8 | 9.9 |
| Cooperation | -0.7 | 4.8 | 2.0 | 3.2 | 2.8 | 11 |
| Overall change in score | 5.4 | 5.6 | 11.8 | 4.9 | 6.4 | 26.2 |

The rough score was then converted to a percentage (always of the maximum number of points which could be obtained in the given category). The results show that in both groups, there was an improvement in all areas, except cooperation. Only the boys from the control group recorded a deterioration of the results in this area, of 9.6%, which also affected the overall results of the control group in the area of cooperation (a deterioration of 2.9 %). The reasons were already discussed in the previous paragraph. In all categories, there was a more significant improvement in the experimental groups than in the control group. The only case where there was an improvement in the control group compared to the experimental group was the area of communication, in which the girls in the control group achieved an improvement of 3.9%, while the girls in the experimental group achieved an improvement of only 3.3%. At this point, we should once again mention the shyness and bashfulness of some of the girls in the experimental group, as was indicated above. Here, too, a more thorough analysis of the individual children's results indicates a certain relationship between the girls' shyness and the score achieved in the area of communication. However, given the more significant improvement by the boys in the experimental group (by 8.4%), this was not reflected

very much in the experimental group's overall results, which thus improved by 2.3% more than the control group in communication, too. There was a more significant improvement among the boys than among the girls in almost all areas. An exception is formed by the experimental group in the area of peer relationships, in which the girls achieved an improvement of 7.4%, while the boys achieved an improvement of only 4.4%. The complete results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*Average improvement by boys and girls in the control and experimental groups (in % of the maximum possible point gain in the given category)*

|  | *BOYS* | | | *GIRLS* | | | *TOTAL* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Control | Experimental | Total | Control | Experimental | Total | Control | Experimental |
| Work, rules, authority | 5.6 | 6.4 | 6.2 | 1.3 | 3.6 | 2.7 | 3.3 | 5.3 |
| Targeted behaviour, self-reflection | 4.0 | 6.2 | 5.7 | 2.8 | 3.0 | 2.9 | 3.3 | 5.0 |
| Regulation of emotions | 4.8 | 6.7 | 6.2 | 3.3 | 5.3 | 4.5 | 4.0 | 6.2 |
| Communication | 4.7 | 8.4 | 7.5 | 3.9 | 3.3 | 3.6 | 4.2 | 6.5 |
| Openness towards people | 4.8 | 7.7 | 7.0 | 2.7 | 5.3 | 4.3 | 3.6 | 6.8 |
| Peer relationships | 5.3 | 4.4 | 4.7 | 2.2 | 7.4 | 5.3 | 3.6 | 5.6 |
| Cooperation | -9.6 | 9.6 | 4.8 | 2.7 | 5.8 | 4.5 | -2.9 | 8.2 |
| Overall change in score | 3.0 | 7.0 | 6.0 | 2.7 | 4.8 | 4.0 | 2.8 | 6.2 |

## 4   Conclusions

Children spend a large part of the day in the kindergarten environment. The entire time they enter interactions with other children and teachers, and possibly other adults. In such an environment, they get into all kinds of social situations which they initially cannot deal with independently. They do not yet have a sufficiently rich repertoire of social behaviour patterns, which is why they cannot react adequately to the situations which arise. Thus, it is understandable that personal-social development is perceived as one of the pedagogues' basic tasks in the Framework Educational Programme.

The article presents the results of a research study which focused on the options of developing preschool children's social skills. A research survey was realized in a selected kindergarten, whose objective was to examine a programme of physical games focused on the development of social skills. The starting point was the belief that physical activities and games offer a considerable potential for the development of social skills. An advantage is the children's spontaneity, simultaneously combined with the need to respect stipulated rules, the option of cooperative and competitive activities, and alternating experiences of success and disappointment. With the help of structured observation, CATO projective tests and an interview with the teacher, the entry level of social skills of the children in the experimental and control classes was ascertained, and, after the realization of the physical activity programme in the experimental class, the same methods were used in both classes to determine the exit level. We compared the data from the entry and exit surveys at a descriptive statistics level (rough score, changes between the initial and final level expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible number of points in the rough score).

The results confirm the findings of some previous studies, particularly in the area of gender differences in the level of social skills. The girls generally achieved better results than the boys during both the entry and exit surveys, but a more significant improvement was recorded among the boys. In both the control and experimental group there was an improvement in the observed level of social skills in all the evaluated areas, but the experimental group showed more significant changes than the control group. In terms of the overall results, the experimental group showed an improvement more than double that of the control group. On the basis of the calculated coefficient of determination, as much as 26% of the determined changes can be explained by the effect of the experiment.

We must point out some of the significant limits of this study. A significantly limiting factor showed to be the low number of children in the control group which was caused by unavoidable organizational changes during the course of the survey. This subsequently caused a lack of balance between the two groups in terms of the number of children and their entry level. Given the above-mentioned organizational changes, it was also necessary to significantly shorten the implemented programme of physical activities to 12 lessons (with a frequency of 1 lesson per week).

Despite the afore-mentioned limits, the authors view the results as positive. The reason is the improvement in all the children's social skills in all the monitored areas, and the more than twofold improvement by the experimental group compared to the control group.

## References

Adamírová, J. (2006). *Hravá a zábavná výchova pohybem: Základy psychomotoriky.* Praha: Komise zdravotní tělesné výchovy MR ČASPV.

Anme, T., Shinohara, R., Sugisawa, Y., Tong, L., Tanaka, E., Watanabe, T., & Yamakawa, N. (2010). Gender differences of children's social skills and parenting using interaction rating scale (IRS). *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2*, 260-268. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.008

Bednářová, J., & Šmardová, V. (2011). *Diagnostika dítěte předškolního věku: Co by dítě mělo umět ve věku od 3 do 6 let.* Brno: Computer Press, a.s.

Blahutková, M. (2003). *Psychomotorika.* Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

Boš, P., & Vágnerová, M. (2012). *CATO.* Bratislava: Psychodiagnostika, a. s.

Caldarella, P., & Merrell, K. W. (1997). Common dimensions of social skills of children and adolescents: A taxonomy of positive behaviors. *School Psychology Review, 26*(2), 264-278. Retrieved from http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid= 6&sid=de55ed35-72d8-488f-a510-1526d9f97edd%40sessionmgr4009&hid=4201& bdata=Jmxhbmc9Y3Mmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl#AN=9708120314&db=a9h

Cook, C. R., Gresham, F. M., Kern, L., Barreras, R. B., Thornton, S., & Crews, S. D. (2008). Social skills training for secondary students with emotional and/or

behavioral disorders: A review and analysis of the meta-analytic literature. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 16*(3), 131-144.

Čáp, J. (1997). *Psychologie výchovy a vyučování.* Praha: Karolinum.

Dvořáková, H. (2011). *Pohybové činnoti v předškolním vzdělávání.* Praha: Raabe.

Gillernová, I., Krejčová, L., Horáková Hoskovcová, S., Šírová, E., & Štětovská, I. (2012). *Sociální dovednosti ve škole.* Praha: Grada Publishing.

Guralnick, M. J. (1990). Social Competence and Early Intervention. *Journal of Early Intervention, 14*(1), 3-14. doi: 10.1177/105381519001400101

Hermochová, S. (2005). *Skupinová dynamika ve školní třídě (Dokážu to?).* Kladno: AISIS.

Hermochová, S., & Vaňková, J. (2014). *Hry pro rozvoj skupinové spolupráce.* Praha: Portál.

Mareš, P., Rabušic, L., & Soukup, P. (2015). *Analýza sociálněvědních dat (nejen) v SPSS.* Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

Mohauptová, E. (2009). *Teambuilding: cesta k efektivní spolupráci.* Praha: Portál.

Pohl, R. F., Bender, M., & Lachmann, G. (2005). Autobiographical memory and social skills of men and women. *Applied cognitive psychology,* 6, 745-759. doi: 10.1002/acp.1104

Průcha, J., Walterová, E., & Mareš, J. (2009). *Pedagogický slovník.* Praha: Portál, s. r. o.

Rubin, K. H., & Rose-Krasnor, L. (1992). Interpersonal problem solving and social competence in children. In V. B. Van Hasselt, & M. Hersen, *Handbook of Social Development: A Lifespan Perspective* (pp. 283-323). New York: Plenum Press.

Splavcová, H., Šmelová, E., Kropáčková, J., & Syslová, Z. (2016). *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání.* Praha: Ministerstvo školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy.

Svoboda, M., Krejčířová, D., & Vágnerová, M. (2001). *Psychodiagnostika dětí a dospívajících.* Praha: Portál, s. r. o.

Švec, V. (1998). *Klíčové dovednosti ve vyučování a výcviku.* Brno: Masarykova univerzita, Pedagogická fakulta.

Villa, M. B., & Del Prette, Z. A. (2013). Marital satisfaction: The role of social skills of husbands and wives. *Paideía, 23*(56), 379-388. doi: 10.1590/1982-43272356201312

Zimmer, R. (2012). *Handbuch Psychomotorik: Theorie und Praxis der psychomotorischen Förderung.* Freiburg: Herder.

# ARTICLES

## Speech Therapy Prevention in Kindergarten

### *Jana Vašíková – Iva Žáková*[*]

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* This contribution presents the results of a research focused on speech therapy in kindergartens. This research was realized in Zlín Region. It explains how speech therapy prevention is realized in kindergartens, determines the educational qualifications of teachers for this activity and verifies the quality of the applied methodologies in the daily program of kindergartens.
*Methods:* The empirical part of the study was conducted through a qualitative research. For data collection, we used participant observation. We analyzed the research data and presented them verbally, using frequency tables and graphs, which were subsequently interpreted.
*Results:* In this research, 71% of the teachers completed a course of speech therapy prevention, 28% of the teachers received pedagogical training and just 1% of the teachers are clinical speech pathologists. In spite of this, the research data show that, in most of kindergartens, the aim of speech therapy prevention is performed in order to correct deficiencies in speech and voice. The content of speech therapy prevention is implemented in this direction.
*Discussion:* Awareness of the teachers'/parents' regarding speech therapy prevention in kindergartens.
*Limitations:* This research was implemented in autumn of 2016 in Zlín Region. Research data cannot be generalized to the entire population. We have the ambition to expand this research to other regions next year.
*Conclusions:* Results show that both forms of speech therapy prevention – individual and group – are used. It is also often a combination of both. The aim of the individual forms is, in most cases, to prepare a child for cooperation during voice correction. The research also confirmed that most teachers do not have sufficient education in speech therapy. Most of them completed a course of speech therapy as primary prevention educators. The results also show that teachers spend a lot of time by speech therapy prevention in kindergartens. Educators often develop the communication skills of children by interesting ways and methods.

**Key words:** speech therapy prevention, kindergarten, teachers in kindergartens.

---

[*]    Jana Vašíková, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; jvasikova@fhs.utb.cz
      Iva Žáková, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; izakova@fhs.utb.cz

## 1  Introduction

The ability to communicate and to express oneself in coherent and standard language is one of the basic human skills. Language is a human tool, which we use for networking, sharing our thoughts and also to acquire new information. Language is a tool which we use to communicate and engage in collectives. Due to this ability, we are able to accept the opinions of others, express our feelings and wishes. Language is a complex psychomotoric exercise in which several body organs are involved. The ability to speak is given to every man, a man is born with the innate ability to learn to speak. Other factors, e.g. the environment in which a child grows up, have a great influence on speech development (Krejčíková & Kaprová, 2000).

According to clinical speech therapists in the Czech Republic, the quality of the speech of children deteriorates. They state that the causes of deterioration can be different, e.g. excessive time spent using tablets and mobile phones and the lack of communication with parents. Children spend time by passive gaming during which they do not speak and therefore, their communication skills are not developing. Active communication and the expressive skills of children are downplayed.

Since this issue concerns mostly children from three years of age, the Department of Education became interested in improving the quality of the speech of children and in providing widespread speech therapy in kindergartens. With the support of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, primary prevention speech therapy courses are arising. These courses help teachers to expand their educational prerequisites to work with children in the field of language and communication skills. The aim of the courses is to naturally encourage the development of language and communication skills in intact children.

The theoretical part of the study is based on scientific literature concerning the definition of speech therapy prevention, anchoring the concept in the field and its links with the health and education sectors. We have defined the characteristics and the content of the job of a clinical speech pathologist, school speech therapist and of the logopaedic prevention specialist. We also focused on concrete forms of speech therapy primary prevention, the areas forming a part of it and the spheres in which it can help.

The aim of the research was to chart and describe the nature of the primary prevention in speech therapy in kindergartens. The research is qualitative, participating observation complemented by discussions with teachers were used. We have examined in detail the nature of the speech therapy prevention, the forms in which it is implemented and whether the teachers are equipped with the educational prerequisites for working with children in the field of speech therapy.

## 2  Speech therapy prevention in kindergarten

In its widest sense, we can talk about prevention as a method of preventing and obviating undesirable phenomena in different areas for people of all ages. We rank speech therapy prevention among the methods of speech therapy intervention. It is the specific activity of speech therapist, which is intertwined with the process of identification of communication disorders, with the elimination, reduction or overcoming impaired communication skills. Prevention aims to avoid, prevent the formation of disturbed communication ability. Speech therapy prevention is defined on three levels - primary, secondary and tertiary.

The main area of research was primary prevention, which is aimed at the population in general. Its most frequent form are the enlightenment activities spread among intact population. Spreading information is realized via media, printed materials, lectures and conferences, where the reflection and presentation of new evidence and findings in current situation take place. One of the basic tasks of primary prevention is to educate and develop the awareness of paediatricians and educators in kindergartens. Through the awareness of teachers and paediatricians, children's parents get appropriate information, mutual contacts are created and early seeking of adequate experts takes place (Renotiérová & Ludíková, 2003).

The activities of primary prevention can be divided into nonspecific (general effort to promote desirable behaviors – e.g. proper speech patterns) and specific (focusing on specific emerging risks and their prevention).

Speech therapy prevention falls within the activities of speech therapists. It is a part of speech intervention, which also includes speech therapy diagnostics and speech therapy. All these three lines blend and complement each other and cannot be completely separated. They are mutually interconnected and form a part of the process of speech therapy intervention. Speech therapy primary prevention also falls within the competences of teachers in kindergartens.

According to the opinion of clinical speech pathologists M. Hrubínová and I. Eichlerová, the purpose of speech therapy in kindergartens is to create a functional framework which primarily supports the natural development of communication in intact children. The speech abilities and skills should be stimulated correspondingly to the age of children. Care should be taken of factors that affect speech (environment, movement, hearing or visual perception) and we should perceive speech therapy prevention as a natural part of the entire educational program for preschool children. Speech therapists or teachers in a kindergarten are not the only persons who can influence the process of natural speech development, but especially parents, grandparents and other people with whom a child comes into contact most often are important. They have an impact on the process of the child's speech development from their birth and they have a primary influence on proper speech development. Therefore, it is important that parents particularly pay attention to creating a stimulating environment in which their child grows up, provide them with sufficient stimuli and information from which the child can gain and enrich their skills and knowledge. They should engage the child in appropriate games to support the development of their whole personality, make a quality speech example, actively communicate and discuss things with them, and lead the child to independent speech.

Speech therapy prevention forms a part of the daily program in kindergartens. The teacher influences the children during the whole day. It is important to discuss stories with children and retell them in the form that children can understand. Using this way also unintentionally develops the communication skills of children and monitors the quality of their speech.

According to Horňáková, Kapalková and Mikulajová (2005), a teacher serves as a model of communication for children. The teacher should respect the children, take into account their level of language skills, and develop them appropriately.

A teacher also should try to follow and understand the mimes, gestures and behaviour of children to estimate the children's nonverbal expressions which can signal that either everything is in order or not, for example a child is emotionally instable or hyperactive.

In recent years, kindergartens devote more time to it and try to pay more attention to children either individually or in groups for the realization of speech therapy prevention. Circles of speech therapy primary prevention have arisen in the last few years with the support of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. These are led by the so-called speech therapy preventionists. Their activities are based on the Methodological recommendation ref. 14712/2009-61 that serves to ensure the provision of speech therapy in schools, and, besides other things, sets the rules and defines the responsibilities of speech therapists, speech therapy assistants, including the competences of teachers in kindergartens and primary school in speech therapy prevention.

## 3   Promotion of natural speech development and prevention of speech disorders in preschool education

Speech therapy prevention or care of a child's speech must be understood as a complex activity in the broadest sense. Not only correct pronunciation but also the development of auditory perception, visual perception, memory, imagination, motor perception, vocabulary, imagination, and grammatical correctness of speech are included (Krejčíková & Kaprová, 2000). All these skills form a prerequisite for the subsequent mastery of human speech in verbal (spoken) and written forms.

The social environment has a significant impact on the development of human language. Marshall and Lewis (2014) carried out a research concerning the communication environment and its influence on speech development in a child. Other authors (e.g. Law, Raily, & Snow, 2013) describe the public health paradigm and explore its implications for speech and language therapy with children. Development of universal prevention services in the speech therapy was one of their research dimensions.

Kindergartens form, as well as families, a crucial and unique space for the development of preschool children's language skills. Therefore, in preschool facilities, staff qualified in speech therapy should work which should ensure and appropriate care for children in the area of the development of communication skills. The staff should also be able to provide valuable advice to parents as partners and the main actors of the educational process.

There is a space for communication and speech development in kindergartens throughout the whole day. Lyytine, Eklund and Lyytin (2005) draw attention to the fact that reading is very important for the natural development of speech. In their study, they affirm that problems with reading and writing at school occur more in the case of children whose parents or teachers do not read at all. Through reading, abstract thinking and critical thinking are developed in children. It is important to comment on the stories with children and retell them in the form that children can understand. Regularity in reading and appropriate management of children in order to understand the plot can affect the correct development of speech.

Even abroad, attention is paid to screening and early detection of impaired communication skills. Pre-primary institutions work with primary prevention and screening programs, use diagnostic materials, they identify the current state of communication and speech abilities in children, especially at pre-school age (Nelson, Nygren, Walker, & Panoscha, 2015).

### 3.1 Teachers and their role in the development of preschool children's communication skills

The aim of a teacher in a kindergarten should be to plan, implement and evaluate the educational activities that affect the development of children's communication skills positively taking into account their age.

Teachers should be diagnosticians as well. Primary prevention is, above all, concerned with a range of intact children with an overlap between those children who might be at risk (e.g. the occurrence of specific learning disabilities in the family or delayed speech development). These are not those children who already have signs of developmental disorders or other difficulties. They are already under the care of a clinical speech therapist as, with these children, it is important to prevent and mitigate the risk of a possible problem (Snowling & Melby-Lervag, 2016).

Teachers in kindergartens often work with children with impaired communication skills as they cannot be excluded from the educational process. The number of children with ICS is increasing, that is why it is important that teachers can recognize a whole range of specific symptoms that occur, develop and change in a child until a child reaches the optimum level of communication skills. From the pedagogical point of view, the essence of speech therapy prevention is in:

- effective procedures in the educational practice – to achieve the best results and performance in the shortest possible time with the minimum effort the child makes, with respect to the child's individuality, developmental milestones and options;
- optimal development of the child's communication skills – creation of a plan, procedures, and resources that will lead to the acquisition, adoption and management of language resources in the educational process.

According to M. Lipnická (2013), a speech therapist's basic competences are:

*Theoretical competences*
- To serve as an example in manner of speech for a child. To have an adequate language education.
- To be well equipped with in-depth knowledge of the language – teaching communication, to apply nativist theories such as Vygotsky's interaction theory about linking the development of thought and speech.
- To gain knowledge in the area of methodological recommendations for educational program for the particular level of schools.
- To possess knowledge on the developmental stages of children according to their age specifics, to be well versed in the ontogenesis of language, to read specialized materials from speech therapy.

*Didactic competences*
- To carry out diagnostics of a child's speech as a part of the diagnostics of his/her whole personality.
- To be able to select and apply adequate educational materials contributing to children's appropriate development with regards to his/her age and needs.
- To apply individual approach to every child, to communicate with parents and provide them with necessary information regarding the level of the child's speech.

*Communication competences*
- To master the language in practice, to influence the situation intentionally in a positive direction using communication skills, to lead monologues and dialogues with children.

- To promote children's communication skills explicitly, to provide them with a space to speak, to promote children's language and speech skills.
- To express opinions in the process of pedagogical diagnostics competently and during the creation of diagnostic materials and plans.

*Intrapersonal competences*
- To be able to think critically in stressful situations, emotional and social stability.

*Interpersonal competences*
- To work in teams, to participate in collective decisions.
- To deal with conflicts and current situations correspondingly.
- To cooperate with children.

*Reflective competences* – self-assessment.

*3.2 Areas of prevention of speech disorders in preschool children*

Primarily, spontaneous communication should be the basis for the prevention of speech disorders in children attending kindergartens. The development of communication skills of preschool children should be fostered by means of games promoting the development of auditory and visual perception, by breathing exercises, exercises developing motor skills, activities promoting the development of vocabulary and the improvement of grammatical correctness of speech (Krejčíková & Kaprová, 2000).

The promotion of the natural development of speech and prevention of speech disorders in preschool education should be focused on the following areas being also evaluated in the context of our research:

- Articulation exercises – or exercises of motor skills of speech organs, they are necessary before drawing sounds, tongue and lips should be relaxed. A restriction on the mobility of speech organs can cause problems later when drawing sounds (logoped online.cz).
- Breathing and phonation exercises – breathing and phonation (voice) exercises interconnect the mutual coordination of breathing, voice and speech. Proper formation of inhalation and exhalation, stimulation of their length and quality affects the fluency of speech and creation of certain sounds. We are practicing the so-called management of breath during speech constantly, an accuracy in using breath during speech is reflected in the quality of speech. Otherwise, there may be breaths beyond pauses between words, poor speech intelligibility etc. Exhalation flow is necessary for the formation of loud speech. Breathing exercises are used in the prevention of communication disorders and also after the removal of adenoids.
- Fine and gross motor skills – gross motor skills represent the system of all the major muscle groups in the body. Their functionality has an influence on the development of fine motor skills, grapho-motor and oral-motor skills. Gross motor skills are the set of movement skills of a child – body control, coordination of arms and legs, and rhythmising the movements. Children develop their locomotor, non-locomotor and manipulative skills at preschool age.
  Fine motor skills are the system of all small muscle groups, minute muscles which require the cooperation of hands and eyes. According to Santlerová and Sýkorová (1984) fine motor skills can be described by a gradual improvement of fine hand movements – the development of grasping and manipulating with objects.

Oral motor skills represent an important area as for practicing correct speech. Deficiencies or obstacles in this area can cause incorrect pronunciation.

- Auditory perception - spoken language cannot spontaneously develop without hearing (Lechta, 2002). The ability of phonemic differentiation (the ability to distinguish between the sounds' distinctive features) develops in time.
- Visual perception – humans acquire essential information through sight. Children respond in gestures before they develop their own language. Lechta (2002) says that visual stimuli provoke the child's vocalization. A child lipreads movements of speech organs, acquires articulation and the forms of nonverbal communication (Lechta, 2002).
- Linguistic levels
  • Morpho-syntactical – (grammatical aspect) – children at preschool age learn the grammar in communicating with adults, the goal is not to learn the specific rules of grammar, therefore, the children's knowledge is implicit. The children are not aware that they apply the rules in speech but they apply them correctly. A proper speech example is important (Petrová & Valášková, 2007).
  • Lexical-Semantic – (richness of vocabulary) – includes the development of both the active and passive vocabulary.
  • Phonetic-Phonological – (phonetic aspects of speech) – places emphasis on the correct pronunciation of sounds. It is closely related to the development of phonemic differentiation – differentiation of individual phonemes. It is affected by the maturity of phonemic hearing, functioning of speech organs, social factors as the environment, speech example, speech and mental stimuli (Klenková, 2006).
  • Pragmatic-social side of speech – the ability to use the acquired skills.

## 4 Characteristics of speech therapy prevention in kindergartens in Zlín Region

The aims of our research are as follows:
  a) to describe the nature of speech therapy prevention in kindergartens in Zlín Region;
  b) to clarify the methods of implementation of speech therapy prevention in kindergartens in Zlín Region;
  c) to clarify the educational qualifications of teachers for this activity.

Our intention was to respond to the research questions formulated as follows:
Q. 1  What is the nature of speech therapy prevention in kindergartens in Zlín Region?
Q. 2  What are the methods of implementation of speech therapy prevention in the selected kindergartens in Zlín Region?
Q. 3  What educational qualifications do the teachers participating in our research on speech therapy prevention have?

The empirical part of the study was realized in the form of a qualitative research. From the data collection methods, participant observation with additional interviews with teachers were used.

The research sample consisted of kindergarten teachers in Zlín Region. We opted for nearby kindergartens and contacted them for cooperation. The selection of teachers was not affected by their education.

The research involved 28 kindergarten teachers. Participant observations were recorded during the morning activities in kindergartens (i.e. between 7:30 and 9:30 a.m.).

*4.1 The results of the realized research*

All teachers who agreed with the observations worked in state kindergartens. During the brief interviews with teachers, we asked at what time of day speech therapy prevention is carried out. 38% of teachers engage in speech therapy prevention in the morning. Only 12% of teachers understand speech therapy prevention as an activity that takes place throughout the day and mingle with all areas. As mentioned above, spontaneous communication and a correct speech model form the basis for the prevention of speech disorders in children. We noticed that prevention in kindergartens also takes place individually and that was the case of four teachers.

One of the common observed characteristics was the way the speech therapy prevention is implemented. 4 out of 28 teachers perform speech therapy prevention individually, another 12 kindergarten teachers implement speech therapy prevention into group activities and the remaining 12 teachers use both forms.

In most kindergartens, speech therapy prevention is realized during the so-called speech therapy circle. It involves all the children in the classroom. During the observations, we recorded the sessions of these "speech therapy circles" implemented within speech therapy prevention. Based on the analysis, we used codes for 8 characteristics, which we later evaluated.
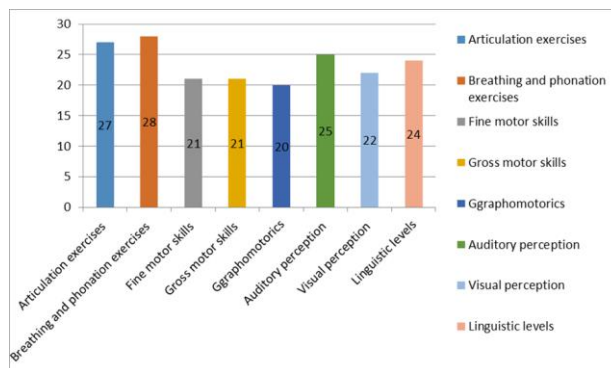


*Figure 1.* Content of "speech therapy circles" in the context of speech therapy prevention.

It is clear from Figure 1 that teachers implement various areas of prevention of speech disorders in speech therapy moments evenly. During the observations, the least attention was paid to the development of the grapho-motor, the fine and gross motor skills of children. All the observed teachers involved breathing exercises in speech therapy moments, only one teacher did not implement any articulation exercises.

During the observations, one common factor in the visited kindergartens occurred. Due to that the aspect of correction of sounds became another category of significance.

In response to these findings, we asked the teachers performing speech therapy prevention about their education. It turned out, that most teachers (20 out of 28) completed a course of speech therapy primary prevention, i.e. they work in the kindergartens as so-called speech therapy preventionists. They are mainly in charge of primary prevention of speech disorders. Their work is based on the Methodological recommendations ref 14712/2009-61.

## 5   Conclusion

Speech therapy prevention has become attractive and one of the central themes in the field of education in the last few years. It certainly follows from the fact that we can observe an increase in the problems in verbal expression of children, resulting in the postponement of school attendance and possible complications while studying at elementary schools. The aim of our research was to explore the forms of speech therapy prevention in Zlín Region. We wanted to define the characteristics and forms of speech therapy prevention being realized in kindergartens under the guidance of teachers. The results show that both forms of speech therapy prevention activities – individual and group – are used. A combination of both forms is also frequent.

In most cases, the aim of the individual form was to prepare children for cooperation in the correction and rectification of sounds. The teachers used specific exercises related to the sounds of the mother tongue. The research also confirmed that most teachers do not have sufficient education in speech therapy. Most of the teachers completed a course of primary prevention in speech therapy, which entitles teachers to implement speech therapy primary prevention in order to fully develop the communication skills of intact children. However, they are able to rectify and adjust the sounds of children with communication disorders or with language impairment as well.

A kindergarten teacher should be a good diagnostician. The teacher is usually the first person who can see the possible deficiencies in a child's speech. Early diagnosis and detection are crucial for further work with the child. The main task of the teacher should be to inform parents and provide them with contacts on clinical speech pathologists in order to start working with the child appropriately to their age and to the problem. And if that happens, the main goal of speech therapy primary prevention is fulfilled.

Even though only three teachers reached speech therapy education in a Master's program, rectification was realized in almost all kindergartens.

The results also show that a large space is devoted to speech therapy prevention in the timetable in kindergartens. Educators are often developing the communication skills of children in interesting ways and methods, they are speech examples for the children and, by using games, they positively stimulate speech development, which can often prevent bad habits or faulty pronunciation of the child.

## References

*Artikulační cvičení*. Retrieved from http://www.logopedonline.cz/ke-stazeni.html

Horňáková, K., Kapalková, S., & Mikulajová, M. (2005). *Kniha o detskej reči*. Bratislava: Slniečko.

Klenková, J. (2006). *Logopedie*. Havlíčkův Brod: Grada.

Krejčíková, J., & Kaprová, Z. (2000). *Náměty pro logopedickou prevenci. Hrátky se slovíčky pro kluky a pro holčičky*. Praha: Fortuna.

Law, J., Reilly, S., & Snow, P. C. (2013) Child speech, language and communication need re-examined in a public health context: a new direction for the speech and language therapy profession. *International Journal of Language Communication Disorders. 48*(5), 486-496.

Lipnická, M. (2013). *Logopedická prevence v mateřské škole*. Praha: Portál.

Lechta, V. (2002). *Symptomatické poruchy řeči u dětí*. Praha: Portál.

Lyytinen, P., Eklund, K., & Lyytinen, H. (2005). Language development and literacy skills in late-talking toddlers with and without familial risk for dyslexia. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 55*(2), 166-192.

Marshall, J., & Lewis, E. (2014). "It's the way you talk to them." The child's environment: Early Years Practioner's perceptions of its influence on speech and language development, its assessment and environment targeted interventions. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 30*(3), 337-352. doi 10.1177/0265659013516331

MŠMT: *Metodické doporučení k zabezpečení logopedické péče ve školství č.j. 14 712/2009-61.*

Nelson, H. D., Nygren, P., Walker, M., & Panoscha, R. (2005). Screening for speech and language delay in preschool children: Systematic evidence review for the US preventive services task force. *Pediatrics, 117*(2), 299-319.

Petrová, Z., & Valášková, M. (2007). *Jazyková a literárna gramotnosť v materskej škole: teoretické súvislosti a možnosti jej rozvoja.* Bratislava: Renesans.

Renotiérová, M., & Ludíková, L. (2003). *Speciální pedagogika*. Olomouc: UP.

Santlerová, K., & Sýkorová, H. (1994). *Rozvoj grafomotoriky v předškolním věku*. Brno: Masarykova Univerzita.

Snowling, M. J., & Melby-Lervag, M. (2016). Oral language deficits in familial dyslexia: A meta-analysis and review. *Psychological Bulletin, 142*(5), 498-545.

# Social-Emotional Health of University Students and the Importance of Its Research

## Mária Mehešová[*]

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* Health and well-being are crucial for individuals, a particular country as well as the whole society. Therefore, it is important to focus research on it, and the Social-Emotional Health Survey – Higher Education used on the sample of university students is a good example of it.
*Purpose:* The aim of the article is to bring information on the current issues of social-emotional health in Slovakia and the possibilities of its measuring with the emphasis on the brand new international questionnaire method Social-Emotional Health Survey – Higher Education (SEHS-HE) by M. Furlong.
*Methods:* The method measures four basic dimensions and twelve psychological indicators of social-emotional health of university students. It helps to find the strengths and health predictions of students.
*Conclusions:* Mental health of young people is the priority of the Slovak National Treating Program for Children and Youth, from which goes the necessity to identify the mental health of various groups of people especially of children and youth, to support it and to create the conditions for its optimal development.

**Key words:** mental health, social-emotional health, university students, covitality.

## 1 Introduction

For decades, mental health of individuals has been neglected. World Health Organization also supported this statement by publishing a report in 2001, describing that one's health, and more importantly well-being, is crucial for a particular country and its society.

World Federation of Mental Health claims that the prevalence of mental disorders is alarming and represents a significant burden for the entire population. Depression and other mental illnesses have a major impact on the quality of life of individuals and, therefore, it is crucial to pay special attention to mental health (World Federation for Mental Health, 2013).

Keyes (2006) states that mental health is a mix of positive feelings, which are applied in real life situations and measure subjective psychological and social well-being. These variables indicate one's prosperity of mental health where mental illnesses are absent and the individual is balanced in terms of emotional, mental and social well-being.

[*]  Mária Mehešová, Paneuropean University, Faculty of Psychology, Bratislava, Slovakia; mmehesova@gmail.com

Based on this statement, we can realize the importance of mental health. The tendency to neglect it can threaten not only the prosperity of the society but may also lead to an increased rate of psychopathological phenomena.

In the year 2000, we could observe an increase in the cases of mental disorders in the Slovak Republic, the number of individuals being diagnosed with some form of mental illness increased by 326,000. Affective, neurotic, stress and somatoform disorders, namely depression, anxiety, and stress responses were the most frequent (Ochrana a podpora duševného zdravia v SR, 2013).

An increase in mental illnesses was also recorded in the Czech Republic, where the occurrence of these diseases increased by 8.3% between 2001 and 2002. Most of the cases were neurotic and affective disorders similar to the ones in the Slovak Republic (Brožová, Daňková, Chudobová, Kamberská, & Lexová, 2003).

Based on these, besides other facts highlighting the importance of mental health, support of positive mental health, preventing mental disorders, providing access to community services and building partnerships between sectors was introduced in 2005 by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the 52 Member States, which supported the Declaration and Action Plan on Mental Health.

The European Commission prepared a document called Green Paper designed to stimulate a debate on the possible approach to the mental health of the citizens and it results were formulated in the European Pact for Mental Health and Well-being, which came into force in 2008. It is pointed out that the European institutions, Member States and various stakeholders are obligated to undertake actions in the following areas:

1. Mental health in youth and education;
2. Prevention of depression and suicide;
3. Mental health of older people;
4. Combating stigma and social exclusion;
5. Mental health at the workplace (Európsky pakt za duševné zdravie a pohodu, 2008).

In 2010, the EU created a work group made up of social and healthcare professionals from eight European countries focused on mental health and well-being. The work group started to closely cooperate with the European Commission in the context of the Pact for Mental Health and Well-being and focused on the objectives and tasks related to the promotion of mental health with regard to the new strategy Europe 2020. Europe 2020 draws attention to man-oriented services called "person centered services" with a focus on the active participation of their users.

The strategic directives to improve health and correct development of children and adolescents based on the implementation of the European strategy to improve the health of EU citizens can also be found in the document called National Programme for Children and Adolescents in the Slovak Republic for the period 2008-2015, which continues. For many young people, the last two priorities are particularly important – adolescent health, and psychosocial development.

The aim of supporting the mental health of the young generation in the EU, and also in Slovakia, is to monitor the health of young people in the social context and to deepen the understanding of the mechanisms causing differences and changes in health and risky behaviors. These findings are important for the creation of effective health support programs, health education programs, monitoring their effectiveness both at national and international levels (Zdravie, 2020; 2013).

Targeted support of mental health is justified especially because current scientific research indicates that the incidence of mental health problems among young people is increasing. It is reported that college students are subject to higher rates of depression than the general population. Depression is common among university students of either gender and is more frequent among individuals who are single compared to those who are married or in a relationship (Sarokhani et al., 2013).

Higher education institutions are trying to support mental health of their students especially during the critical transition from one period of development to another. Even though higher education provides students with many new experiences, promotes academic, social and personal development, it is also a source of new problems, which can cause mental anguish. Trying to find evidence for this claim, we looked at 24 studies focusing on depressive symptoms among college students and found a 31% higher incidence rate of depression in their case than in the case of the general population (Ibrahim et al., 2013; Furlong, 2016).

Therefore, the identification of mental health problems and levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction is essential for an early detection of those young people who are at potential risk of mental problems as they get older and thus create the basis for necessary prevention (Erhart et al., 2009).

To examine the mental/social-emotional health among university students, an entirely new tool was created - the Social-Emotional Health Survey – HE by M. Furlong from the University of California, USA (2015).

## 2   Purpose

Over the last few decades, the focus of research has turned to the positive youth development perspective. There is an increase in the attention paid to improving students' quality of life in scientific research. For example, research of mental health of young people brought some interesting findings, particularly when examining the link between anxiety and the lack of personal well-being causing poor academic performance of students; new knowledge about the positive and negative indicators of mental health as well as its impact on the academic achievement in the time span (Dowd, Furlong, & Sharkey, 2013).

The model of mental health by Michel Furlong has 4 positive mental health domains, which are based on social psychology (e.g. Lips, 1995), the image of oneself (Chi-Hung, 2005) and cognitive therapy (Dozois, Eichstedt, Collins, Phoenix, & Harris, 2012). These domains/dimensions are the following:

 a)  Belief-in-self;
 b)  Belief-in-others;
 c)  Emotional competence;
 d)  Engaged living.

In the above four essential domains of the model of social-emotional health, 12 psychological indicators can be distinguished, each representing a unique field of mental health. The first domain – belief-in-self – consists of three psychological indicators: self-efficacy, persistence and self-awareness. The second domain – belief-in-others – consists of three psychological indicators: family support, institutional support and peer support. The third domain – described as emotional competence – consists of the following three psychological indicators: cognitive reappraisal, empathy and self-regulation. The last of

domains – engaged living – contains the following psychological indicators: gratitude, zest and optimism (You, Dowdy, Furlong, Renshaw, Smith, & O'Malley, 2013).

*Belief-in-Self*
- Self-awareness – acceptance of one's moods and feelings;
- Self-efficacy – the ability to successfully overcome many challenges;
- Persistence – continuing work despite its complexity.

*Belief-in-Others*
- Family coherence – the presence of a sense of family togetherness;
- Peer support – the presence of social support provided by friends;
- Support campus – contains a sense of integration into a teaching institution.

*Emotional Competence*
- Emotional re-appraisal – attempt to redirect one's thoughts from negative to positive in order to improve mood;
- Empathy – seeing how others think and feel;
- Self-control – preferring thinking before impulsive acts.

*Engaged Living*
- Optimism – expectations of positive experiences and situations during the day;
- Zest – enthusiastic and energetic approach to life;
- Gratitude – awareness and gratitude for everyday things (SEHS, 2015).
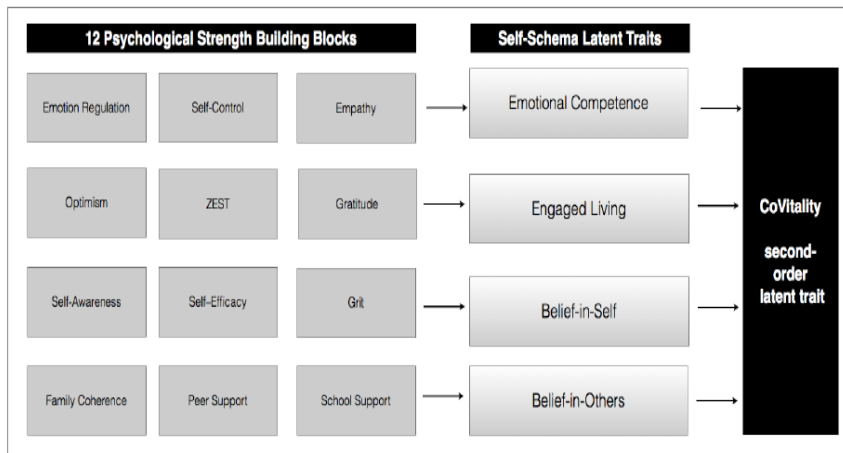


*Figure 1*. Model of social-emotional health.

In addition, the research of social-emotional health which has brought 12 psychological indicators divided into four major domains of positive mental health, also explained the concept of covitality. Covitality could be described as synergistic to positive mental health, which is composed of a number of positive psychological units (Furlong, You, Renshaw, O'Malley, & Rebelez, 2013).

In one of the most recent studies, Jones, You and Furlong (2012), decided to introduce the term covitality because it captures a wide range of notions including healthy and positive functioning in all areas of life. The primary objective of this research was to

contribute to the study of optimal human functioning and to examine the relationship between covitality as a construct of positive psychology and personal well-being.
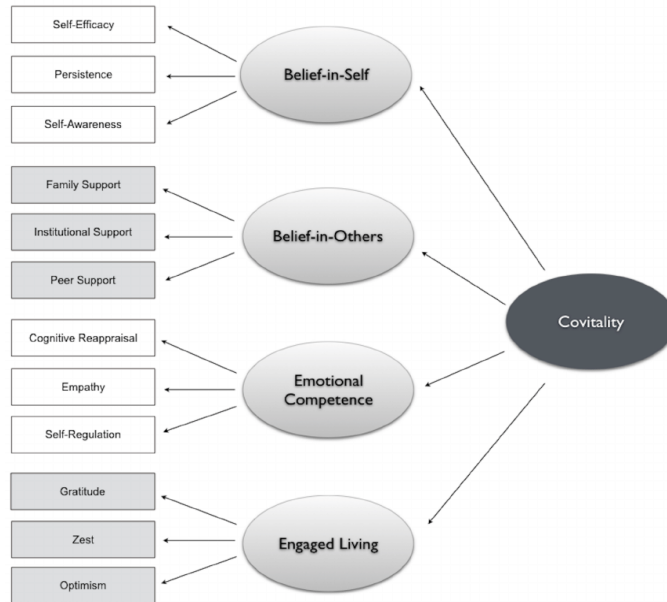


*Figure 2*. Social and Emotional Health Survey conceptual and measurement model.

Pennell, Boman and Mergler (2015) conducted a research that sought to clarify the relationship between covitality and its basic constructs such as belief-in-self, belief-in-others, emotional competence, and engaged living with two variables – subjective well-being and depression. The results of the first phase of the research showed that belief-in-self, belief-in-others, and engaged living are significant predictors of increased subjective well-being. These predictors showed a higher level than the others. The results of the second phase of the research showed that the above predictors are beneficial in the process of reducing depression as well. In both phases of the research, it was proven that the combined effect of characteristics that create covitality is greater than the individual components of covitality alone.

## 3  Methods

We decided to use the model of social-emotional health and the Social-Emotional Health Survey for higher education in our research at selected universities in Slovakia and to study the following levels of social-emotional health of university students in general, as well as within the social-demographic variables – gender, residence, field of study; and also, to examine the link between social-emotional health of students and their life satisfaction and well – being.

Our intention was not only to measure the mental health of college students, but also to identify those students who need prevention or intervention services for their personal growth, and also detect in which indicators and domains students reach a high level of

health, i.e. identify their potentials. The existing psychological methods were mainly focused on measuring the deficits which not all students have, but only 15-20% were identified and those with more serious diseases. The advantage of this survey is that it provides an insight into the psychology of the individual schemes and allows students to show how to optimally build their personality, where and in which areas of mental health, and in which social-emotional competencies are their strengths and where are their weaknesses or shortcomings. Furlong himself notes that for example, in the USA, only 2% of schools do screening of the mental health of their students (Romer, McIntosh et al., 2005), which is a really low number. The situation in Slovakia is not any better.

## 4   Conclusion

Finally, we would like to conclude that social-emotional health of university students should not be neglected, what is more, we should emphasize the importance of research in this area mainly due to the fact that college students are in a period that is critical especially because of the transition from one developmental period to another. Higher education institutions, while providing their students with a stimulating environment that brings them new academic knowledge, expertise, experience and a lot of options to move forward, whether in the social or personal development; also create an environment which is new for students and can be a source of problems that can cause mental anguish.

As Furlong et al. (2016) stated, research on social-emotional health provides us, besides theoretical and psychometric outcomes, with information that is relevant for each university student, and also information for educational institutions that is useful in pursuing comprehensive mental health in schools or groups and provide services aimed at preventing or alleviating the adaptation problems in the college life, and then allow them to track student's existing assets and offer strategies that will further promote the development of their psychological strengths.

## References

Brožová, J., Daňková, Š., Chudobová, M., Kamberská, Z., & Lexová, P. (2003). *Ženy a muži v číslech zdravotnické statistiky.* Praha: Ústav zdravotnických informací a statistiky ČR.

Dozois, D. J. A., Eichstedt, J. A., Collins, K. A., Phoenix, E., & Harris, K. (2012). Core beliefs, self-perception, and cognitive organization in depressed adolescents. *International Journal of Cognitive Therapy*, 5, 99–112. doi:10.1521/ijct.2012.5.1.99

Dowdy, E., Furlong, M. J., & Sharkey, J. D. (2013). Using surveillance of mental health to increase understanding of youth involvement in high-risk behaviors: A value added analysis. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 21, 33–44. doi:10.1177/1063426611416817

*Európsky pakt za duševné zdravie a pohodu.* (2008). Retrieved from: http://ec.europa.eu/health//sites/health/files/mental_health/docs/mhpact_sk.pdf

Furlong, M. J., You, S., Renshaw, T. L., O'Malley, M. D., & Rebelez, J. (2013). Preliminary development of the Positive Experiences at School Scale for elementary school children. *Child Indicators Research, 6*(4), 753-775. doi:10.1007/s12187-013-9193-7

Furlong, M. J., You, S., Shishim, M., & Dowdy, E. (2016). Development and validation of the Social Emotional Health Survey – Higher Education Version. *Applied research in Quality of Life, 12*(2), 343-367. doi:10.1007/s11482-016-9464-9

Chi-Hung, N. (2005). Academic self-schemas and their self-congruent learning patterns: Findings verified with culturally different samples. *Social Psychology of Education*, *8*(3), 303–328. doi:10.1007/s11218-005-4015-5

Ibrahim, A. K., Kelly, S. J., Adams, C. E., & Glazebrook, C. (2013). A systematic review of studies of depression prevalence in university students. *Journal of Psychiatric Research, 47*(3), 391–400.

Jones, C. N., You, S., & Furlong, M. J. (2012). A preliminary examination of covitality as integrated wellbeing in college students. *Social Indicators Research*, *111*(2), 511–526.

Keyes, C. L. M. (2006). Subjective well-being in mental health and human development research worldwide: An introduction. *Social Indicators Research*, 77, 1–10. Retrieved from: http://ezproxy.cvtisr.sk:2414/static/pdf/368/art%253A10.1007% 252Fs11205-005-55503.pdf.

Lips, H. M. (1995). Through the lens of mathematical/scientific self-schemas: Images of students' current and possible selves. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *25*(19), 1671–1699. Retrieved from: http://search.proquest.com/docview/ 618915232?accountid=14522

*Ochrana a podpora duševného zdravia v SR.* (2013). Retrieved from: http://www.unipo.sk/public/media/17467/Ochrana%20a%20podpora%20duševnéh o%20zdravia%20v%20SR.pdf

Pennell, C., Boman, P., & Mergler, A. (2015). Covitality constructs as predictors of psychological well-being and depression for secondary school students. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *19*(4), 276-285.

Romer, D., McIntosh, M. et. al. (2005). Treating and preventing adolescent mental health disorders: What we know and what we don't know: A research agenda for improving the mental health of our youth (pp. 597-615). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press, Annenberg Foundation Trust at Sunnylandsxl. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/9780195173642.003.0032

Sarokhani, D., Delpisheh, A., Veisani, Y., Sarokhani, M. T., Manesh, R. E., & Sayehmiri, K. (2013). Prevalence of depression among university students: A systematic review and meta-analysis study. *Depression Research and Treatment.* http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2013/373857

World Federation for Mental Health. (2013). *The people's charter for mental health*. Retrieved from: http://staging.wfmh.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/THE-PEOPLES-CHARTER-2013.pdf

You, S., Dowdy, E., Furlong, M. J., Renshaw, T., Smith, D. C., & O'Malley, M. D. (2013). Further validation of the Social and Emotional Health Survey for high school students. *Applied Research in Quality of Life, 9*(4), 997–1015. doi: 10.1007/s11482-013-9282-2

*Zdravie 2020: Európsky politický rámec na podporu vládnych a spoločenských aktivít pre zdravie a prosperitu.* (2013). Retrieved from http://www.who.sk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Zdravie-2020_kratka-verzia1.pdf

# Education of Elderly Patients Within Nursing Care in Slovakia

## Petra Kaduchová[*]

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* The paper deals with the issues of the education of senior patients within nursing care. The aim of the paper is to find out the level of nurses' knowledge and skills in educating elderly patients and to discover how these are reflected in the reality of clinical practice. It is a case study focused on showing the current real state of clinical practice related to the given topic.
*Methods:* This paper will introduce the outcomes of a qualitative research (semi-structured interview, semi-structured observation, documents analysis) based on theoretical background. The research was carried out during the survey fellowship in the Slovak Republic and the respondents were nurses working in standard hospital departments. Certain phenomena, relations and influencing factors were clarified through the follow-up analysis. The gathered data were processed by using qualitative methods in the form of case studies.
*Results:* The qualitative survey has revealed certain deficiencies in nurses' knowledge and in the reality of the education of elderly patients in clinical practice.
*Discussion:* The deficiencies in knowledge and skills are essential in the reality of clinical practice.
*Limitations:* The research sample was made up of educating nurse/nurses working in geriatrics, in long-term care departments or internal departments. It included a total of 16 respondents.
*Conclusions:* Sufficient attention should be paid to the training of nurses which should be focused on the specificities of educating seniors/senior patients as well as on the reality of education that is performed. It is necessary to provide training for working with this specific age group even in pre-gradual nursing education.

**Key words:** education, educational process, specificities of education of seniors, nursing care, educating nurse.

## 1 Introduction

For a long time, the prognoses have been clearly referring to aging of population. This trend relates to the aging of senior population which is caused by a faster growth in the number of people in high decennium and generally long-lived people.

Overall, the health potential, self-sufficiency and convalescence potential are all decreased in elderly age. Patients must cope with these natural changes within their capabilities and at the same time, they must adapt to the problems related to diseases or hospitalization. Diseases or hospitalization represent demanding life situations for them, even more when linked to loss of self-sufficiency. Patients expect to be explained all the

---

[*] Petra Kaduchová, Palacký University in Olomouc, Faculty of Education, Olomouc, Czech Republic; kaduchova@epol.cz

necessities in a comprehensible patient way. They need information, explanation, instructions what to do, i.e. education.

Such education is a part of nursing care where patients receive not only new knowledge but also new practical skills. The aim of education is to get into and keep a senior patient in the role of an active and constructive co-creator of the treatment (Neméth et al., 2009, p. 74).

This paper is focused on selected aspects of education of senior patients within nursing care. The findings could be used by people who monitor the work and education of educators of seniors as well as by implementers of education activities for nurses.

Within the theoretical background in the context of education of seniors, we mention some specificities of education of senior patients. In the following chapter of the paper, the outcomes of the qualitative research will be presented. The research sample includes nurses working at standard hospital departments. Based on these current outcomes, our intention is to search for the answers to the question: "What is the level of nurses' knowledge in the education of elderly patients and the possible relation of this knowledge to the reality of clinical practice?" One of the goals of the paper is to emphasize the necessity of quality preparation and cultivation of nurses' competences in the role of an educator of senior patients with the use of both theoretical background as well as the outcomes of the realised research.

## 1.1 Specificities of educating senior patients in general

Health care providers will surely meet an increase in the number of seniors in the future. To provide them with care efficiently, it requires proper identification of the seniors' needs and their close family. Health care providers should be able to identify the needs of seniors and here it is essential to see the senior age as a natural part of life.

A lack of information is an everyday problem of senior patients. Plenty of scientific resources point out that hospitalized senior patients are less sufficiently informed than the younger ones, but they also keep less information in their minds (Sävenstedt, Zingmark, Hydén, & Bruslin, 2005, pp. 317-318). It is probably because of the limited ability of elderly people to remember and due to the awareness of the involution changes in senior age together with the automatic assumption of limitations of a senior (Pokorná, 2010, pp. 42-44).

Changes that appear at senior age significantly influence the perception as well as the education itself. Therefore, it is important to keep certain conditions supporting the process of education and making the outcomes more efficient. However, there is no evidence that the general ability to learn becomes worse through aging (Venglářová & Mahrová, 2006, p. 65). The real practice often shows that efficient approaches to transferring information are not used. One of the possible causes of the lack of information could lie in the suppression of rights[1] and dignity of a patient, the so-called ageism, with which we meet in some situations in hospitalized patients. The most common form of ageism is refusing the right to be informed. In this case, we consider very dangerous to label such a patient as non-cooperative, hopeless and thus worthless (Pokorná, 2010, pp. 73-84). Another common form of ageism is in an inadequate form of giving information. Unfortunately, even today, senior patients experience various

---

[1] Rights of senior patients are stated in Charter of the Rights and Freedoms of the Older People, declared by The International Association of Geriatrics in Adelaide, Australia in 1997.

types of the so-called elderspeak communication, which is accepted with displeasure by the elderly (Pokorná, 2010, pp. 62-67; Talerico, 2005, pp. 12-16).

Seniors represent a quite varied target group in the educational process. As a part of their education, it is necessary to respect the specificities, possibilities and limits of this age group (Špatenková & Smékalová, 2015, pp. 57-58). When educating seniors, it is essential to realize that we do not teach a child but an adult individual. Compared to children and youth, adults are (as for the need of recognition) more vulnerable during the educational process, they do not want to be educated but supported and to be led towards self-education (Határ, 2014, p. 86).

Everything we explain to patients is in fact education. Education as such is also a part of nursing care, or the nursing process. Education of seniors consequently affects the nurses on lots of wards and workplaces and it also affects those who want to take care of their beloved ones in their home environments.

It is necessary to respect the specifics of senior age, to place an emphasis on the aspect of individuality, and to adjust the education to the skills and abilities of the learners. Such an approach to education is a skill that can be learned. For education, not only the educators' professional knowledge and their teaching skills are important, but also the art of teaching and a genuine interested in teaching others. For the above reasons, the art of teaching is considered decisive.

### 1.2    The role of a nurse educating a senior patient

Education provided within health care has its particularities. Healthcare institutions primarily focus on ensuring care of their patients' health and their education as such is then realized as a part of this care and in accordance with the organization and the methods applied by the healthcare institution. Within nursing care, it is important to connect education with the nursing process suggested for a particular patient.

Healthcare workers fulfil the role of the co-ordinators of the whole educational process. They should diagnose the educational needs of patients, they are the creators and the planners of the education (mediators of knowledge and experience) and fulfil the role of evaluators. At the same time, they are also the advisors and supporters of the educated individuals.

It is obvious that the quality of the whole educational process depends on the educators' skills as well as on the educators' personalities. Nowadays, higher and higher requirements occur when educating clients. Petřková and Čornaničová (2004, pp. 72-73), in relation to the educators' competences in educating seniors highlight the psychological-didactic competences (social, psychosocial and communication competences) important to create such a climate of education which suits the seniors' needs and fosters their active participation in the education and learning. Not of less importance are the personality competences; with the emphasis on authenticity, empathy, the ability of auto-regulation and self-reflection, warmth, the integrity of the personality and dynamism.

Certain requirements must be met by healthcare workers in the role of educators (it is the expected behaviour of the individuals in relation to their social status). According to Juřeníková, to succeed in education, an educator should possess certain qualities related to their character, intellect, sensorimotor skills, social skills, professional knowledge and skills, educational knowledge and skills, and auto-regulation (Juřeníková, 2010, p. 69).

Moreover, as mentioned above, education of senior patients is not easy. Seniors as a specific target group have their life experience, specific needs and limits and thus, belong to the most demanding participants of the educational process. Unlike other participants of education, e.g. pupils and students for whom it is difficult to evaluate the lecturer's mastery, seniors are demanding listeners which can evaluate (with pleasure, and often very critically) a wide spectrum of the lecturer's competences, e.g. their professional competences, practical experience, didactic skills, communication skills (Mužík, as cited in Kryštof, 2010, p.117).

The educators of seniors should accept the seniors as the participants of the educational process, they should listen to them carefully, respect them and tolerate their specificities, all these from both the theoretical and practical point of view (Hloušková et al., as cited in Kryštof, 2010, pp. 117 - 118).

"Nurses with a higher or specialized education are able to use strategies supporting the patients' dignity, self-evaluation and their ability to make decisions and to be independent. The ability to respect the patients' – seniors' – autonomy is a significant aspect that should be highlighted in the process of training healthcare workers" (Davis, as cited in Pokorná, 2010, p. 38).

An unquestioned factor in social interaction is the overall image of a nurse and her competences. The overall image of the nurse has an effect on the quality of the provided care. Based on professional resources, in this context, we can distinguish between:

-   Qualities difficult to influence: the nurse's character and temperament together with their behaviour and actions;
-   Qualities that can be influenced: professional knowledge, skills and abilities (Pokorná, 2010, p. 47).

In order to educate senior patients efficiently and to meet the set goals, the presence of a competent educator/nurse who possesses not only specific knowledge, skills and abilities in the field of education, but also adequate qualities and experience for working with the specific group of seniors is undoubtedly of a great importance. The development of nurses' knowledge and skills is a direct way to the development of competences and the ability to make decisions easily in agreement with the demands and requirements for evidence based healthcare (Pokorná, 2010, p. 110).

## 2   Methodology

The research is based on the defined research question: *"What is the level of nurses' knowledge and skills when educating elderly patients and how are these reflected in the reality of clinical practice?"*

### 2.1   Aim of the research

The aim of the research is to find out the level of nurses' knowledge and skills in the education of elderly patients and to discover how these are reflected in the reality of clinical practice.

### 2.2   Partial research questions

The research is focused on answering a set of interrelated partial research questions aimed at achieving the set goal:

-   Which nurses, or at which job position, are in charge of educating the patients on the ward?

- What qualifications do the nurses/educators of elderly patients have?
- What is the nurses'/educators' level of knowledge in the education of elderly patients?
- What was the structure of the monitored educational intervention (focused on the form, goal, content, methods, tools and aids, time, length, location, feedback, and education report)?
- Which didactic principles did the nurse apply while preparing and performing the monitored educational intervention?
- Which educational principles did the nurse apply while preparing and performing the monitored educational intervention in the clinical practice?
- How does the department provide help related to the problems in the education of patients?
- What is the content of the medical documentation related to the education of patients?
- What is the way the nurses record the education of patients?

### 2.3    Research sample

The research sample was purposeful and was made up of educating nurses working in Slovak university hospitals competent to educate senior patients in wards of geriatrics, in long-term care departments or internal wards. The sample of the qualitative research involved the total of 16 respondents. Most of the group (54.32%) was made up of nurses with higher specialized education and the largest group of respondents consisted of nurses (41.97%) being in practice for 21 years or more.

### 2.4    Structure of the research, research methods

The author of this paper carried out a research in teaching hospitals in the Slovak Republic in 2016 and the research was aimed at the educational strategies of nurses working with senior patients. The research was carried out within the professional co-operation of Faculty of Education in Trnava with Faculty of Education in Olomouc.

Before the research was carried out, hospital managements of all teaching hospitals in Slovakia had been contacted to find out about the educating nurses' work in their facilities and were asked for possible participation in our research. A total of 9 teaching hospitals in Slovakia were contacted, out of which 6 hospitals agreed with participation.

In the first phase of the quantitative research, the designed questionnaire was used. A total of 81 nurses participated in the research through a questionnaire[2].

The second phase:

In the second phase of the research, data were gathered by means of qualitative methods. First, through non-structured interviews with selected workers (16). The interviews were carried out with the goal to verify the data from the previously sent questionnaire and to update them. Further questions were asked to extend the original answers.

Semi-structured observation of the educational activities and document analysis (education records etc.) were other research methods to be used.

The content of the problematic items in semi-structured observations and semi-structured interviews with the selected respondents included the issues of basic and specialized

---

[2] The research outcomes are not a part of the content of this paper, they are not going to be provided further in the text.

education, educational competences, qualifications of the employees performing education at workplaces, knowledge and skills to educate senior patients, possible activities of educating nurses (eventually their qualifications), keeping educational records, etc. In the case of case studies, the gathered data were processed by using qualitative methods.

The permission to gather data in the hospitals was issued on the request submitted to a particular healthcare facility and based on the consent of each educated patient. The names of the healthcare facilities are not the object of the research and will not be mentioned in the paper.

The research was carried out in October and December 2016.

The professional tutor of the research was Janette Gubricová (Department of Pedagogical Studies, Faculty of Education of University of Trnava in Trnava). As for the methodology, we drew attention to the selection of the research sample, to the organization of addressing the selected respondents, to developing the questionnaire, to the way of interview assignment, to gathering of documents and to the content of problematic questions for the semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observation.

## 3   Results

In the following chapters, the outcomes of the realized qualitative research are introduced. We focus on data analysing with the aim to find out about the level of nurses' knowledge and skills in the field of the education of senior patients and the associated reality of providing education in practice.

Considering the space limits of the paper, only one casuistry will be presented – the case study does not significantly differ from the other cases of educational activities done by us and from the general presentation of the whole problem. For the same reason, full quotes are not cited but only selected key findings are introduced.

Casuistry 1 – case study: Defect treating, education intervention in a sixty-year-old female patient diagnosed with varicose ulcer who is expected to be released home. It is necessary to teach the patient and her family how to treat the wound.

### 3.1   Outcomes of the semi-structured interview (selected key findings)

- Is there a unique position of the educating nurse in your facility? Would you be glad to have one?
  - *Earlier, they had an educating nurse (they usually trained by e.g. the company providing equipment to a healthcare facility), now they do not have any.*
  - *Yes, they would be happy, they do not have enough time for education.*
- If you provide education, what is your qualification, work position, experience in education?
  - *At our ward, education is provided by nurses which are competent to educate.*
  - *We provide basic as well as specialized education.*
  - The respondent: tertiary technical school, position – bedside nurse, experience: working on this ward since graduation.
- Did you meet the topic of the education of senior patients during your studies?
  - subject: basics of pedagogy and education in nursing (with no specification of senior education).

- Do you feel the difference between the education of senior patients and adult patients? In what respect?
  • Slow understanding, "they are demented", they cannot concentrate, poor vision, hard on hearing, physical deficiencies.
  • *"In the case of some patients, education is not possible."*
- What knowledge should a nurse have to educate senior patients?
  • Professional knowledge in the field.
  • When providing education, nurses do not have any sources of knowledge, experiences or methodology (know-how of every nurse).
- Which personal qualities are necessary for the education of a senior patient?
  • *Patience.*
- What are the didactic principles considering the psycho-social needs and requirements for the education of seniors?
  • He does not know exactly.
- What are the phases of the educational work with seniors and what are their characteristics?
  • He does not know exactly.
- Is there an educational standard in your facility? Do you prepare plans of education in written form? Is there an education protocol in your facility? In what kind of documents do you write the records about the education of senior patients?
  • *We do not have an education standard.*
  • *We do not make the education plan in a written form.*
  • *There is no education protocol.*
  • Basic and specialized education: records are written to the nursing documentation, the nurse's report and layoff report; most commonly: educated on.
  • The nursing documentation is unified for all age groups – it does not reflect the specificities of the education of seniors.
- How do you get feedback? What are the ways of finding out if the patient understood the content of the education?
  • We usually get feedback by asking the question if everything is clear to the patient/family and if they can manage it.
- If you have some trouble in providing education, do you know who to contact?
  • In case of any problems, they help themselves operationally or they ask a ward sister for help.

*3.2 Outcomes of the semi-structured observation (selected key findings)*
- Topic, goal and content of education, according to verbal presentation of the nurse: training of bandaging in home environment;
- Used methods, according to the nurse's verbal presentation: explanation, demonstration, training, interview;
- Form of organization: individual;
- Equipment: trolley with bandaging equipment;
- Time of education: during morning hygiene;
- Duration of education, according to the nurse's verbal presentation: up to 15 minutes;
- Place of education: the patient's room and the patient's bed.

- Description of the educational process:
    • introducing;
    • setting the goal of the education by the nurse;
    • explanation, demonstration – practical demonstration of bandaging by the nurse, according to the ward standards;
    • feedback;
    • summary;
    • saying good bye.

*3.3 Document analysis (selected key findings)*
- Education recorded in medical referral – saying: "the patient has been educated".

## 4 Discussion

The level of nurses' knowledge was investigated through cognitive questions. As it was said before, seniors/senior patients are, for their particularities in education, undoubtedly a group that demands a different approach and concept of the educational process from the education of other age groups. It shows that their education is specific and unique. A lack of knowledge about the education of senior age groups is a serious issue and its development should be implemented in programs of further education.

Based on our observation of the education reality, we have found out that during the educational activity, the possible limits, options and the pre-concepts of the female patient were not considered. The objectives of education were not optimally formulated and were unrealizable. The training was performed just by the method of demonstration. Bandaging was done according to the ward standards, by a nurse and only with the reference to specific bandaging in the home environment.

The nurse did not respect the specifics of the target group during communication (quick interpretation and insufficiently loud speech, unclear articulation, etc.), the nurse used professional terminology inadequately; the patient was rather passive; continuous motivation absented; timing of the lesson and time allocation did not correspond with the patient's needs.

There was another thing that was often absent – efficient feedback. To get the feedback, it is important to find out whether the patient really understood what he was taught. Based on literature, we should not ask "Do you understand it?" or "Did you get it?". We should learn about what or how they understood from the answer to the question "What have you learnt?" (Venglářová & Mahrová, 2006, pp. 31-32).

A peaceful place is suitable for the realization of education, a place where nothing disturbs the communication, the inner environment setting is also important (Juřeníková, 2010, p. 56). We know from practice and our observation also revealed that education is mostly done in the patient's room. In the case of immobile patients and if there is not any other suitable place, in our point of view, this can be considered the only possible way.

Before starting the education, it is essential to collect important information from all available sources and determine the problem of a particular patient with respect for their individuality, to set the educational diagnosis, to define the goals in cooperation with the patient, to design the plan of education, to identify what we want the patient to learn (in this case, it is to train the application of compressive bandaging, to bandage the wound, to check the leg, program measures, prevention of complications, continuity of nursing

care – home care agencies, wound healing surgeries etc.). Then this plan should be realized, evaluated and feedback should be done to find out if the goal was fulfilled.

The educational report is an important proof of providing proper care and it is also important for the healthcare personnel and their protection. Properly recorded documents ensure the continuity of education, enable the evaluation of the educational strategies, monitoring progress and the evaluation of the patient's results. It also serves as a tool to mediate education to other healthcare personnel.

Education records should contain the level of the patient's knowledge at the beginning and at the end of the education, the goal of the education; the content; the applied forms and methods; educational materials; educational barriers; evaluation of goals; when, where, by whom and to whom was the education provided, the nurse's and the patient's signature.

The plan of education as a part of the nursing documentation should be worked out in a written form (Juřeníková, 2010, p. 52), ideally in cooperation with the patient, and should be kept in the patient's records. At the same time, the existence of nursing standards as a definition of quality determining the minimal provided care (Mastiljaková, 2004, p. 45.) can provide nurses with guidance and the feeling of security while educating.

## 5   Conclusion

The paper is focused on the selected aspects of the education of senior patients in nursing care. The aim of the paper was to find out the level of nurses' knowledge and skills in the education of elderly patients and to discover how these are reflected in the reality of clinical practice.

Education of seniors is specific in many aspects. Senior age can be defined by certain parameters that a nurse in the role of an educator of senior patients should be appropriately prepared for. The education of senior patients is supposed to be realized individually and should be adjusted to the physical and mental state of each patient. It is important to focus on forming some habits and actions and these habits, actions and skills should be trained and monitored. Thus, educating seniors is time consuming and requires a sensitive and empathetic approach from nurses.

In this paper, the partial outcomes of a qualitative research (semi-structured interview, semi-structured observation, document analysis) that was carried out within the research fellowship in Slovakia are mentioned. The qualitative research dealt with the level of knowledge or skill of nurses about the problems in the education of senior patients associated with the reality of education realized in practice.

One of the goals of the paper was to point out the importance of quality preparation and cultivation of competences of nurses in the role of educators of senior patients by using both the theoretical background and the outcomes from the above research. Another aim was to emphasize the necessity to respect the specificities of the education of senior patients and it is the subject for further reflection on this topic.

Based on the theoretical findings mentioned above and the outcomes from our research, we assume that it is necessary to provide training for work with this specific age group even in pre-gradual nursing education. Sufficient attention should be paid to the education of nurses that is focused on the specificities of the education of seniors/senior patients as well (Goriup, Čagran, & Krošl, 2015, p. 27) as on the reality of the educational process. Educational activities can be performed in the form of model

situations where there is an opportunity to train both efficient approaches and efficient communication techniques, e.g. reducing elderspeak is essential to minimalize the negative stereotypes about the lack of competences and dependence of seniors (Williams, Kemper, & Hummert, 2003, pp. 242-247). We can strengthen the cognitive and functional abilities of seniors by ensuring optimal conditions for education, and increase their satisfaction that can be the way to succeeding in education.

At the end of the paper, there is an open statement of an anonymous respondent about the education of seniors: *"...providing patients with nursing care and education is the matter of the heart of each nurse. Nevertheless, the necessary background – such as necessary documentation or the presence of the educating nurse, more information and skills in this area simplify the education, improve the results of the education and, eventually, increases the quality of nursing care…"*

## References

Goriup, J., Čagran, B., & Krošl, K. (2015). Education of Older People for Combating Their Loneliness. *Acta Technologica Dubnicae*, *5*(1), 21-36. doi: 10.1515/atd-2015-0030

Határ, C. (2014). *Geragogika: vybrané kapitoly z teórie a metodiky edukácie seniorov*. Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre.

Juřeníková, P. (2010). *Zásady edukace v ošetřovatelské praxi*. Praha: Grada Publishing.

Kryštof, D., & Špatenková, N. (2010). Klíčové kompetence lektora v seniorském vzdělávání. In *Univerzita třetího věku. Historie, současnost a perspektivy dalšího rozvoje* (pp. 115-125). Brno: Masarykova univerzita.

Mastiljaková, D. (2004). *Úvod do ošetřovatelství, systémový přístup* (Vol. II). Praha: Karolinum.

Neméth, F., Babčák, M., Eliášová, A., Hudáková, A., & Derňárová, L. (2009). *Geriatria a geriatrické ošetrovateľstvo*. Martin: Osveta.

Petřková, A., & Čornaničová, R. (2004). *Gerontagogika: úvod do teorie a praxe edukace seniorů*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého.

Pokorná, A. (2010). *Komunikace se seniory*. Praha: Grada Publishing.

Sävenstedt, S., Zingmark, K., Hydén, L. Ch., & Bruslin, Ch. (2005). Establishing joint attention in remote talks with elderly about healt: a study of nurses' conversation with elderly persons in teleconsultations. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Science,* *19*, 317-318.

Špatenková, N., & Smékalová, L. (2015). *Edukace seniorů. Geragogika a gerontodidaktika.* Praha: Grada Publishning.

Talerico, K. A. (2005). Enhancing communication with older adults – Overcoming elderspeak. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing & Menthal Health Services*, *43*(5), 12-16.

Venglářová, M., & Mahrová, G. (2006). *Komunikace pro zdravotní sestry*. Praha: Grada Publishning.

Williams, K., Kemper, S., & Hummert, M. L. (2003). Improving nursing home communication: An intervention to reduce elderspeak. *The gerontologist*, *43*(2), 242-247.

# Study Circles in Online Learning Environment in the Spirit of Learning-Centered Approach

## *Szilvia Simándi**

**Abstract:**

*Introduction:* In the era of information society and knowledge economy, learning in non-formal environments gets a highlighted role: it can supplement, replace or raise the knowledge and skills gained in the school system to a higher level (Forray & Juhász, 2008), as the so-called "valid" knowledge significantly changes due to the acceleration of development. With the appearance of information technology means and their booming development, the possibilities of gaining information have widened and, according to the forecasts, the role of learning communities will grow.

*Purpose:* Our starting point is that today, with the involvement of community sites (e.g. Google+, Facebook etc.) there is a new possibility for inspiring learning communities: by utilizing the power of community and the possibilities of network-based learning (Ollé & Lévai, 2013).

*Methods:* We intend to make a synthesis based on former research and literature focusing on the learning-centered approach, online learning environment, learning communities and study circles (Noesgaard & Ørngreen, 2015; Biggs & Tang, 2007; Kindström, 2010)

*Conclusions:* The online learning environment can be well utilized for community learning. In the online learning environment, the process of learning is built on activity-oriented work for which active participation, and an intensive, initiative communication are necessary and cooperative and collaborative learning get an important role.

**Key words:** study circle, online learning environment, learning-centered approach.

## 1   Introduction

Recently, lifelong learning validation is getting into the focus of attention both in the world of work and training. From the point of view of validation/recognition, we can distinguish between formal (identified with school system training) and all the other learning environments. In the most general sense, validation serves the "visualization" of the gained knowledge. In this approach, it is the result of learning that is important, i.e. the result is important and not the environment in which learning takes place. Participation in courses organized in the training market, work experience, participation in open courses, or self-study can serve as examples of learning environments different from the formal one. Thereby, there is an opportunity to certify such gained, but not

---

* Szilvia Simándi, Eszterházy Károly University, Eger, Hungary; simandi.szilvia@uni-eszterhazy.hu

documented learning results by their validation in the labour market or in different trainings.

The learning-oriented approach builds on the active involvement of the participants, putting the community and knowledge into focus, and strengthens the learning process by helping, supporting evaluation. The learning-oriented approach is strengthened also by the expectations of the labour market where practice-oriented, activity-based learning situations are getting to be appreciated.

On the basis of Kopp's (2013) work, the pillars of the learning-oriented approach can be summarized as follows:

- Learner-orientation: Builds on different preliminary knowledge of the participants, their different learning needs, and it is characterized by flexible and diverse learning management.
- Knowledge orientation: It is problem-oriented and practice-oriented, learning is active, activity-based and situational.
- Helping, supporting evaluation: Formative evaluation is getting more and more emphasized, i.e. it promotes learning by evaluation during the learning process.
- Community orientation: Builds on cooperation and learning from each other (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

In this paper, we are looking for the similar features between the learning-oriented approach and study circles, with special attention to the possibilities of study circles to be realized in the online learning environment.

The aim of this paper is not to show the study circle initiative in its detailed history, we only emphasize some stations in a nutshell. So, in the introduction of study circles, we focus on certain pillars of the learning-oriented approach.

The first study circle, which can be connected to self-organizing education characteristic for Swedish adult learning, was established by Oscar Olsson (1877–1950), a university student in Lund, near Malmö, in 1902. At the beginning of the 20th century, the target groups of the non-formal adult education were the disadvantaged groups, in case of which the primary aim was to increase the qualification level. The members of the study circles held their meetings in flats, churches, schools, rented rooms etc., in private circles. Besides increasing knowledge, the aim was to strengthen self-confidence so that the participants would be able to change their situations by their own efforts. Study circles are still popular in Sweden; they have become a part of the natural lifestyle of the Swedish population. Study circles are based on common interests and volunteering: the participants regularly learn in communities on the basis of their common interests. Olof Palme, the former Prime Minister of Sweden, regarding study circles once said, "Sweden is a Study Circle democracy to a great extent" (Harangi, 2010, pp. 32-33). In 2008, 1.9 million participants spent 9.8 million learning hours in 275,000 study circles, it means that each participant studied an average of 36 hours in a study circle. This complies with such a typical study circle that sits together for a 3-hour activity at about 10 times (Kindström, 2010, p. 50).

The practices of the Swedish study circles have spread to many countries, although they have a different name, practices and history in each country (see Australia: Australian Study Circles Network; Bangladesh: Study Circle Bangladesh; Canada: Study circles – A guide for programmers; Sweden: The Swedish National Council for Adult Education, The Swedish Adult Education Association; USA: Everyday Democracy – Previously the Study Circles Resource Center etc.) (Larsson & Nordvall, 2010).

Concerning Hungary, learning circles have existed in different forms, with smaller or bigger differences. We can list here the registered cultural and public educational associations' activities, different clubs, study groups, non-registered reading circles or hobby circles based on common interests. For example, study groups were organized to actively acquire knowledge on a subject in the form of leisure-time activities. There were mineral collecting, stamp collecting, old coin collecting circles, as well as ornamental plant growing, pet breeding, photo and short film making, homeland knowing and astronomical circles. Even though there were not so many circles, generally they proved to be lasting. And what is more important, their members studied technical literature on the given subject, so they became experts in their interest groups. Still, they remained rarities in public education; they have never become as defining as the study circles in Sweden and other Northern-European countries (Maróti, 2014).

We can ask the question, whether all small groups in public education can be considered learning communities. The Adult Education and Training Encyclopaedia in Hungary defines learning groups in general as every group organized for learning. In a narrower interpretation, however, such a small group can be considered a learning group that works with direct guidance of a qualified leader or a leader without qualifications. According to Maróti (2014), learning foreign languages in groups can serve as an example for non-formal learning. Although the participants' work is characterized by activity and cooperation, their work is led by a language teacher and the members of the group adjust to the teacher. Such a language learning group is different from a learning community, there is a lack of self-guidance.

As long as we speak about language learners, opposite the traditional language learning groups, there is a different kind of practices and methodology that characterize the conversational clubs, for example. The foreign language (English, German, French etc.) conversational clubs, as their names suggest, are mainly directed to the development of oral skills in a foreign language, in a relaxed climate. If there is a language teacher present, they mainly have a facilitating, learning supporting role. Everyone can join, from beginners to advanced language learners; everybody takes part in the conversations according to their level. There is only one main rule; no one can say a word in Hungarian. The range of topics is wide. The topics of the conversations (e.g. culture, sport, actualities, work, free time) are defined by the participants together, they play and accepting an active role in the realization of their own learning process, although here again the members can change.

The above examples show that there is a methodologically significant difference between the educating groups and communities, as well as between the members of an audience of a lecture, participants of a language course and a self-motivated community. Compared to a group behaving as a simple unit, a community has an advantage – it is more than the amount of the activities of its members because the change of opinions in them and the activities supplementing each other remain even if the number of its members is reduced.

## 2   Methodology projections of study circles

In the text below, methodology projections of study circles are examined. Study circles can be viewed as learning- and participant-oriented small groups with self-educational forms of organization that are built on the division of work and cooperation of the participants, from selecting the learning materials and planning, through their utilization

to evaluation of the achieved results. In study circles, everybody is important, the success of common work depends on the contribution of each member.

This paper is based on the Swedish traditions and experience (Kindström, 2010), we can outline the significant features of study circles as follows:

The basis for learning in a study circle comes from an interest in a common topic. We can speak about an open, free learning opportunity, the participation is voluntary, there is no input competence specified – at most, recommendations for applicants are given. Generally, it does not end with an exam and official papers, either. Experiences from the Swedish study circles shows that only some percentage of the participants hope to gain official papers. Study circles mainly build on the pleasure of learning and the curiosity towards the topic, as well as the need for communication and belonging to a community are among the significant motifs. In Sweden, for example, study circles almost exclusively represent the only learning possibility for the age group above 50, since other forms of adult education focus rather on younger adults (Bjerkaker, 2006; Campbell, 1998).

In an earlier research – "Society of circles", 63 participants were interviewed to get to know the reasons for their participation in study circles. The study was directed to explore the connection between the everyday life and study circle participation in a sophisticated way. During it, 44 different participation reasons were found, which were ranked into 6 meta-categories (Kindström, 2010):

1. Satisfying an interest: the most important arguments to join a study circle were interest and curiosity. Study circles were primarily built on the desire for knowledge corresponding to the needs and interests of the participants. Actualities that a wider society was interested were also among the reasons.

2. Knowledge: learning for knowledge that can be used in everyday life, that can be utilized in the world of work or even connected to different hobbies. Research on adult education confirmed that participants become more committed to learning if the "necessary advantages" for them appear during the learning process. They naturally depend on their attitude towards learning and also on the value of knowledge for the individual (learning for pleasure) (Kotler & Keller, 2012).

3. Community: the social function was mentioned by almost all interviewed participants. Besides knowledge, good social relationships were also indicated as important. The driving force of participating in a community was the cooperation between its members and not the rivalry between them. The "necessary advantage" can occur in this form as well; besides the generally supposed ones (utilization in the world of work or everyday life etc.), it can even be a kind of communication need (for example belonging to a community).

These three meta-categories could be found in the majority of the persons interviewed.

Other reasons can be found in the following categories:

4. Personal development: emphasizing its significance, its influence on increasing one's self-esteem.

5. A study circle as a democratic forum: a part of the participants emphasized the opportunity to tell and discuss their opinions.

6. A way of learning: emphasizing the freedom of choice and the absence of exams.

It was also stated in the study that the participation in a study circle had usually not only one, but more reasons, the participants joined them usually due to several reasons.

As far as the composition of the members of study circles is concerned, we can usually talk about heterogeneous groups. The participants were different from the point of view of gender, age, qualifications, marital status as well as their workplace, and they had different preliminary knowledge and experience. The interest in the topic was the same.

The number of persons in the groups should be neither too high nor too low. If a group has fewer than five members, the experience shows that it is hard to maintain a general conversation, if it is too big, then the cooperation and common responsibility inside the group can be damaged. Namely, the work inside the study circles is based on the active participation and cooperation of its members. The ideal number of the members in a learning group is between 8 and 10, so, every member of the group can be in a communicational relationship with the others and there is a possibility of exchanging opinions and experiences too.

Planning the work in a study circle and the formulation of the aims are jointly discussed by the participants, they approve and target them, and thus, an active involvement from the participants is indispensable. The participants can even change or modify the plan in a flexible way during the study circle work, since the learning plan is seen as a tool for learning. The members of the study circle are responsible for their own work and accomplish their learning objectives. It is also important that the work in the study circle should start from the experiences and knowledge of the participants and build on their preliminary knowledge and experiences.

The leader of the study circle is not a traditional leader, but they are rather the facilitator and the supporter of the participants. The leader is aware of the principles of group dynamics and supports the dialogue among the participants. As in the real life, in the study circles, there are people who do not hide their opinions while others are shy and quiet. The leader of the study circle strengthens the self-esteem of the participants, creates a relaxed climate, encourages cooperation and prevents rivalries.

The fact whether the expectations of the participants come to light before the start of the learning process has a significant impact on the success of the work in the study circle.

The experience from the Swedish study circles show that if the common work shifts to any end of the scale, namely if it becomes too school-like, that is, if the free exchange of opinions is replaced by orientation on curriculum and teaching (for example, the process becomes too controlled), or if the working climate becomes too free or jovial, it endangers the joint learning. The reason for this can be found in the weak motivation of the participants or too high expectations.

We can say that certain pillars of the learning-oriented approach (Kopp, 2013) are clearly reflect in the study circles – knowledge, learning support and the community stand in their centre.

## 3 Study circles in the online learning environment

In the continuation of our study, we focus on methodological projections of the study circles realized in the online learning environment.

Prior to the online learning environment, place and time were of determinative significance. The person who did not find partners of the same interest in his or her place of living or could not comply his or her free time with the other participants, had a not easy task.

With the emergence and booming development of informational technology means the possibilities of gaining knowledge widened. New technology reinterprets the feedback,

interactive and reflective features of learning. Parallel to the spread of the broadband Internet and the interactive web 2.0 means, connectivism as the theory of network learning appeared (Verhagen, as cited in Bessenyei & Szirbik, 2011).

George Siemens (2005) finds connectivism the learning theory of the digital era. According to Benedek, connectivism considers learning a process in which information exchange supported by informal, online means, organized into networks has a definitive role among the interchanges. Gaining knowledge is a process during which specialized interchanges are connected to information sources. Participation in networks, the access to information, software serving the interpretation of information and putting them into contexts give the possibility of a completely new, cooperating and self-educating learning. Such services are provided by, for example, community sites (Facebook, Google+), photo-sharing sites (Flickr), video-sharing sites (YouTube, Videa) and various blogs. Here we can list Wikipedia and other, freely editable information stores, Twitter, different link-sharing sites (LinkedIn, delicious) and forums, as well as online office applications (Google Docs), news sources (RSS), and online storage providers (Dropbox) (Benedek, 2013).

The expression online or virtual community is used in many senses in technical literature dealing with the topic and the standard language. "It can mean an Internet forum, a group of online videogame players, as well as a research team working on a common project. The examples also show that the online communities often exist not only in the cyber space but the online community can also replicate or "lengthen" our real relationships, and can mean relationships beyond, from which later even real personal relationships can be born" (Fejes, 2007, p. 32).

The essence of the online learning community can likewise be found in the interactions, group activities developing in the online environment, and a difference can be made in the group activities for example by the fact whether collaboration occurs or not.

In connectivism, cooperative and collaborative learning get an emphasized role. In our interpretation, cooperative learning means that group members help each other to reach the individual's learning objectives, while during collaborative learning, the group members support each other to reach the common learning objectives. During the cooperation, the participants divide the tasks among each other, and every group member is responsible for a certain piece of task. Collaboration is, however, such "building of knowledge" during which the division of work is spontaneous, depending on who can contribute with what to the joint work (Tóth, 2013). During cooperation, the "distributed roles" are fixed until the learning process ends, but in the process of collaboration, the roles can change even several times depending on who and with what kind of knowledge can contribute to the given working process (Dorner, 2007). So, collaborative learning can be understood as "a collaborative knowledge building process directed to solving a given problem, during which the participants share their theories connected to the solution of the problem and they also harmonize these" (Baba, as cited in Dorner, 2007, p. 303).

With the involvement of community sites (e.g. Google+, Facebook etc.), there is a new possibility of inspiring study circles – utilizing the power of communities and the possibilities given by network-based learning. Google+ and Facebook also give opportunities for asynchronous communication. For example, a closed Facebook group gives space for everyday communication or project-like tasks, and can efficiently support almost any kind of community activity. Each participant takes part in the

learning process using his/her own Facebook profile, but the extent of information visible about the members can vary. There are participants whose profiles are public, complete, while others show only limited information. Google+ is at present the second biggest among the online communities in terms of the number of users (Ollé & Lévai, 2013).

We can mention the initiative called Virtual University of Károly Eszterházy University as an example. Those interested can choose among many topics based on their interests. Certain courses can be realized in different learning environments (e.g. Moodle, Google+, Facebook group, etc.). Some courses have credit values, these are mainly for higher education students, other courses offer the opportunity to "study for pleasure" – free and open learning.

Those courses are in the centre of our attention, in which some of the features of study circles and certain pillars of the learning-oriented approach are reflected.

The period of the courses is predetermined, one can apply after preliminary registration, and, usually, there is no possibility for joining after they started. The courses are generally built on an activity-orientated network work. For its successful accomplishment, activity and intensive and initiative communication between the participants are required. The initiative builds on differentiated marketing activities as for the addressed target group: it tries to address more segments by building on the "necessary advantages" of the participants.

Certain courses can be a great form of the completion of the formal school studies for primary school, secondary school or even higher education students. Moreover, they offer learning possibilities for those wishing to refresh, renew their knowledge, for people open and interested in life matters, for those working in changing shifts, or some special target groups (mothers with babies, pensioners, those living geographically far away, those wishing to study in Hungarian, those having limited opportunities for moving, etc.).

Courses functioning as learning communities offer such learning situations which the participants can actively join and act in, they can bring creative ideas and ask questions about a topic. The tasks are characterized by diversity and colourfulness. The course leader is, in the case of the learning circle-oriented courses, present rather as a facilitator of the participants – they create the opportunity to study both individually and together for the participants, and support the dialogues among the participants. In every phase of the learning process (planning, organization, realization, and evaluation), the learning activity of the participants comes into focus, where the participants, too, can influence certain activities and the space for learning.

During the joint online work, there is the possibility to share and store information in an organized way and to use many kinds of communication surfaces (Uden, et al., 2015). Brainstorming of ideas in connection with a topic can be realized in the online form, too, with the help of sites that can be edited together, to which videos, photos, links and files can be added, for example with Padlet or Lino web applications.

Community learning to be realized in an online learning environment can well be supplemented and supported also by the following:
-   Google Drive public or private storage – for sharing and storing files;
-   Google document to be shared with other people – interactive Word document for common note-taking, brainstorming of ideas;
-   Google Slides – give the possibility of jointly edited PowerPoint slide shows;

- Google Calendar – different events can be created to which invitations can be sent;
- Google+ community site – generating community content (sharing and commenting on documents in an open or closed community, sharing of video and sound files, etc.);
- Mind-mapping software;
- Skype – synchronous communication: conference call, video call, chat etc.

## 4   Conclusion

The above examples show that the online learning environment can be well utilized for community learning. It is predicted that the role of learning communities is going to grow. Members of virtual communities established around a common interest are going to move more easily into the info-communicational space than the present generation. Though the practical application of connectivism is more demanding in the formal school environment, experiences show that in a non-formal learning environment, where the pillars of learning-oriented approach can be more visible, it can be well utilized. In the online learning environment, learning requires a specific type of behaviour different from classroom situations as the individual's responsibility is bigger than in the traditional educational environment and self-regulation gets an even bigger role as the participants are not physically present (Noesgaard & Ørngreen, 2015; Nehme, 2010).

## References

Baba, S. (2005). *The dynamics of study circles: Some reflections on ABIM's collaborative learning system.* Malaysia: Academy for Civilizational Studies. Retrieved from: http://irep.iium.edu.my/7540/1/The_dynamics_of_study_circles.pdf

Benedek, A. (2013). Új pedagógiai paradigma – 2.0: Tételek a digitális tanulásról. In A. Benedek (Ed), *Digitális pedagógia 2.0* (pp. 15-51). Budapest: Typotex Kiadó.

Bessenyei, I., & Szirbik, G. (2011). Hálózatok, társas tudás, konnektivizmus. *Oktatás – Informatika,* 1-2, 20-30.

Bjerkaker, S. (2006). The Study Circle: For Learning and Democracy. *Convergence, 39*(2-3), 49–60.

Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2007). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University.* Open University Press. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2mWn469

Campbell, S. L. (1998). *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators.* Study Circles Resource Center, a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc. Retrieved from http://www.awcnet.org/documents/tools_studycirclefacilitatorsguide.pdf

Dorner, H. (2007). *Kollaboratív tudásépítés számítógéppel segített tanulási környezetben – A tudásépítő interakciók elemzése.* MultiMédia az Oktatásban 2007 conference. Budapesti Műszaki Főiskola. Retrieved from http://conf.uni-obuda.hu/multimedia 2007/55_DornerHelga.pdf

Fejes, J. B. (2007). Online tanulóközösségek. *Iskolakultúra*, 4, 32-37.

Forray R. K., & Juhász, E. (2008). Az autonóm tanulás és az oktatás rendszere. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle, 58*(3), 62−68.

Harangi, L. (2010). A művelődési önszerveződés svéd modellje. *Szín, 15*(1), 32-36.

Kindström, C. (2010). *A tanulókörök módszerének a bemutatása.* Szentendre: Budapest Környéki Népfőiskolai Szövetség.

Kopp, E. (2013). Tanulásközpontú programfejlesztés. *Felsőoktatási Műhely,* 2, 39-56.

Kotler, P., & Keller, K. L. (2012). *Marketing management.* Prentice Hall. Retrieved from: http://bit.ly/1xXKzJq

Larsson, S., & Nordvall, H. (2010). *Study Circles in Sweden. An Overview with a Bibliography of International Literature.* Linköping University Electronic Press. Retrieved from http://liu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:328351/FULLTEXT01

Maróti, A. (2014). Közösségi a közművelődés? *Kulturális Szemle*, 1, 26-32.

Nehme, M. (2010). E-Learning and Students' Motivation. *Legal Education Review, 20*(1-2), 223-239.

Noesgaard, S. S., & Ørngreen, R. (2015). The Effectiveness of E-Learning: An Explorative and Integrative Review of the Definitions, Methodologies and Factors that Promote e-Learning Effectiveness. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 13*(4), 278-290.

Ollé, J., & Lévai, D. (2013). *A XXI. század oktatástechnológiája I.* Eger: EKF.

Siemens, G. (2005). Connectivism: A Learning Theory for the Digital Age. *Instructional Technology and Distance Learning, 2*(1). Retrieved from http://www.itdl.org/journal/jan_05/article01.htm

Uden, L., Liberona, D., & Welzer, T. (Eds.). (2015). *Learning Technology for Education in Cloud.* Springer.

Tóth, P. (2013). Tanulási teljesítmény mérése online környezetben. In A. Benedek (Ed.), *Digitális pedagógia 2.0* (pp. 220-271). Budapest: Typotex Kiadó.

Verhagen, P. (2006). *Connectivism: a new learning theory?* Retrieved from http://elearning.surf.nl/e-learning/english/3793

# Family as One of the Most Important Factors in a Child's Upbringing

## *Jaroslav Oberuč – Ladislav Zapletal*\*

**Abstract:**
*Introduction:* The development of a child takes place according to certain laws, each one of which has its own individual dynamics, so, every child becomes a unique human being. Children gradually collect information about themselves and the world around them. They receive feedback about themselves from people who take care of them – mainly their family, mother and father. Their positive responses support the child's feeling of being loved, worthy of interest, which has a positive effect on them.
*Purpose:* Family environment is likely to have the strongest impact on the child's behaviour. Educational procedures, family climate, relationships between parents, those between parents and the child, the degree and methods of satisfying the child's needs, moral values, and social ties of the family – they all affect the child's behaviour.
*Methods:* In the presented paper, traditional desk research methods were used.
*Conclusions:* Behaviour is learned and has its purpose. Family teaches the child many things, e.g. how to cope with simple tasks, as well as about complex social inclusion.

**Key words:** child education, marriage, family, family education, the role of mothers, the role of fathers.

## 1 Introduction

Young people do not want to get married. According to a recent survey by the International Centre for Family and Work Studies (Lajdová, 2006), nearly one in five of young persons, graduates from various types of schools, considers partner cohabitation as an informal union of two people. One of the most common responses of young people is: "Once we have our own home, sufficient income and will enjoy our freedom, then we can start a family". Although it might seem that the so-called, cohabitation serves as good training for marriage, marriage counsellors claim that they do not have good experiences with such a form of living together as young people get used to a certain way of functioning, which is then difficult to change during marriage. The biggest changes in cohabitation occur when a baby is born. New responsibilities which cannot be postponed start occurring and the changes in how the couple functions tend to be more difficult to cope with for men than women. For them, cohabitation is a more comfortable form of living together.

---

\*    Jaroslav Oberuč, DTI University, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia; oberuc@dti.sk
     Ladislav Zapletal, DTI University, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia; zapletal@dti.sk

According to experts, however, there must be a distinction drawn between long-term cohabitation and living together for few months before the wedding, when the mutual adaptation issues are being solved. The latter case is not harmful to the relationship. Such a form of cohabitation can help uncover an unsuitable partner for marriage, e.g. a tyrant, a jealous partner, or an asocial person. However, this is beneficial only if the partners do not fall for the illusion that marriage will change the other person for better.

Among professionals, twelve months are considered the optimum time of dating and getting to know each other. After this time, the level of endorphins is gradually dropping and a "crush" in the relationship enters a new phase. This is the time when partners should say what they want – they should either get married or break up. However, young people often live together for years and nothing happens. Such testing of living together is just dating. Even though, in recent years, the number of marriages has decreased almost by half per thousand inhabitants, marriage is not a doomed institution. In surveys, only six percent of Slovaks consider it outdated. Nevertheless, as young people who live together claim that there is no reason to enter a formal relationship when the life "without a piece of paper" provides more pleasant things as marriage – time spent together, the option of leaving anytime and sexual life.

In western Europe, cohabitation is widespread among young couples. In Sweden, for example, only 17 percent of new couples get married. In Slovakia, according to a survey by Focus realized eight years ago, cohabitation before marriage was approved by 47 percent of respondents while 48 percent disapproved. The number of people approving sexual intercourse before marriage, however, is much higher, up to 70 percent. Sociologists justify that cohabitation without marriage, unlike occasional sex, is seen as something more binding and more visible.

Although the society's approach to marriage has not changed significantly, the opinions on the age at which it is optimal to get married has been changing. In the past, there was a social pressure placed on people to get married young, even though it was clear that it produced unstable marriages leading to their failure. Today, the social pressure is not so strong.

## 2 Marriage – the perfect arrangement or an old fashioned one?

What are people's views on marriage? Opinions of those who have not tried it differ from those who can be considered veteran spouses. Nowadays, it may seem that its purpose is disappearing and, especially among young people, its importance has declined. The fact is that particularly young people postpone marriage for various reasons. Many young couples choose an alternative form of living together, so to speak "without a piece of paper".

The way of life and trends differ from generation to generation. Once, "ordinary" dating was not at all considered common. People married after a relatively short time. Walking the streets holding hands or in an embrace was almost unacceptable. And not so long ago, a twenty-year single woman was already considered a spinster. Today, it is different. Basically, everything has changed. People today spend more time studying and committing to work and their career, they enjoy their adult lives and they put off marital affairs for later.

If you ask a young woman who is in a long-term relationship when the wedding is going to take place, the most common answer you get is – "Don't be ridiculous". "And for

what reason?" "If I want to live with someone, I do not need a piece of paper for it." (Vladuch, 2016).

It seems that marriage means the end of love itself and the beginning of duties, an inevitable stereotype and monotony. Before the marriage, the opinions on the institution of marriage are often influenced by the role models in the individual's environments, especially by our parents' relationships. Of course, arguments and days that strikingly resemble each other will come, but the purpose of marriage is much deeper. A married couple is the basic unit of the society. Love cannot be just dreamed, it is the most beautiful and precious thing. It is amazing to experience the moments of being together and it is extremely important to have someone close when problems come. And, of course, a harmonious family environment represents the basic precondition for bringing up children.

We firmly believe that the majority of people were lucky enough to grow up in a family where the parents manifested their love, where their shared kisses and hugs were a part of everyday reality and not only a memory from years ago. For some people, marriage is a loving reality while for others, it is a big mystery. The truth remains that, so far, no one has come up with a better form of the coexistence of two persons.

The notion of marriage can be defined as the relationship between two people (usually understood as an intimate and sexual relationship), which has a national, social, or religious recognition. It is created through contracts, civil or religious ceremonies.

In Slovakia, marriage is defined in the Act No. 36/2005 on Family and on Amendment of some other acts. Its basic principles include (Act no. 36/2005 Coll., Art. 1-4 and § 1-3):

- Marriage is a permanent community of a man and a woman. The society protects this commitment and promotes its welfare. Husband and wife are equal in rights and obligations. The main purpose of marriage is the foundation of a family and proper upbringing of children.
- A family based on marriage is the basic cell of society. All forms of families are broadly protected by the society.
- Parenting is a highly recognised mission of men and women by the society; and a stable family including the child's mother and father is the most suitable environment for the general and harmonious development of a child. The society provides parenthood not only with protection, but also with necessary care, especially in the form of material support and help.
- All family members have an obligation to help each other and, according to their ability and a capacity, to contribute to increasing the material and cultural level of the family. Parents have the right to raise their children in agreement with their own religious and philosophical opinions and the obligation to provide a peaceful and safe family environment. Parental responsibility is shared by both parents.
- A marriage is entered on the basis of free will and completing a consenting declaration of a man and a woman, after fulfilling the conditions specified by this law.
- The purpose of marriage lies in the foundation of a family and proper upbringing of children.
- Men and women who want to enter into marriage should first know each other's qualities and health condition.

- The declaration of marriage is done in front of a municipal officer charged with keeping of the register, eventually an authority that fulfils the task, the register officer, or an authority of the church or a religious institution entitled thereto by a special regulation.

From the reference on the cited Family Act we cannot share the views of some of our citizens who seek to promote marriage as a union of two, adult, mentally capable persons, and does not insist that they must be of the opposite sex. Although gay marriages are legal in Canada, Spain, Portugal, France, Benelux and in most states in the USA, in Slovakia, according to the law, marriage is a union of a man and a woman, so this type of marriage is legally impossible.

There are ongoing discussions on the context of the status of marriage. According to the Slovak Constitution, marriage is a permanent union of a man and a woman. We can find it in all eras and in all cultures and that is because it meets the basic needs of humans incomparably better than any other institution, even though, over the centuries, it has undergone numerous changes in different cultures, social structures and spiritual attitudes. When considering these differences, permanent characteristics of mutual emotional relationships between men and women should not be forgotten. Although the dignity of this institution is not manifested everywhere with the same clarity, there is a sense of the greatness of marriage in all cultures, because the welfare of mankind and of human and Christian society is closely related to the favourable status of marital and family community. The ideal conditions for getting married are the presence of love, mutual understanding, as well as material support.

This is also demonstrated in the empirical research by Lucie Droppová (2006), in the work The Meaning of Marriage for the Formation of Families, where most of the married respondents indicated the main reason for entering into marriage the feelings of stability, security and safety in the partnership, as well as communication as a basis of marital understanding. As the main cause of staying single, people who are economically independent, stated the reason that, so far, they have not found a suitable partner.

## 3   Family and upbringing in the family

The concept of family is closely connected with the concept of marriage. However, a married couple becomes a family only if they meet the important function of the reproduction of humans. Family is a biosocial group, formed by at least one parent and a child. It is a small social group, made up of individuals connected by marriage, biological relations or adoption. Family members follow steady behaviour patterns, each family member fulfils a certain social role.

Průcha, Walterová and Mareš (1995, p. 189) consider family "The oldest social institution that performs the socializing, economic, social-regulatory, reproductive and additional functions. It creates a certain emotional climate, forms interpersonal relationships, values and attitudes, ethical principles and lifestyle. From the sociological point of view, it is the inclusion of individuals to social structures."

Due to these facts, Tamášová recommends understanding the concept of family as a "Small social group that forms a certain social system and from which its members get their identity. People living in it are characterized by their interconnected relationships emerging from partnership – marriage and kinship – parents and children" (Tamášová, 2007, p. 11).

A family, as the primary social group, is characterized by intimacy, high unity, emotionality and authenticity, which are based on strong emotional bonds. Typically, it is the first social group that individuals come into contact with and, for some time, it is the only one. Most people were born into a family and lived in it for the most of their childhood and youth. Relationships between parents very actively influence the psyche of the child, the attitude which the child develops towards its surroundings. A quiet family environment is the first presupposition for enabling children to grow up into balanced and satisfied adults.

At present, the family performs the following functions (to compare: Hlásna, Horváthová, Mucha, & Tóthová, 2006; Oberuč, Ušiak, & Sláviková, 2014, p. 75; Krajčová & Pasternáková, 2009):

1.  Biological – in the sense of reproduction of people and regulation of sexual life. In a civilized society, it also includes conscious family planning, which is based on knowledge of genetics, biology and psychology. The developmental uniqueness of personality represents a specific area (Gáborová & Porubčanová, 2016).

2.  Economic – it is the share of individual family members on social production and consumption, which is meant to satisfy the needs of the family members. Each family has its own budget which depends on the income of the family members.

3.  Social and educational – its task is introducing children into the society and their education. Its mission is to promote mental and physical development. Parental care gives children a sense of security and satisfaction, helping them to create and develop relationships with people and themselves. Porubčanová (2015) draws attention to the social partnership of parents and their participation when dealing with educational institutions.

4.  Cultural and psychological (emotional) – this function lies in the fact that a family creates patterns of social coexistence for its members while providing them with an opportunity of emotional enjoyment, relaxation and practicing hobbies. Emotional relationships in the family are important for its stability, morality and civilized behaviour.

5.  Protection – parents are obliged to look after the mental and physical development of their children, their nutrition, housing, clothing and, especially, to protect them from negative social-pathological phenomena. Emotional ties between spouses and between parents and children, as well as family ties provide the best conditions for happiness and are essential for the stability of a family. Pasternáková (2005) also stresses empathy in family relationships.

6.  Rest and recovering – are focused on the application and development of children and other family members' interests in a reasonable and satisfactory manner, organization and efficient use of free time by children and on mental recovering of all family members.

7.  Diagnostic – this function's task in the family is to analyse, recognise and identify the needs of the child by their parents and to implement these needs in accordance with their developmental needs (Labašová & Porubčanová, 2012).

Fulfilling of the functions of the family directly depends on the relationship between the spouses, which is reflected in the relationship between parents and children. A cold or even hostile, or a completely ruined relationship between spouses does not provide the right conditions for the child's emotional development.

The natural composition of complete families is represented by spouses – a father and a mother – and their offspring. It creates the optimal conditions for the completion of all family functions (Krajčírová & Mikloško, 2004).

A family is therefore a unit, in which the mutual relationships of all its members are important. Some of the parents' roles can be substituted, e.g. where the mother is missing, the role can be replaced by the father and vice versa. In certain situations, however, the roles of a father and a mother are irreplaceable. A woman – mother – has a role that can never be replaced by men, while men have roles that cannot be replaced by anyone else. A man and a woman, as a father and a mother, need each other and complement each other, thus form a whole. Therefore, it is important that the family is complete and that there are both parents present as people whom the child needs.

## 4   The role of the mother in the family

The differences between men and women are biological. The question of which sex is more valuable seems unnecessary for the child's upbringing. Currently, there is much talk about the fading gender roles, but the collaboration of the mother and the father in the family is very important. Relationships between parents very profoundly affect the psyche of the child, the attitude that the child develops towards its surroundings.

Despite this finding, mothers have taken a central position in the family for many generations and are seen as the unifying figures or strengthening agents. The role of a mother is associated with the emotional and educational aspects and being exposed to various requirements and demands. A mother fulfils one of the most important social roles. She unconditionally loves her children, regardless of their beauty, skills or talents. Children, who have not experienced their mothers' love and tenderness, lose the most valuable and the most beautiful thing one could experience in childhood and which they emotionally recall in adulthood. The relationship between the mother and the child is of a particular importance in building emotional relationships that will help them find their place in the human society. It is very important that the child receives as many pleasant inputs at an early age (caress, smile and understanding) as possible. It is known that the shortage of these is reflected in latter aggression or inaccurate adaptation of a young person to social regulations.

Experts agree that children who could not grow up in the care of their mother, especially at pre-school age, when the emotional development is the most intense, are disadvantaged.

Mothers should also represent the aesthetic element in the family. This differs from the role of fathers, who are associated rather with artistic nature.

The aesthetic role of the mother in the family is mainly reflected in the overall climate, quietness, appearance of the home and in the behaviour of individual family members. It is precisely this climate that only women can create. The mother of the child embodies security, satisfaction, happiness, empathy towards the other person, towards their joys and sorrows. She does not cause unnecessary quarrels and does not underestimate other people's work. She is brave, able to cheer at the right moment, even if she herself may be in a difficult situation.

The contact between the mother and the child at an early age can create favourable conditions for the positive development of the child's personality. School-age children are already able to understand that it is necessary to be separated from the mother for some time; they are adequately prepared for this.

The role of mothers is crucial in education because the foundations for the formation of human nature and character are laid long before people begin to use their brains, long before they learn how to speak with other people.

The correct implementation of the role of the mother in the family requires mental and physical maturity in order to be able to handle complex tasks associated with the function of a good mother and also performing all tasks and activities associated with the role of the father because, today, these two roles can be substituted almost to their full extent.

## 5    The role of the father in the family

The father and the mother are the first role models for children. They are consciously and unknowingly trying to imitate them. Therefore, it is necessary for both parents to deliver an optimal, quiet family climate as the basis for a peaceful, healthy development of their children (Kačáni & Višňovský, 2005, p. 21).

The father should not only show love, but he should also be supportive to his wife. The father is a guarantee of security. The role of the father affects the relationship between the father and the mother as well. The role of the mother is linked to her emotional balance. This balance can be either strengthened or weakened, depending on what the mother's relationship with her husband looks like. Therefore, every mother's emotional change has a direct impact on the mother – child relationship. Therefore, a harmonious marriage is necessary for the proper emotional development of a child. Moreover, children perceive and create an image of their fathers not only based on their own observations, but also through their mothers' perception of their husbands. Therefore, a woman who despises her husband and discredits him in the eyes of children, helps to create a distinctive image of the father which, in turn, will also affect his role.

The father's educational function is mainly characterized by support and protection from the outside world, leading children to discipline, promoting their independence, autonomy and quality performance. Fathers should represent an authority, but it shall not take the form of authoritarianism, despotism or tyranny.

The father's is the male role in the family. He helps his son in accepting his manhood, including sexual orientation. In the case of daughters, fathers help them discover the role of mothers and women, and thus acquire the model of femininity. Women, who have not developed a close, friendly relationship with their fathers, do not feel comfortable among men and they do not understand them. Fathers should be committed to the life of their daughters. Fathers should have an understanding for their daughters' concerns; they should not send them to their mothers for advice.

Fathers' love should not be selfish, they should respect their children's personalities and, as they grow up, should become friends with them and help them become independent. Fathers should be those who children can rely on, authorities which can persuade, satisfy and effectively help them. They should be affectionate to the child, but this love must be fair, strict and demanding.

## 6    Conclusion

Family not only forms a social group, but its main function is to link people, as an expression of their interpersonal relationships, by which it becomes one of the most important parts of the system of human relationships. Family is an institution of

socialization and development of a child's personality. A harmonious family environment represents not only an important basis for the child's present life, but it can positively affect their future as well. The quality of life of any society is directly dependent on the quality of family life (Rigová, 2005).

Babies are born helpless, unable to survive alone, so they need well-functioning families as an ideal group for their survival. Family is, in most cases, the first model of human coexistence, shaping the child's development and affecting their way of life. It provides children with support and, at the same time, it teaches them how to build their own individualities.

## References

Droppová, L. (2006). *Vietnam Mandelstam pre vznik rodiny.* Retrieved from http://www.luciadroppova.eu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=88&Itemid=33

Ďuricová, L. (2005). Spôsob výchovy v rodine a formovanie osobnosti dieťaťa. In *Rodinné prostredie ako factor socializácie a personalizácie osobnosti dieťaťa.* Zborník čiastkových výstupov a riešení vedecko-výskumnej úlohy VEGA 1/0244/03. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, FHV.

Gáborová, Ľ., & Porubčanová, D. (2016). *Vybrané kapitoly vývinovej psychológie.* Brno: Tribun.

Hlásna, S., Horváthová, K., Mucha, M., & Tóthová, R. (2006). *Úvod do pedagogiky.* Bratislava: ENIGMA.

Kačáni, V., & Višňovský, Ľ. (2005). *Psychológia a pedagogika pomáhajú škole.* Bratislava: IRIS.

Krajčírová, M., & Mikloško, J. (2004). *Mamy bocian nenosí.* Bratislava: Motýľ.

Krajčová, N., & Pasternáková, L. (2009). *Štýly výchovy v rodine v kontexte s hodnotovou orientáciou detí.* Prešov: Prešovská univerzita v Prešove.

Labašová, E., & Porubčanová, D. (2012). *Pedagogická diagnostika*. Dubnica nad Váhom: DTI.

Lajdová, Z. (2006). *Mladým sa do manželstva nechce. Prečo?* Retrieved from http://koktail.pravda.sk/sexi-soubiznis/clanok/51324-mladym-sa-do-manzelstva-nechce-preco/

Oberuč, J., Ušiak, G., & Sláviková, G. (2014). *Základy pedagogiky*. Dubnica nad Váhom: Dubnický technologický inštitút v Dubnici nad Váhom.

Pasternáková, L. (2005). Hovoríme o empatii. *Vychovávateľ, Educatio,* 51(9).

Porubčanová, D. (2015). Stratégie kooperácie relevantných inštitúcií pri eliminácii agresie žiakov. In J. Hanuliaková et al., *Klíma školy a agresivita žiakov v empirickom kontexte* (pp. 105-149). Dubnica nad Váhom: DTI.

Průcha, J., Walterová, E., & Mareš, J. (1995). *Pedagogický slovník.* Praha: PORTÁL.

Tamášová, V. (2007). *Teória a prax rodinnej edukácie.* Ivánka pri Dunaji: AXIMA.

*Ústava Slovenskej republiky a ústavné zákony*. (2006). Žilina: PORADCA, s.r.o.

Vladuch. (2016). *Manželstvo – najdokonalejší zväzok, či prežitok?* Retrieved from http://zena.atlas.sk/manzelstvo-najdokonalejsi-zvazok-ci-prezitok/rodina/manzelstvo/501992.html

*Zákon č. 36/2005 Z. z. o rodine a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov*. Retrieved from http://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2005-36

# INFORMATION

## Doc. PhDr. Valentína Trubíniová, CSc.
## An Outstanding Slovak Pedagogue

### *Viola Tamášová*[*]

Doc. PhDr. Valentína Trubíniová, CSc. is an outstanding personality – the founder of the field of pre-school pedagogy at three Slovak universities. In January, she celebrated her life anniversary – her 80th birthday. She was born on January 6, 1937 in Nová Lehota (a picturesque village near Piešťany). She finished her secondary school studies in 1955 at Pedagogical School for Training Kindergarten Teachers in Modra, where her interest in the issues of pre-school pedagogy, kindergartens and, above all, children has arisen. Then, she graduated from the Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava, in the field of Pedagogy with specialization on Pre-School Education (1981). Later, in 1997, she earned a PhD. degree, and in 2003, habilitated in Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education of Comenius University in Bratislava.

In Bratislava, during her professional life, she has tried every job position – from working as a teacher, the director of several kindergartens (Pavlovova, Plátenícka, Teplická), a school inspector in district Bratislava III, a state school inspector at the Ministry of Education, to being a specialist at the Central Institute for Teacher Training (Ústredný ústav pre vzdelávanie učiteľov), where she could make use of all her knowledge and share it with her colleagues as a part of their further education.

As a university teacher at Comenius University in Bratislava, using her conception, she participated in the creation of the field of study Kindergarten Teacher Training, later Pre-School Pedagogy and implemented them at universities in Trnava and Ružomberok as well. Her conception is, to a certain extent, being used at all Slovak faculties of education even nowadays.

---

[*]   Viola Tamášová, DTI University, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia; tamasova@dti.sk

Doc. PhDr. Valentína Trubíniová, CSc. has focused on the fields of management and training kindergarten teachers and delivered courses, e.g. Conceptions and Programs of Pre-School Education; or Management of Kindergartens, for students at several faculties. Her professional orientation is also reflected in her publication activity starting with her dissertation thesis (1997) in which she focused on training educational leaders in pre-school education. In her habilitation thesis (2003), she dealt with the issues of the quality of pre-school education.

Doc. PhDr. Valentína Trubíniová, CSc. is a recognized scientific worker. She has participated in the solution of several VEGA and KEGA projects, among them, the most important are *Predškolská pedagogika – Terminologický a výkladový slovník predškolskej pedagogiky (Pre-School Pedagogy – Terminological Dictionary of Pre-School Pedagogy)*, 2007 (she is the editor and the author of 160 entries) and the project entitled *Innovations in the Theory of Pre-School Pedagogy in Relation to the State Curriculum for ISCED 0 – Pre-Primary Education,* the outcomes of which are presented in 13 publications.

She significantly contributed to the review of the history of pre-school education in her monographs *The History of Pre-School Pedagogy (Volumes I and II, 2003, 2007).* Recently, she has finished her new monograph *Pedagogické aspekty hry v reflexii významných osobností (Pedagogical Aspects of Games in Important Personalities' Reflection).* Her latest monograph offers an opportunity to understand the reasons of the historical changes in games and using them in education in the period under review better. She seeks the answers for the following questions: *What is a game? What is the function of games? What is the role of games in children's lives? Why do children play?* It is a wonderful book and I have had the opportunity to be the reviewer of it.

In all her other scientific and scholarly works – textbooks, study materials, books of proceedings, journals, entries in encyclopaedias, etc., Doc. PhDr. Valentína Trubíniová, CSc. deals with the issues of kindergarten management (with an emphasis placed on the innovation of the content of pre-school education), development of games and toys, language education, didactics, communication, children's speech development, children's personality development and happy childhood in family environment.

She has educated hundreds of students – teachers-to-be – and guided them when writing their bachelor, diploma, rigorous and doctoral theses. She has received many honours, medals and awards for her work, among them are the honour for *The Most Important Personality in Pre-School Education in Slovakia* awarded by OMEP – Organisation Mondiale pour l'education préscolaire, (2007)**,** certificate of *Honour by the Rector of the Catholic University in Ružomberok* (2007), and she earned the honour *"A Pedagogue Worth Remembering"* on the occasion of awarding the best teachers in Slovakia with Zlatý Amos (Golden Amos) in academic year 2011/12.

She has been fulfilling her life mission – to be a good teacher, to lead students towards love and respect for children, to playing with them – for more than a half of a century. She has never lost her optimism, but she has lived with humility in her heart, humanity, self-sacrifice, and enthusiasm for pre-school education – it is only a small fragment of the life and work of this outstanding personality depicted in this paper.

*Dear colleague, dear Doc. PhDr. Valentína Trubíniová, CSc., a precious friend, on behalf of me and the Editorial Board of Acta Educationis Generalis, I wish you good prosperity, life satisfaction, a lot of love and friendship from those close to you.*

# Prof. PhDr. Jiří Mareš, CSc.
# On the Occasion of His Jubilee Celebrations

*Hana Lukášová – Tomáš Svatoš[*]*

Dear Professor, it is hard to believe that you are celebrating another of life's major anniversaries. In this message of congratulation, we would like to look back over selected milestones in that long part of your life's journey on which we have had the honour to meet you, ask you for interviews or even for advice.

At our very first meetings we dealt with the interesting research topic of the microanalysis of teaching from the perspective of teacher-pupil interaction and communication. At that time, it was a question of the microanalysis of teaching, the results of which were incorporated in research work that you completed and defended at the Jan Comenius Pedagogical Institute at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

The results of this research emerged in an interesting research team with whom you collaborated (Tollingerová, Helus, Křivohlavý, Gavora, Kulič, Š. Švec and many other specialists). Every member of the team focused on questions relating to the analyses of teacher-pupil or teacher-student communication and interaction in teaching from a different perspective. All tried to find methods what would facilitate the description of the reality of teacher in school practice and contribute research findings to support future changes. In the 1970s this was an entirely unique methodology in an otherwise normatively conceived approach to questions of school. A series of microanalytical approaches to pedagogical and psychological research have revealed that pedagogical communication in primary school teaching has a number of reserves. The proceedings of a 1981 conference that were prepared under your editorship with the title Teacher-Pupil/Teacher-Student Interaction provided very rich inspiration for changes in pedagogy as a science in the search of a new quality of pedagogical theory and practice

---

[*]    Hana Lukášová, University of Tomas Bata in Zlín, Faculty of Humanities, Zlín, Czech Republic; hlukasova@fhs.utb.cz
       Tomáš Svatoš, University of Hradec Králové, Faculty of Education, Hradec Králové, Czech Republic; tomas.svatos@uhk.cz

and its reflections in research. Tomáš Svatoš recalls about this period: 'With the arrival and methodology of Jiří Mareš much began to change; inspired by an emerging activity- and experience-based approach and with the substantial support of technical equipment, future teachers encountered procedures like micro-teaching, professional role-play or methods of socially communicative training based on reflection and self-reflection. Does this sound "modern" to you? I expect so, but in fact I am writing about the start of the 1970s. When I read about research on the basis of video-study or read news about video-training in teaching, I know that "this is old hat" here and that today's methods were foreshadowed by the work of Jiří Mareš (and his peers) from more than 45 years ago' (2012).

Publications entitled Social and Pedagogical Communication (1998) and Communication in School (1995), which were published in collaboration with Professor J. Křivohlavý, became a very valuable asset in the search for new possibilities and quality in the development of general didactics, which took as their starting point a new conception of didactic interaction and communication in primary school teaching. They also contain new sources of inspiration for those seeking to develop teaching training methods. A previously unheard-of body of work emerged; on the one hand, it presented the necessary theory and broad development of the subject, but at the same time the publications also had an applied dimension, and this in an entirely new way lay in concrete examples and instances that immeasurably contributed to the reader's understanding of the material.

Another team of collaborators that you led was the Grant-Awarding Agency of the Czech Republic. In the working party for pedagogy and psychology No.406 (between 1996 and 2002) we were able to observe closely your conscientious approach to checking the bases for decision-making about the allocation of financial support for projects that developed research in both scientific fields. An alert and responsible approach was the key to overseeing the quality of research activity in pedagogical and psychological disciplines and concentrated on the quality of their development for future teacher-training.

From 2001 the opportunity also arose to work with the man celebrating today in a working party for pedagogy, psychology and kinanthropology which you led as a member of the Accreditation Committee of the Government of the Czech Republic. Professor Mareš's rigorous and critical assessment was always delivered with great respect and kindness to all participants. In every evaluation, there were always recommendations that led to a change or correction to the accreditation plans proposed. The recommendations always sought to attain the kind of quality of accreditation plans that would ensure that the new programmes of study were approved by the committee.

Between 2001 and 2004, Professor Mareš, you acted as advisor to the research theme entitled New Possibilities for Educating Teachers, Trainers and Pupils for a Learning Society in the Twenty-First Century. The annual assessments and analysis of the results of individual stages over the five years of the research theme were always a clear and critical source for the internal evaluation of research results in the research team. Professor Mareš similarly helped with a whole series of other new pedagogical topics: it is worth recalling, for example, topics entering pedagogical contexts for the first time, like the climate of the school and classroom, social support, quality of life, teacher attitudes to professional development or, newest of all, low morale among teachers.

From 2004 he prepared another research project for a Grant-awarding Agency of the Czech Republic task entitled The Quality of Life of Children and Adolescents, which was launched in 2006. The first edited volume, published under the same title, shows that the question of a person's quality of life, which had underlain all topics and activities in the preceding years, had become a central research question. In the edited volumes showing the results of research the extent of your contribution as author is clear at all levels (general, metophological and empirical). The examination of preconceptions and conceptions of the quality of life of children in primary-school pupils brought entirely new impulses for the study of preconceptions for teacher-training students and new impulses for their training and other education.

In subsequent years the number of completely fundamental publications for the development of health pedagogy and psychology (see, for example, The Child and Pain, The Patient's Conception of Illness, Social Support, and others), and another publication, Pedagogical Psychology in 2013, which brought a whole series of impulses for the further development of sciences of learning and teaching and for teaching practice. Professor Mareš also devoted great attention to the conception of the meaning of teacher training for all levels of school and consistently built trust in this profession.

Dear professor, we thank you for your encouragement to embark on a research career. We thank you for the chance to learn from your patience, love for the field, tenacity in the search for new possibilities in the development of pedagogical and psychological science. We also thank you for providing great hope and unending support and help when we were looking for ways out of situations that sometimes seemed like blind alleys.

It is an honour for us that we can express in this place our great admiration for your extraordinary life and give brief testimony about some research and professional milestones that we have shared together.

We would also like to express our respect for you as a person who, with his extraordinary humanity, intervened in the lives of many people and many areas of pedagogical and psychological scientific development. We would like to express thanks on behalf of all whom you so willingly helped when they were most in need.

We wish you many reasons for happiness in the days to come. We also wish you good health and the motivation for further research from which we too (immodestly speaking) will benefit.

# Publication Ethics and Malpractice Statement

DTI University, Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, as the owner of the journal *Acta Educationis Generalis* takes its duties of guardianship over all stages of publishing extremely seriously and we recognize our ethical and other responsibilities. We are committed to ensuring that advertising, reprint or other commercial revenue has no impact or influence on editorial decisions. In addition, the Editorial Board will assist in communications with other journals and/or publishers where this is useful and necessary.

## Duties of authors
### Reporting standards
Authors of reports of original research should present an accurate account of the work performed as well as an objective discussion of its significance. Underlying data should be represented accurately in the paper. A paper should contain sufficient detail and references to permit others to replicate the work. Fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statements constitute unethical behavior and are unacceptable. Review and professional publication articles should also be accurate and objective, and editorial 'opinion' works should be clearly identified as such.

### Data access and retention
Authors may be asked to provide the raw data in connection with a paper for editorial review, and should be prepared to provide public access to such data, if practicable, and should in any event be prepared to retain such data for a reasonable time after publication.

### Originality and plagiarism
The authors should ensure that they have written entirely original works, and if the authors have used the work and/or words of others that this has been appropriately cited or quoted. Plagiarism takes many forms, from passing off another's paper as the author's own paper, to copying or paraphrasing substantial parts of another's paper (without attribution), to claiming results from research conducted by others. Plagiarism in all its forms constitutes unethical publishing behavior and is unacceptable.

### Multiple, redundant or concurrent publication
An author should not in general publish manuscripts describing essentially the same research in more than one journal or primary publication. Submitting the same manuscript to more than one journal concurrently constitutes unethical publishing behavior and is unacceptable. In general, an author should not submit for consideration in another journal a previously published paper. The authors and editors of the journals concerned must agree to the secondary publication, which must reflect the same data and interpretation of the primary document. The primary reference must be cited in the secondary publication.

### Acknowledgement of sources
Proper acknowledgment of the work of others must always be given. Authors should cite publications that have been influential in determining the nature of the reported work. Information obtained privately, as in conversation, correspondence, or discussion with third parties, must not be used or reported without explicit, written permission from the source. Information obtained in the course of confidential services, such as refereeing manuscripts or grant applications, must not be used without the explicit written permission of the author of the work involved in these services.

### Authorship of the paper

Authorship should be limited to those who have made a significant contribution to the conception, design, execution, or interpretation of the reported study. All those who have made significant contributions should be listed as co-authors. Where there are others who have participated in certain substantive aspects of the research project, they should be acknowledged or listed as contributors. The corresponding author should ensure that all appropriate co-authors and no inappropriate co-authors are included on the paper, and that all co-authors have seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication.

### Disclosure and conflicts of interest

All authors should disclose in their manuscript any financial or other substantive conflict of interest that might be construed to influence the results or interpretation of their manuscript. All sources of financial support for the project should be disclosed. Examples of potential conflicts of interest which should be disclosed include employment, consultancies, stock ownership, honoraria, paid expert testimony, patent applications/registrations, and grants or other funding. Potential conflicts of interest should be disclosed at the earliest stage possible.

### Fundamental errors in published works

When an author discovers a significant error or inaccuracy in his/her own published work, it is the author's obligation to promptly notify the journal editor or publisher and cooperate with the editor to retract or correct the paper. If the editor or the publisher learns from a third party that a published work contains a significant error, it is the obligation of the author to promptly retract or correct the paper or provide evidence to the editor of the correctness of the original paper.

## Duties of the Editorial Board

### Publication decisions

The editor of a peer-reviewed journal *Acta Technologica Dubnicae* is responsible for deciding which of the articles submitted to the journal should be published. The validation of the work in question and its importance to researchers and readers must always drive such decisions. The editor may be guided by the policies of the journal's editorial board and constrained by such legal requirements as shall then be in force regarding libel, copyright infringement and plagiarism. The editor may confer with other editors or reviewers in making this decision.

### Fair play

An editor should evaluate manuscripts for their intellectual content without regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, ethnic origin, citizenship, or political philosophy of the authors.

### Confidentiality

The editor and any editorial staff must not disclose any information about a submitted manuscript to anyone other than the corresponding author, reviewers, potential reviewers, other editorial advisers, and the publisher, as appropriate.

### Disclosure and conflicts of interest

Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in an editor's own research without the express written consent of the author. Privileged information or ideas obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and not used for personal advantage. Editors should refuse themselves (i.e. should ask a co-editor, associate editor or other member of the editorial board instead to review and consider) from considering manuscripts in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or (possibly) institutions connected to the papers. Editors should require all contributors to disclose relevant competing interests and publish

corrections if competing interests are revealed after publication. If needed, other appropriate action should be taken, such as the publication of a retraction or expression of concern.

### Involvement and cooperation in investigations

An editor should take reasonably responsive measures when ethical complaints have been presented concerning a submitted manuscript or published paper, in conjunction with the publisher (or society). Such measures will generally include contacting the author of the manuscript or paper and giving due consideration of the respective complaint or claims made, but may also include further communications to the relevant institutions and research bodies, and if the complaint is upheld, the publication of a correction, retraction, expression of concern, or other note, as may be relevant. Every reported act of unethical publishing behavior must be looked into, even if it is discovered years after publication.

### Duties of reviewers

### Contribution to editorial decisions

Peer review assists the editor in making editorial decisions and through the editorial communications with the author may also assist the author in improving the paper.

### Promptness

Any selected peer-reviewer who feels unqualified to review the research reported in a manuscript or knows that its prompt review will be impossible should notify the editor and excuse himself from the review process.

### Confidentiality

Any manuscripts received for review must be treated as confidential documents. They must not be shown to or discussed with others except as authorized by the editor.

### Standards of objectivity

Reviews should be conducted objectively. Personal criticism of the author is inappropriate. Peer-reviewers should express their views clearly with supporting arguments.

### Acknowledgement of sources

Reviewers should identify relevant published work that has not been cited by the authors. Any statement that an observation, derivation, or argument had been previously reported should be accompanied by the relevant citation. A reviewer should also call to the editor's attention any substantial similarity or overlap between the manuscript under consideration and any other published paper of which they have personal knowledge.

### Disclosure and conflict of interest

Unpublished materials disclosed in a submitted manuscript must not be used in a reviewer's own research without the express written consent of the author. Privileged information or ideas obtained through peer review must be kept confidential and not used for personal advantage. Reviewers should not consider manuscripts in which they have conflicts of interest resulting from competitive, collaborative, or other relationships or connections with any of the authors, companies, or institutions connected to the papers.

# Guide for Authors

**Acta Educationis Generalis** is an interdisciplinary journal whose primary objective is to fulfill the need for thorough discussion of research results in disciplines relevant to pedagogical, psychological and technological aspects of education and to contribute towards the wide diffusion of scientifically sound contributions in this domain. All the contributions published in Acta Educationis Generalis are freely accessible at http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/atd.

Submission of an article implies that the work described has not been published previously, that is not under consideration for publication elsewhere, that its publication is approved by all the authors, and that, if accepted, it will not be published elsewhere in the same form, in English or in any other language. The journal does not have article processing charges (APCs) nor article submission charges.

Please write your text in good English (American or British usage is accepted, but not a mixture of these). The submission should not exceed 20 pages with figures and tables (format A4, Times New Roman 11, single space). Use decimal points (not commas); use a space for thousands (10 000 and above).

Provide the following data on the title page (in the order given):

*Title.* Concise and informative. Avoid abbreviations and formulae where possible.

*Author names and affiliations.* Present the authors' affiliation addresses below the names. Provide the full postal address of each affiliation, including the country name, and the e-mail address of each author.

*Corresponding author.* Clearly indicate who is willing to handle correspondence at all stages of refereeing and publication.

*Abstract.* A structured abstract is required as follows:
  a) *Research study:*

|  |  |
|---|---|
| Introduction: | context of the study, main research aims/questions |
| Methods: | sampling, design, methods of data collection and analysis |
| Results: | main findings |
| Discussion: | relevance of findings |
| Limitations: | limitations of research (e.g. sample size, range of participants) |
| Conclusions: | explanations of obtained results, areas of further research |
| Key words: | 3-5 words that describe key aspects |

  b) *Literature review:*

|  |  |
|---|---|
| Introduction: | context of the review, background |
| Purpose: | main research aims |
| Methods: | parameters and inclusion criteria, search strategy and procedures, methods of analysis |
| Conclusions: | main conclusions arising from research aims and author's/authors' comments |

| Key words: | 3-5 words that describe key aspects, avoiding general and plural terms and multiple concepts. |
|---|---|

*Abbreviations.* An abbreviation should be used in cases when a) the abbreviation is standard and will not interfere with the reader's understanding and b) if space and repetition can be greatly avoided through abbreviation. Define abbreviations that are not standard in this field at their first occurrence in the article.

*Subdivisions of the article.* After the abstract, divide your article into clearly defined and numbered sections. Subsections should be numbered 1.1, 1.2, etc.  Any subsection may be given a brief heading.

*Tables and figures* should be given separate numbering (Table 1, Figure 1). Number all tables sequentially as you refer to them in the text (Table 1, Table 2, etc.), likewise for figures (Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.). Use clear and concise titles. The number and the title should be placed above the table, the figure number and the title appear below the visual display.

*Acknowledgements.* Place acknowledgements before the references.

*References.* Each source you cite in the paper must appear in your reference list; likewise, each entry in the reference list must be cited in your text. Use APA style for referencing and citation. For more information, please consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, (6th ed., 2nd printing).

For *in-text citations* follow the author-date method (Jones, 1998). The complete reference should appear in the reference list at the end of the paper. If you are directly quoting from a work, you will need to include the author, year of publication, and the page number for the reference. Always capitalize proper nouns.

The *list of references* should follow the paper. Responsibility for the accuracy of bibliographic citations lies entirely with the authors. Reference list entries should be alphabetized by the last name of the first author of each work. For multiple articles by the same author, or authors listed in the same order, list the entries in chronological order, from earliest to most recent. More than one reference from the same author(s) in the same year must be identified by the letters "a", "b", etc., placed after the year of publication. When referring to books, chapters, articles, or Web pages, capitalize only the first letter of the first word of a title and subtitle, the first word after a colon or a dash in the title, and proper nouns. Present the journal title in full. Citing and listing of web references: as a minimum, the full URL should be given.

*Reviewing policy*
Acta Educationins Generalis uses double-blind review. All submissions are sent to two anonymous reviewers and will only be accepted on the basis of stringent peer review.

The editorial policy and the technical content of the journal are the responsibility of the Editorial Board.
Authors are encouraged to submit their papers electronically to aeg@dti.sk.