ANSWERS AND INNOVATIONS IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN

PORTUGAL AND SLOVENIA

Edited by

Luís Castanheira and Tatjana Devjak

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Introduction

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Tatjana Devjak, Luís Castanheira and Sanja Berčnik

Pre-school education is an integral part of an educational system, which assumes a significant role in remedying educational deficiencies. In today's world, which is characterized by mixed races, religions, cultures, value systems and different economic systems, pre-school education should be oriented towards the multicultural dimension, towards understanding and the justice system functioning, as well as towards the provision of the conditions for participation and empowerment of the individual as an individual and as a community member. The scientific monograph titled *Answers and Innovations in Pre-School Education in Portugal and Slovenia* comprises theoretical and empirical papers, which provide the formal basis of the pre-school education in Portugal and Slovenia, and various innovations that improve the quality of pre-school education. The first two papers are dedicated to the fundamentals of the pre-school education system. *Tatjana Devjak* in her paper *Concept of Pre-school Education in Slovenia Through Theoretical Framework* presents the uniform system of pre-school education in Slovenia as a significant constituent of the educational policy. In the paper, the provision of pre-school education is viewed as one of the fundamental tasks of the municipality, while the main tasks of kindergartens are to assist parents in providing comprehensive care for children, improving the quality of life of families and children, and creating opportunities for integrated child development. The paper also introduces the pre-school education studies, in the scope of which students become familiar with various characteristics of the childhood and education, and gain a core theoretical and practical knowledge of individual areas of kindergarten activities in

accordance with the publicly valid programme, i.e. Kindergarten Curriculum. *Luis Castanheira* in his paper titled *Concept of Pre-School Education in Portugal Through Theoretical Framework* introduces the theoretical framework of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Portugal which has a leading role in the development of children in all areas and domains. He presents ECE as a right for everyone, a precondition for enriched development, which enhances the democratic principle of equality of opportunity, both in access and in educational success throughout life. Although there is no compulsory national pre-school education programme, there are Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-school Education, which are based on the overall pedagogical objectives, and are intended to support the creation and implementation of the curriculum in the pre-school centres under the responsibility of each pre-school teacher, in collaboration with the educational team of the local educational establishment/grouping of schools. The third paper titled *Slovene and Portuguese Pre-School Teachers about Collaboration with Parents* by the authors *Tatjana Devjak, Luis Castanheira* and *Sanja Berčnik* states the main objectives and strategies of collaboration between parents and pre-school teachers in both countries. In the theoretical part the authors focus on the legal framework of collaboration with parents, whereas in the empirical part they compare the views of the Slovenian and Portuguese pre-school teachers on the importance of their collaboration with parents, whereby they highlight some personal views of on different ways of parental collaboration, on parental influence on the life and work of the pre-school institution, and on their competencies as regards their collaboration with parents. In the following paper titled *Collaboration with Parents as a part of Kindergarten's Educational Concept* the author *Sanja Berčnik* points out that the global changes in Slovenia also triggered changes in the education system, specifically, more plural early childhood education, at the level of programmes and organizational forms, as well as at the level of content and working methods. She argues that the kindergarten's educational concept, as a reflection of joint educational activities in the educational institution and each individual in it, requires collective agreements between (pre-school) teachers, children, and parents; based on the importance of collective agreements she analyses the pre-school teachers' and parents' expectations as regards their participation in drafting the educational concept. *Angelina Sanches* in her paper *Pedagogical Supervision as a Collaborative Process of Vocational Training*; discusses the role of pedagogical supervision in the initial training of early childhood educators/teachers. In the paper, the author analyses supervision as the process that supports and regulates the learning and professional development, and focuses on the importance of embarking on a reflexive (inter)action committed to the construction of quality educational and training responses. *Rosa Novo* in her paper *Modern School Movement*

(MSM) highlights the pedagogical model of Portuguese Modern School movement (M.E.M.) as an excellent contribution, which ensures quality in each institution. She advocates the democratic the pre-school institution, establishment and discusses the organization of the group of children, the playroom, and the daily routine. *Janez Vogrinc* and *Vesna Podgornik* in their paper titled *Improving Pre-School Education Through Self-Evaluation* focus on self-evaluation research, which can when carried out by pre-school teachers, significantly contribute to improving the quality of work of the pre-primary education institutions. The paper highlights the current situation in the field of self-evaluation research in Slovenian kindergartens and the conditions provided to pre-school teachers for self-evaluation. *Cristina Mesquita* in her paper *Participatory Contexts: Voice of the Child and Pedagogical Intentionality* reflects on the importance of participatory contexts in the education of children. She discusses participatory pedagogues and different approaches (High Scope, Pedagogy-in-Participation), that are concerned with the rights of children and their participation in an educational process. The idea of participation is presented as a right and in that context, the importance of building interactive and collaborative environments is discussed. *Tatjana Hodnik Čadež* focuses on mathematics as a teaching subject in the early years in her paper titled *Towards Comparison of Numbers Through Problem-solving in Kindergarten: Analysis of Pre-School Teachers' and Children's Performance.* She argues that although mathematics is a part of the Slovene curriculum, its activities should be interdisciplinary, i.e. linked to other areas, such as language, art, sport, science, etc., especially in the case of problem-solving. The aim of her research was to examine how the pre-school teachers and children address a particular problem in mathematics in relation to the comparison of numbers. *Maria Jose Rodrigues* in her paper titled *Science Education in the Early Years – Guidelines and Perspectives* writes about the placement of science in the guidelines for early childhood education in Portugal. She believes that science should be introduced in the early childhood centres with children from 3 to 6 years. In her opinion there is a growing need to provide research-driven education based on active and participatory methodologies, in order to initiate providing a scientific content to develop reasoning. The aim is to understand the world, to experiment, to innovate, to be autonomous, to cooperate with others and in doing so, fully exercise citizenship. The author of last paper titled *Language Support to Immigrant Children* is *Darija Skubic*. She focuses on education as the key factor of successful integration of young generations of migrants in the society. She points out a survey, which shows, that some of the educational systems in Europe (Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Canada, Portugal) are already adapting to the realities of immigration, while Slovenia is still among least committed counties. She underlines, that the language

assumes the major role in supporting children's process of identity formation; she presents mother tongue-based education and language support to immigrant children, especially in two of the aforementioned countries Sweden and Slovenia.

The Concept of Pre-School Education in Slovenia Through Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

The concept of pre-school education in Slovenia is a relatively new concept that referred to the education of children before entering school at first, but later it was expanded to the entire period of the education of children from 11 months to their school entry. The term pre-school education has been in use in Slovenia since 1993 when the Ministry of Education and Sports took over the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. Pre-school education in Slovenia is not compulsory; however, it forms a significant part of the educational policy. Similar as in some countries of northern Europe, there is a uniform system of pre-school education and care in Slovenia, i.e. care and education for young children are provided in uniform environments with a single regime for all pre-school children. Pre-school institutions fall under one administration, professionals generally have the same level of education, and belong to the same payment class regardless of the age of children for which they care. Organised pre-school education and care are exercised in public and private pre-school kindergartens, in pre-school family care or at home. In the year 2014/2015, there were 900 public kindergartens and 79 private kindergartens, which altogether included 84.750 children, accounting for 76.8% of all children. Pre-school education in kindergartens is governed by two laws, namely by Organization and Financing of Education Act and Pre-School Institutions

Act. **The provision of pre-school education is one of the fundamental tasks of the municipality, whereas the fundamental responsibilities of kindergartens in Slovenia are to assist parents in providing comprehensive care for children, improving the quality of life of families and children, and creating opportunities for integrated child development. In the course of their studies students of pre-school education become familiar with the various stages of child development and child education, and obtain core theoretical and practical knowledge of individual kindergarten activities in accordance with the publicly valid programme, i.e. Pre-school Curriculum, which was approved by the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education in March 1999. Graduates of the First Cycle Bologna Study Programme are able to communicate with children and adults and should be able to plan, implement and critically analyse educational work. An important objective of the pre-school education studies, which focus on practical pedagogical training, is the acquisition of fundamental and broad knowledge and its application in practice that will encourage the graduates' lifelong learning and provide the ways for acquiring specific knowledge and skills they need at work.**

Keywords: *Pre-school education, kindergartens, uniform system, kindergarten, Kindergarten Curriculum*

Introduction

The education and care policy of pre-school children depends on the view of the country as regards the allocation of responsibility for the education and care of pre-school children – either to parents or to the society. Countries, among them Slovenia, which recognize the problem of the education and care of pre-school children as a public problem, understand the right to quality programmes of pre--school education as a universal right. Pre-school period is an especially sensitive period of the child's development, and pre-school education can be of significant practical assistance in addressing the educational gaps if certain conditions are met.

Among the conditions, it is especially important to mention professional workers in pre-school institutions, who should, according to the experts' opinion, complete specialized higher education. In accordance with that pre-school education in Slovenia is based on the principles of democracy, pluralism, autonomy, professionalism and responsibility of employees; equal opportunities for children and parents, taking into account the diversity among children; the right to a choice and diversity, and the maintenance of balance between the various aspects of the child's physical and mental development.

Pre-School System in Slovenia

Pre-School Education

The term „pre-school education“ is relatively new in Slovenia, as it has only been used since 1993, when the Ministry of Education and Sport took over this area from the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. The term „pre-school education“ has replaced the term „child care“ and was first related solely to the child upbringing to his entering school, but later it was expanded to the entire pre--school period, from 11 months, when maternity leave in Slovenia ends, and up to 6 years or to the school entry (Devjak, Skubic, Polak and Kolšek, 2012).

The field of pre-school education, according to the OECD definition (2011) includes all the types of services that provide education and child care before entering school, but, as stated by Devjak et al. (2012), it also covers education, development and learning of children. Although pre-school education in Slovenia is not compulsory, it is an important and integral part of the educational policy, since there is a high awareness that pre-school education can significantly contribute to remedying school and educational deficiencies (Pre-School Education and Care in Europe, 2009). In Slovenia's Development Srategy pre-school education aims at reducing social exclusion and at allowing parents to more easily combine work and family obligations. The fundamental tasks of pre-school education or pre-school institutions in Slovenia are to assist parents in providing comprehensive care for children, improving the quality of life of families and children, and creating opportunities for integrated child development (Article 2 of Pre-School Institutions Act, 1996, 2005). The objectives of pre-school education are as folows: developing the skills of understanding and acceptance of oneself and others; developing the skills of making arrangements, consideration of diversity and participation in the groups; developing the skills of identifying feelings and fostering emotional experience and expression; fostering curiosity, exploratory spirit, imagination and intuition, and the development of independent thinking; encouraging language development for the effective and creative use of speech, and later also for reading and writing; promotion of artistic works and artistic expression; transfer of knowledge from different fields of science in in everyday life; promoting physical and motor development and the development of autonomy in the hygiene habits and health concerns (ibid., Article 4).

Organization of Pre-School Education

Model and Organization of Pre-School Education at State Level
In Europe, two organizational models of pre-school education and care are

predominant – a uniform and non-uniform[1] model. In Slovenia there is the so called uniform model of pre-school education, which envisages "education and protection for young children in uniform environments, with a uniform arrangement for all pre-school children" (ibid., p. 10). All age groups fall under the same administration; even professional staff have the same level of education and are classified in the same salary class regardless of the age group they work in (ibid.).

Pre-school education in Slovenia is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, and is regulated by two laws: Pre-School Institutions Act (1996, 2005, hereinafter ZoVrt) and the Organization and Financing of Education Act (1996, 2007, hereinafter: ZOFVI). Organization and Financing of Education Act provides for the conditions for operation, and determines the method of management and funding of all areas of education, while the Pre-School Institutions Act regulates pre-school education in public and private kindergartens (kindergarten tasks, objectives and principles, a range of kindergarten programmes, funding, conditions for the education of professional workers, working responsibilities of the pre-school teacher and of the assistant teacher, personal data collection and protection in kindergarten, etc.) (Pre-school Education, 2016).

Organized pre-school education and care are therefore carried out in public and private kindergartens, whereby parents have the right, in accordance with Article 9 of the ZoVrt (1996, 2005), to choose the programme of pre-school education in a public or private kindergarten. For children who cannot be included in the kindergarten due to illness, pre-school education can also be carried out at the child's home (ibid.). The legislation, therefore, provides for the legal framework for establishing public and private kindergartens.

Public Kindergartens

A public kindergarten may be established as a public educational institution or as an organizational unit of a public educational institution or of any other institution, or as any other legal entity governed by public law. A kindergarten is thus a legal entity, unless otherwise provided by law or the founding Act (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Article 7). Public kindergartens are established by local communities and municipalities. As a legal entity, the kindergarten must first be entered in the Court Register, and then in the Register of Providers of Publicly Valid Education Programmes, kept by the aforementioned Ministry. The proposal for the Register entry is filed by the local community – the founder of the public kindergarten or a private kindergarten (Pre-School Education, 2016). In order to be able to carry out

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1   The second model is a so-called non-uniform model of pre-school education, in which pre-school education and care are adapted to the age of children (different for the first and second age groups), and another Ministry is responsible for each age group. (Pre-School Care and Education in Europe, 2009).

care and education, public kindergartens should employ professional workers with the required education, as well as provide for space and equipment specified by the Minister (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Article 33). Kindergartens may start the activity of care and education upon their entry in the record kept by the Ministry responsible for pre-school education (ibid. Article 34). A public kindergarten can be established if it comprises a minimum of 10 children's departments (ibid. Article 44).

Depending on the duration, kindergartens can carry[2] out daily programmes (6 to 9 hours in the morning, in the afternoon, all-day or alternatively); half-day programmes (4 to 6 hours in the morning, in the afternoon or alternatively) and shorter programmes (240 to 600 hours per year) for children from remote and demographically deprived places. Daily and half-day programmes are intended for children from the age of 1 until their school entry, and comprise education, care and nutrition, while shorter programmes are intended only for children aged 3 and beyond, and comprise education and care, as well as child nutrition (ZoVrt, 1996, 2005, 14 Article). In kindergartens pre-school education is provided for the first (from 1 to 3 years) and the second (from 3 years to school entry) age group (Article 15), and the educational work is carried out homogeneously (the children included are in the age range of one year), heterogeneously (the children included are from the first or the second age group), or in combined departments (the children included come from the first and the second age groups) (ibid. Art. 16)[3]. The daily and half-day programmes are carried out jointly by pre-school teachers and pre-school teacher assistants, whereas the shorter programme can be implemented by pre-school teachers alone (ibid.). A kindergarten can also provide for the care and education of pre-school children in an educational-care family, in which case they are carried out at home by a pre-school teacher or a pre-school teacher assistant who is employed in a kindergarten and meets the educational requirements for the pre-school teacher or the pre-school teacher assistant; such an organization should be in accordance with the space and equipment norms and standards (ibid. Article 18). As already mentioned, pre-school education for children who cannot be included in kindergarten due to illness can also be organized as the so-called pre-school education at home, which is also carried out by pre-school teachers or pre-school teacher assistants who have finished the required education programmes (ibid. Article 19).

2   Specific norms and standards have been adopted for the education of the people with special developmental needs, of the nationally mixed population, and of the Roma children (ZoVrt, 1996, 2005, Article 14).

3   The number of children in the department should not exceed 12 children in the first age group and 22 children in the second age group, but the competent authority of the founder's community may, considering the situation and position of pre-school education in the local community, decide that the number of children may exceed the above number (ZoVrt , 1996, 2005, Article 17). Currently, the norms 12 + 2 children in the first age group and 22 + 2 children in the second age group apply in Slovenia.

Public kindergartens also provide pre-school education for children with special needs according to the programme for pre-school children with adapted implementation and additional professional assistance (Law on Placement of Children with Special Needs, 1996, 2011, hereinafter ZUOPP, Article 18). Pre-school education provides for additional professional assistance to remedy deficiencies, as interference or as an advisory service (Article 8), which is carried out individually or collectively in a department or externally in the educational or social welfare institution. Pre-school children may, upon the doctor's proposal, be guaranteed the right to counseling services as additional professional assistance prior to the introduction of the guidance procedure, up to a maximum of two hours per month (Article 9). In individual programmes for pre-school children with special needs, the contents, organization and methods of implementation are addapted (Article 11). In addition to the adjusted implementation, the care and education of children with special needs can also be provided within an adapted programme for pre-school children (Article 5), which is implemented by special kindergarten developmental departments, by kindergarten units established for the implementation of these programmes, and by public institutions for the careand education of children with special needs, as well as by public social welfare institutions (ibid. Article 18).

Programmes for pre-school children and the adapted programmes for pre-school children with special needs were adopted by the Expert Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Article 25). Public kindergartens implement a publicly valid programme called Kindergarten Curriculum, approved by the Council of Experts of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education in March 1999. It is primarily designed for the so-called daily programmes, but at the same time (taking into account the specificities),it also creates the professional basis for work in other programmes (half-day, shorter programmes, educational-care families, education at home). The curriculum concept was introduced because it is "broader and more overall than the concept of the programme, and it also shifts from the traditional emphasis on content to the emphasis on the process of pre-school education, it promotes the interactions and experiences from which the child learns in kindergarten" (Kindergarten Curriculum, 1999, p. 7). It comprises the objectives of the Kindergarten Curriculum and the principles drawing on them, the core knowledge about the development and learning of the child, and the global and specific goals for individual fields of activity. For reasons of transparency and professional clarity, it is divided into 6 subject areas – movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics –the activities of individual fields are interdisciplinary connected. Interdepartmental activities, such as moral development, health care, safety, traffic education are intertwined through all areas. The proposed content and objectives are set separately for the first and second

age group. The pre-school teacher empowered to "upon his professional consideration decides what, when, and how to do certain things" (ibid. page 8).

Private Kindergartens

Private kindergartens can be established by domestic or foreign legal entities or natural persons. A private kindergarten should be entered as a legal entity in the Court Register at first, and then in the Register of Providers of Publicly Valid Education Programmes, kept by the aforementioned Ministry. The proposal for entry in the registers is submitted by the private kindergarten itself (Pre-School Education, 2016). Private kindergartens can differ from public kindergartens according to the programmes. The programme of a private kindergarten is determined by the founder of the kindergarten based on Article 13 of the ZoVrt (1996, 2005), who can also decide on carrying out the public kindergarten programme. Prior to starting the programme, a private kindergarten must also obtain approval by the General Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education on the adequacy of the programme. Private kindergartens that implement the programmes according to specific pedagogical principles (Steiner, Decroly, Montessori and similar), are approved by the General Council of the Republic of Slovenia for General Education, when the programme has been recognized by an appropriate international association (ibid.). Both a public kindergarten and a private one can start their operation only after they have been registered by the Ministry. In order to be eligible for the entry in the Register, the requirements for professional workers, premises and equipment (ibid.) should be fulfilled.

However, if there is a need for pre-school education, the municipality may also grant a private kindergarten a concession for the implementation of a publicly valid programme (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Article 73). The granting of a concession means that a private kindergarten carries out a public service and has the same programme as a public kindergarten; a special concession contract defines the extent of funds provided to the kindergarten by the municipality (Paragraphs 74 and 75). Private kindergartens with a concession are part of a public network organized for the provision of public service in the field of education (see also Article 11). Private kindergartens without a concession can acquire the right to be funded from local community budgets in the case that they carry out at least a half-day programme, have at least one department of pre-school children, employ pre-school teachers and pre-school teacher assistants for the implementation of the programme in accordance with the law and other regulations, and if they are accessible to all children (ZoVrt, 1996, 2005 Article, 34)

In the school year 2014/2015, there were 978 kindergartens in Slovenia, of which 91% were public pre-school institutions, whereas 9% were private kindergartens. The total number of children enrolled was 85,407, accounting for 78.1% of all

children in Slovenia. The European Strategic Objective stated in the Education and Training 2020 document, according to which 95% of 4 and 5 year-olds should be enrolled in pre-primary education, has not yet been achieved despite the high number of children visiting kindergartens. In Slovenia 90.8% of 4 and 5 year-olds visit kindergartens (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2016).

Kindergarten Employees

Educational activities in a public kindergarten are carried out by pre-school teachers and pre-school teacher assistants, by the counsellor, the organizer of the hygiene regime, the organizer of the diet, and others (ZoVrt, 1996, 2005, Article 39). The work obligation[4] of the pre-school teacher covers preparation for educational work, planning and carrying out educational work, working with parents, and participation in the organization of life and work in kindergarten. The work obligation of the pre-school teacher assistant covers cooperation with the pre-school teacher in the planning, preparation, and carrying out of educational work in the department, and performing other tasks related to the kindergarten activities. Skills for work are acquired by employees in the scope of their completed pedagogical education; pre--school teachers should complete higher education according to the educational or study programme for pre-school education or higher education of the appropriate orientation, and a study programme for care and education designed for pre-school education. Pre-school teacher assistants should complete secondary professional education in line with the educational programme for pre-school education or finish the fourth year of the gimnazija *(upper-secondary school)* and complete a vocational course for working with pre-school children (Article 40). A pre-school teacher in the development department who carries out an adapted programme for pre-school children with special needs should prove a level of education provided for pre-school children and a special pedagogical education. In the kindergarten, which also includes children with special needs, educational work can also be performed by a pre-school teacher, who has completed special rehabilitation education (ZoVrt, 1996, 2005, Article 39).

Pre-School Education Studies

Study Course and Subjects

Pre-school teachers should complete a postsecondary or higher education provided through an educational or study programme for pre-school education or

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4   In compliance with the law and with the collective agreement specifying the weekly working time, the number of hours of the pre-school teacher's work with children should not exceed 30, whereas the number of hours of the pre-school teacher assistant's work should not exceed 35 hours a week (ZoVrt, 1996, 2005, Article 41).

higher education of the appropriate orientation, and a study programme for care and education designed for pre-school education. In Slovenia, the first-level higher education professional study programme Pre-school education is provided at three faculties –at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana, which is the largest and oldest Faculty of Education in Slovenia, at the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor, and the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska. In the field of education and training of pedagogical workers, there are two models according to the relationship between the subject and pedagogical education and training, the parallel model and the sequential one. The studies at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana are organized as the parallel model, i.e.the subject and pedagogical education and training are intertwined throughout all the studies (Zgaga, 2006, p. 15).

At the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana, the study programme Pre-School Education is the only higher professional programme and at the same time also the youngest one, which started as a three-year higher professional programme in the academic year 1995/1996. After the Bologna reform, the programme still remains a higher professional programme (Elaborat, 2006). The Pre-school Education Programme lasts for 3 years, and after the acquired 180 ECTS credits, the graduate is awarded the title Diplomirani vzgojitelj predšolskih otrok (VS) */Graduate Pre-School Teacher/Professional Higher Education/.* The basic goal of the professional study programme Pre-school Education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana is to "train students for quality educational work with younger children – pre-school children, and children in the first grade of the nine-year elementary school, and to work with their parents, colleagues and other professionals".

In addition to the general competences of the study programme (A, B)[5], the students acquire the subject-specific competences of the graduates of the Faculty of Edu-

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5   (A) General (generic) competences of higher education graduates: Ability to communicate, collaborative / teamwork. Synthetic, analytical, creative thinking and problem-solving. Flexible use of knowledge in practice. Autonomy, (self) criticality, (self) reflection, (self) evaluation, and pursuit of quality. General visibility, ability to communicate with experts from other professional and scientific fields. Initiative / ambition, the value of continuous personal progress and professional training. Information literacy. Organizational and managerial skills. Ability to manage time, self-development and planning, self-control of the implementation of plans. Communication in a foreign language. (B) General (generic) competencies of all graduates – education professionals: Knowledge and understanding of social systems (especially processes in education and education). Sensibility / openness for people and social situations. Knowledge and understanding of developmental Knowledge, differences and needs of the individual. Knowledge about educational and educational concepts, their philosophical and historical foundations. Knowing and understanding the institutional frameworks of work (requirements, legislation, documentation needs, legal aspects of educational work). Competence for research in education and training. Organizational and managerial skills in education, mentoring for students and trainees. Use of information and communication technology in education. Understanding individual values and value systems, managing professional-ethical issues. Knowing, understanding, focusing In inclusive, non-discriminatory work, multiculturalism (Elaborat 2006).

cation of the University of Ljubljana (C)[6] and the subject-specific competences of the Pre-school Education Programme (D), such as knowledge, critical evaluation and the use of theories on childhood, development and learning in the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational work; knowledge and autonomy in carrying out the curriculum for kindergartens and curriculum of the first grade of the nine-year primary school; knowledge of the contents, forms and methods of work, and the autonomous implementation of the curriculum for kindergartens and curricula of the first grade of the nine-year elementary school; efficient and flexible organization of space and time: arrangement of a playrooms for various activities and games, play and retrieval corners, selection of didactic and gaming devices, flexible scheduling of activities and links between them; observing and monitoring the achievements, progress and development of children; recognizing and adhering to individual needs and other differences between children (in personality traits, abilities, cognitive styles, family or social and cultural environment ...) in educational work; providing emotional safety to children and promoting autonomy according to their maturity; fostering the curiosity of children, taking into account internal motivation and interests, disseminating interests and promoting research and active learning; knowledge of team work and cooperation in pairs with pre-school teacher assistants, teachers or professional teams and effective communication with parents, and knowledge and use of various forms of cooperation with them (Procedures, 2016, pp. 1 and 2).

In the education process, students are thus acquainted with different concepts of childhood and education, they acquire the core theoretical and practical knowledge fo individual kindergarten activities, as well the skills of communicating with children and adults and of the planning, carrying out and critical analysis of their educational work (ibid.).

The programme consists of compulsory core pedagogical subjects, compulsory subjects of the profession, elective subjects, pedagogical practice, and the diploma project. In the curriculum there are 24 compulsory subjects, 3 units of the (compulsory) consolidated practice and a (compulsory) graduation project. The compulsory core

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6   (C) Subject-specific competences of the graduates of the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana: Knowledge of the content and methodology of the field. Understanding and using curricular theories and general and didactic knowledge in the subject area. Interdisciplinary linking of contents. Application of special pedagogical skills for working with children with special needs. Pedagogical class and / or Groups. Organizing active and independent learning, training pupils for effective learning. Capability to check and evaluate pupils' knowledge and achievements, and generate feedback. Communicate with professionals from different educational areas. Cooperation with parents. Understanding the relationship between the educational institution and the social environment. Systemic viewing and operation. Knowing and understanding the theoretical basics of advisory work. Designing a comprehensive assessment of individual needs. Groups, their strengths and weaknesses, taking into account environmental factors (physical, social, cultural) with appropriate procedures and instruments.Confirmation of procedures and principles of advisory work and planning and implementation of intervention programs.Enable to establish and maintain a partnership relationship with other users, Groups (parents, local community, counseling services, the economy, etc.). Commitment to such changes to the system, which guarantee the basic rights and needs of the user or the user. Groups (ibid.).

educational subjects are as follows. Developmental Psychology, Educational Psychology, Theory of Education, Pre-School Education, School Pedagogy with Didactics, Pedagogical Methodology, Kinesiology of Pre-School Children, Inclusive Education, Slovene, Sociology of Education and Selected Topics in Philosophy. The compulsory professional subjects are as follows: Language and Literature, Movement, Children in Society, Initial Sciences, Early Math Learning, Music, Music in Eearly Childhood, Art Education, Puppetry, Drama and Media, Dance Expression, Technical Education, Social Studies and Cross-Curricular Connections –Interdisciplinary projects, in which the students' knowledge of fundamental and technical subjects are used in a flexible manner, and the projects whereby the students can choose between several thematic groups each year. Among the elective courses, students can choose from basic courses (D) such as English Language I – Strategies for Learning a Foreign Language, Special Education, Interpersonal Communication, Education Research, Media Education, Child Victims of Violence, Family Literacy and English Language II – Linguistic Abilities. Among the elective professional courses (C), linked to the kindergarten activities, students can choose from courses such as Pedagogical Speech in Kindergarten, Youth Literature, Movement –Gaming Method, Swimming, Hiking, Kindergarten – Democratic Union, Game and Sciences, Mathematical Challenges in Kindergarten, Communication with Music, Artistic Creativity, Creative Technical Workshops, Puppetry, Dance Theatre, Children in the Kingdom of Animals and Nature in Kindergarten, Kindergarten in Nature (Booklet, 2016). The study programme contains 5 elective courses of 4 ECTS credits (a total of 20 credits). Students choose two optional subjects of the elective professional subjects (C): one from the group of the core subjects and one from the group of the kindergarten activities. The other three (D--general elective subjects) are selected from the common faculty elective subjects, of which two can also be from other faculties or universities. Students can get 30 ECTS credits from the compulsory or the optional part of the programmefrom any verified pre-school education programme abroad (mobility). The optional subjects of the programme motivate the students of pre-school education to get special qualifications in the field of work in kindergartens in which they are particularly interested due to their abilities. An important goal of pre-school education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana is "acquiring core and broad transfer skills that will enable the graduates to develop resources and ways to acquire the specific skills and knowledge they need at work" in the process of lifelong learning (ibid. p. 1).

Practical Pedagogical Training

Special emphasis of the study programme Pre-school Education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana is also placed on practical pedagogical

training (hereinafter PPU), which is a significant component of undergraduate education. It is based on the PPU model within which four types of scientific and research findings are dynamically intertwined: knowledge of student learning, the role of PPU in the study programmes, professional development of students during the PPU, and partnerships in the field of undergraduate education (Juriševič, Lipec Stopar, Magajna and Kranjčan, 2007). PPU is the very part of the programme that enables the most direct connection between academic and professional studies, profession and vocation, theory and practice (Devjak and Vilič, 2016a after Lipec 2007). As Juriševič et al. (2007) states, „if the Faculty student learns the necessary theoretical contents and develops various academic skills, in the scope of pedagogical practice he acquires professional identification and self-esteem, thus concluding a circle of experiential learning with a practical pedagogical experience, as well as developing various professional competences (ibid. p. 32). Also in the White Paper on Education of the Republic of Slovenia (2011), the PPU is emphasized as an important factor in the initial education of future pedagogical workers. In the professional development of students, pre--school education is a process in which students, in acquiring knowledge, experience and responsibility, move towards more complex patterns of thinking. PPU process provides students with numerous opportunities for active testing in concrete learning situations, for the integration of theoretical and practical pedagogical and professional knowledge. PPU enables students to acquire and develop new knowledge through experience transformations (Juriševič et al., 2007). PPU is an essential part of a research-oriented pre-school education study, and can be carried out in various ways, e.g. the student may observe the mentor in the performance of educational work, he may participate in the performance of educational work, he may independently carry out a lesson under the guidance of a mentor, or he may work independently for a longer period of time (Devjak and Vilič, 2016a). The pre-school education programme comprises two types of practice: the integrated practice and the aggregated practice.

Integrated practice[7] is carried out in the form of contact hours (practical exer-

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7   At the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor, practical training is included in the higher education programme Pre-School Education, and is also conducted in the form of an integrated and aggregated pedagogical practice in the first study year. The integrated practice is implemented in all three years in the scope of 10 ECTS credits. Students are expected to spend one day a week in kindergarten or in the first grade of elementary school, and to perform specific tasks (planned observation of various aspects of educational work, analyses, visits in institutions, etc.). Practical training in the form of aggregated practice is only carried out in the second and third study years in the scope of 12 ECTS credits. In the second year, practical training lasts two weeks (4 ECTS credits) and takes place in kindergarten. In the third year it lasts four weeks (8 ECTS credits) and takes place three weeks in kindergarten and one week in the first grade of elementary school (see http: /www.pef.um.si/205/predsolska+vzgoja). At the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska, the practice is evenly distributed among all three study years. Students undergo 3 weeks of practical training each year (they are awarded 3 ECTS credits in the first year, 3 ECTS credits in the second year, and 6 ECTS credits in the third year). More information: http://www.pef.upr.si/izobrazevanje/dodiplomski_studij_1%20_stopnje/predsolska_vzgoja_(vs)/od_2016-2017.

cises) in kindergartens, primary schools and other institutions for younger children. It is designed, organized and managed by a higher education teacher or his coworker and is, therefore, an integral part of individual subjects of basic pedagogical studies and of all professional subjects. In the scope of the integrated practice, the acquired theoretical knowledge is used in practical work, followed by a theoretical reflection of the practical work. It is carried out in the form of observations according to instructions or performances, whereby the pre-school teachers in the kindergarten or in the 1st grade of elementary school participate as mentors. As the integrated practice is part of the study subjects, it is not separately evaluated. Without taking into account the independent work (preparation for practice and writing reports), it covers 190 hours which accounts for 8.5% of all contact hours (Presentation book, 2016).

Another form of practice is the so-called consolidated or agregated practice that is an independent student activity, consisting of direct work in kindergarten (1st and 2nd age groups) or in the 1st grade of elementary school; it encompasses work preparation and evaluation of pedagogical work, which are carried out by the student under the mentorship of the pre-school teacher or the teacher. It takes place in kindergarten or the school of the student's choice, in the first age group section (2 weeks in the first study year), in the second age group section (4 weeks in the thirdstudy year), and in the first grade of primary school (1 week in the secondstudy year). The purpose of the consolidated practice is to get acquainted with educational institutions, to learn about the work of the pre-school teacher, to test the abilities and the acquired knowledge in the scope of the studies (Presentation Book, 2016).

In the first year, practice is of an observational character. As already mentioned, students perform practical work in the first kindergarten age group, i.e. in the departments of children aged from 1 to 3; during the observation practice they should learn about the characteristics of the child of this age group, about the correct care of the child, and combine theoretical knowledge with the direct work with children. The content of the practice is a core part of the curriculum, which the mentor then teaches. In addition to direct work with children, the student acquires an insight into the life and work of the kindergarten, both into activities, as well as other issues, such as the organizational structure, infrastructure and software, local, cultural, social and other particularities. The practice enables the student, in terms of his ability and motivation, to find out about his own suitability for the education profession, and to account for his motivation to become a pre-school teacher; further he learns about the professional role of the pre--school teacher, and about what the pre-school teacher is expected and required to do. During the observational practice, students actively monitor the pre-school

teacher's work, they participate, assist, and have the opportunity to advocate their ideas. The students mainly aim at observing and learning about different pedagogical (educational) approaches (e.g. ways of motivating, stimulating, explaining, solving educational problems, organizing work, integrating and combining different contents), about personalities and other special features of children (especially how to work with children with special needs); further, ways of monitoring the child's development, ways of working with parents (e.g. consultations with parents, open days, excursions and other activities with parents, involvement of parents in the direct implementation of the curriculum), the team work of pre--school teachers and pre-school teacher assistants at all stages of creation and evaluation of the implementation of the curriculum, other forms of work and activities taking place in the kindergarten educational group, which are related to the pre-school teacher's professional role are also at the core of the students' interests (Devjak and Vilič, 2016a, p. 3).

In the second year the pedagogical practice is of observational character, too; the students should be acquainted with the institutional framework of life and work in the first three years of elementary school, with th curriculum for the first grade, with the characteristics of children entering school, with the particularities of cooperation, the team work of the pre-school teacher and the first grade teacher, with the activities and issues in the first grade, with pedagogical documentation, with the organizational structure, infrastructure, and with the programme, with the local, cultural, social and other specificities, and with cooperation with parents. It is recommendable for the students to attend the expert group meetings, such as activites and conferences. The students focus on the observation of various pedagogical (educational) approaches, e.g. ways of motivating, encouraging, explaining, solving educational problems, organizing work, integrating different content; further, on personal and other special features of children (especially working with children with special needs); the students should learn about the ways to monitor the child's development, ways of working with parents, e.g. consultations with parents, open days, excursions and other activities with parents, involvement of parents in the direct implementation of the curriculum); forms of team work of the pre-school teacher and teacher at all stages of formation, evaluation of the curriculum implementation and other forms of work and activities that take place in the first grade of elementary school, and which are related to the pre-school teacher's professional role are are also at the core of the students' interests (Devjak and Vilič, 2016b).

In the third year, a four-week practice is carried out in the second age group (3–6-years old). This is the final part of the practical training, in which students should get experience of the educational work complexity. It is therefore crucial

to have a good mentor. In the third year, the student is expected to independently implement the curriculum, which comprises the following tasks; efficient and flexible organization of space and time and transitions between activities; working with the pre-school teacher assistant and with other professional staff in the kindergarten and outside; monitoring and evaluation of achievements, progress and development of children; communication with parents and various forms of cooperation with them. In all the study years the number of practice hours is about the same – where there is more aggregated practice, there is less integrated practice and vice versa. The calculation of all hours of direct practice shows that the student will practice 12 days per semester on average (Devjak and Vilič, 2016c).

Pre-School Education Master's Study

Since the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana is dedicated to the continuous development of pre-school education in Slovenia and its positioning in contemporary processes in the world, it offers the 2nd Cycle Pre-School Education Programme[8], which lasts 2 years and is awarded 120 ECTS credits. The programme is designed modularly and consists of 6 modules[9]: 1.) General modules; 2.) Compulsory optional content modules; 3.) Modules of optional professional content; 4.) Common selection modules; 5.) Preparation of the Master's thesis. The overall goal of the programme is to professionalise the pre-school education and raise the level and quality of professional qualifications of the professional staff in kindergartens; the aim of the programme is to educate the experts that will ensure the sustainability of pre-school education in Slovenia, and take care of its placement in contemporary processes in the world. The programme provides the foundation for the development of the pre-school education system at the national level –as regards the creation of development policies, and professional and ethical standards of the profession; it also focuses on the community level in the promotion of the cooperation between professionals and institutions that care for the pre-school children's well-being. The study programme is designed as an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental programme, which integrates students into research and development

8   Similar study programmes: University of Jyvaskyla;Titleof the programme: The Master Studies in Education Department: Department ofEarly Childhood Education; Country: Finland; 2. Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Title of the programme: Master of Science in Early Childhood Education; Department: Norwegian University of Science and Technology; Country: Norway; 3. Universitat de Barcelona; Title of the programme: Postgraduate Diploma on Advanced Study of Early Pre-school Education; Department: Universitat de Barcelona; Country: Spain; 4. Worcester State College; Title of the programme: Master of Education Concentration on Early Childhood Education; Department: Worcester State College; Country: Massachusetts, USA (Proofreader PV mag, 2016). From the academic year 2016/2017 onwards, the Second Cycle pre-primary education programme will also be carried out at the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor (http://www.pef.um.si/338/predsolska+vzgoja).

9   More information on https://www.pef.uni-lj.si/174.html (11-5-2016).

projects at faculties and in practice, and focuses on conceptual issues, as well as disciplinary fields. Masters of pre-school education will be qualified to research, manage and add to the quality of kindergartens, and to focus on special didactic areas (Proceedures of Pre-School Education Mag 2016).

Continuing Education and Training of Professional Workers in Education

In accordance with Article 105 of the ZOFVI (1996, 2007), professional staff employed in kindergartens should continuously get educated and trained, thus acquiring the professional titles of Mentor, Adviser and Councilor. At the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana, the Department for Continuing Professional Training was officially established in accordance with the adopted Rules on the Organization and Functioning of the Pedagogical Faculty on 8 March 2001, and in the year 2005 the Centre for Continuing Education and Training was establusfed, within which, according to the Rulebook on Continuing Education and Training (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia 64/2004), training and education programmes (IZP) and vocational training programmes–prescribed programmes (PRP), and modernization programmes (PSD) are carried out.

Vocational training programmes are study programmes that upgrade, deepen and disseminate knowledge of education programmes and give a new qualification. A professional worker who carries out such a programme has an appropriate education to teach a particular subject or to carry out certain educational work. Among the advanced training programmes the Study Programme for Pedagogical Upgrading in Pre-school Education should be mentioned[10], which lasts 1 year and is awarded 60 ECTS credits; its main goal is to train graduates of certain First-Cycle Bologna programmes (i.e. programmes in the fields of education, arts, humanities, and social sciences) for work in kindergartens. The programme develops general and subject-specific competencies[11]. The course consists of three parts as

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10 A similar program is also conducted at the Faculty of Education of the University of Primorska.
11 General competences: Ability to communicate, collaborative / teamwork. Synthetic, analytical, creative thinking and problem-solving. Flexible use of knowledge in practice. Autonomy, (self) criticality, (self) reflection, (self) evaluation, and pursuit of quality. Knowledge and understanding of developmental laws, differences and needs of the individual. Knowledge, understanding, orientation towards inclusive, non-discriminatory work, multiculturalism. And the following subject-specific competences: Knowledge, critical evaluation and the use of theories on childhood, development and learning in the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational work. Knowledge of the contents, forms and methods of work, and the autonomous implementation of the curriculum for kindergartens and curricula of the first grade of the nine-year elementary school. Knowledge of all areas of activity in kindergarten and subjects in the first grade of the nine-year primary school and their (interdisciplinary) integration in the learning process. Effective communication with parents and knowledge and use of various forms of cooperation with them. Adapting practice to specific educational contexts. Ability to direct the practice towards intercultural and interethnic dialogue (CNIU, 2016).

flows: Basic Pedagogical Study (A) is compulsory and encompasses the following subjects: Developmental and Pedagogical Psychology, Pre-School Pedagogy, Motorics of Pre-School Child and Inclusive Education and Training. The second part is elective professional subjects (B): Language and Literature, Movement, Society, Nature, Early Learning of Mathematics, Music, Art Education, Puppetry, Drama, Media, Dance Expression and Technical Education. The last part is devoted to compulsory professional subjects (C): Social Studies and Interdisciplinary links or projects and aggregated kindergarten pedagogical practice (D) (CNIU, 2016).

Conclusion

Based on several years studying child development and learning in early childhood, the right to quality early childhood education programmes is viewed as a universal right accessible to all. This right should also be granted to immigrants, as we are aware that care and education are particularly important for the integration in the society. By planned integration in kindergartens, which is based on the Guidelines for the Integration of Immigrant Children, providing for the educational measures for the integration of immigrants, we would like to ensure a successful overcoming of learning difficulties of immigrants, which stem from their insufficient linguistic knowledge, the differences between the family culture and the environment culture, the incomplete inclusion in the society, and from the differences in school systems and in education programmes between the country of origin and Slovenia. While guaranteeing these universal rights, care is being taken to maintain quality pre-school education at the state level, and about kindergartens, with a quality assurance model and a quality assurance model in kindergartens, developed by the Slovenian experts. In addition to evaluation and self-evaluation of the work of kindergartens, quality pre-school education also requires high-quality studies, which give prospective professional workers a quality specialized higher education. The self-evaluation reports of the First-Cycle study programme Pre-Shool Education and of the Second-Cycle study programme Pre-School Education for 2015 shows that the Pre-School Education at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana is of high quality. In their care for topicality and diversity, a diverse range of optional professional subjects is offered that enables the students to upgrade their knowledge of the content they are particularly interested in. Despite the fact that a master's degree in pre-school education is not a prerequisite for the kindergarten employment, the study is undertaken by the candidates with many years of practical experience, who are highly motivated to study and to raise the level of pre-school education in practice. The quality implementation of the pre-school education programme is guaranteed by excellent lecturers and their assistants, who

have had a lot of experience from the pedagogical, scientific and research field, and are in direct contacts with top foreign experts; thus, the lecturersare motivated for high-quality work at home, able to compare scientific/artistic activities, and offeredthe opportunity to develop ambitious ideas and establish cooperation. In the future, the quality of studies will be taken care of, and the quality of pre-school education in Slovenia will aim at providing even more practical pedagogical training, more professional training, and at visits by experts from various institutions; in accordance with the process development and the open curriculum, a new Curriculum Manual will also be drafted.

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The Concept of Pre-school Education in Portugal Through Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

In Portugal, Early Childhood Education (ECE) plays a leading role in the development of children in all areas and domains. Fortunately and eventually, in the first years of the 21st century a consensual thesis has been reached. ECE attendance is no longer considered a luxury and has become itself a right for everyone, a precondition for enriched development, which enhances the democratic principle of equality of opportunity, both in access and in educational success throughout life. In Portugal ECE is intended for children from three years until their entry into compulsory schooling, in other words, in the 1st year of the 1st Cycle of Basic Education (Law No 5/97, of 10th February). This is the first stage of basic education in the process of lifelong education. It became universal for 4-year-old children from the school year 2016/2017 (Law No. 65/2015), which changed another Law that established the compulsory schooling regime and which contemplated the universality of early childhood education from the year children reach five years. Nowadays ECE is for all children from the year they reach four years old. The universality implies an obligation for the State to ensure the existence of an early childhood education network that allows the enrolment of all the children covered by it and also that this attendance is free of charge for the educational component.

This is stated in the original legislation (Law no. 85/2009). There is no compulsory national program for early childhood education, but there are Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (CGPSE), which are based on the overall pedagogical objectives defined by the aforementioned Outlining Law (Law 5/97, of 10th February). These are intended to support the construction and management of the curriculum in the early childhood centres under the responsibility of each educator, in collaboration with the educational team of the local educational establishment/grouping of schools. The first CGPSE were published in 1997 and are still defined as a set of general and organized principles that the educator should use to make decisions about their practice, in other words, to plan and evaluate the educational process to be developed with children. In Portugal the ECE works in public and private institutions, pedagogically supervised by the State.

Keywords: *early childhood education, Early childhood centres, Curriculum Guidelines*

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Portugal is a creation of the republican system that transformed a social concern into a legal and educational project for children from 3 to 6 years old, the period just before entering the compulsory elementary school. The decision of broadening the responsibilities of the State must be viewed in the light of the implementation of the concept of the earlier ages as an autonomous object of social intervention and scientific reflection. Its purpose was to create and train a new generation of new, more educated and supportive people in society, but for this, educational success was essential, and this could only be achieved through formal schooling beginning as soon as possible. It was essential not to miss the early years of the child's life, considered fundamental to the creation of healthy habits in specific educational environments and with properly trained professionals.

Early Childhood Education is not just a social and educational asset. It is also a cultural asset, for culture presupposes lifelong learning, requires intellectual curiosity, the ability to solve problems and also requires an ethical stance. Culture also wants to state and acknowledge the existence of multicultural societies, where difference is affirmed but equality of opportunity is guaranteed. This is the reality of the Portuguese society, its potentiality. Hence, we must consider that the quality of Early Childhood Education in a country can be the path for a more human and fair society.

The Portuguese Early Childhood Education System

Early Childhood Education: A brief history

Early Childhood Education in Portugal is considered the first stage of basic education in Portugal and begins at the age of three. Over the years there have been different designations for Education aimed at children before entering elementary school, seen not only in the history of education, but also in legislation, either in Portugal or other countries, for instance Educação Infantil, Educação Pré-Escolar, Asilos Infantis, Creches, Escolas Maternais, Escolas Infantis, Jardins de Infância, Infantários. According to Cardona (1997, p. 21), "ao longo da sua evolução, podemos observar diversas oscilações em relação ao papel e à especificidade atribuída a este nível de ensino, podendo constatar-se a existência de diferentes concepções subjacentes à expressão Educação de Infância" [throughout its evolution, we can observe several fluctuations in relation to the role and the specificity attributed to this level of education, and it is possible to verify the existence of different conceptions underlying the expression Educação de Infância (Early Childhood Education)]. To begin with there were assistance concerns throughout the 18th and 19th centuries and, more recently, educational and social. Teresa Vasconcelos (2003, p. 20) states that "a escolha da terminologia – Educação e cuidados para a infância – pressupõem uma perspetiva integrada e coerente, implicando políticas articuladas comuns à faixa etária dos 0 aos 5/6 anos por parte do ministério que tutela a educação e não a partir dos 3 anos, tal como a legislação portuguesa prevê" [the choice of terminology – early childhood education and care – presupposes an integrated and coherent perspective, implying articulated policies common to the age group from 0 to 5/6 years old by the ministry that supervises education, and not from the age of 3, as provided for the Portuguese legislation.] Indeed, the OECD (2011, p. 14) also considers that "a educação e cuidados para a infância incluem todos os contextos que proporcionam cuidados e educação para as crianças antes do ingresso na escola obrigatória, independentemente do tipo de estabelecimento, horário de atendimento, financiamento, ou conteúdos programáticos. O período da pequena infância é, em geral, definido como abrangendo a faixa etária que vai dos 0 aos 8 anos de idade" [early childhood education and care include all the contexts that provide care and education for children before entering compulsory school, regardless of the type of institution, working hours, funding, or curriculum content. The period of early childhood is generally defined as covering the age range from 0 to 8 years old].

The option for this research places it as the formal Education aimed at children from three to six years old, before entering Primary School, now called School

of the 1ˢᵗ Cycle of Basic Education in Portugal. The terminology used in the classification of the period of the child from three to six years of age, as well as the institutions that have this educational response and their professionals, have thus undergone several changes. **The institutions range from Escola Infantil, Jardim--escola, Escola pré-Primária, Jardim-infantil to Jardim-de-infância.** The educational response in itself has been called Ensino Infantil, Ensino pré-Primário, Educação Pré-escolar and Educação de Infância. The professionals are Professora Infantil, Educadora Infantil and Educadora de Infância. The correct and official discourse nowadays in Portugal name all of these as Educação Pré-escolar [Early Childhood Education (ECE)] and Jardim-de-infância [Early Childhood Education Centre or School] for the institutions attended by children from three to six years old. The teacher specialized in this area is officially called Educador de Infância [Early Childhood Educator or teacher].

ECE has slowly emerged during the 19ᵗʰ century, grew and developed during the 20ᵗʰ century and it reached stabilization in the 21ˢᵗ century. Things have changed from the children's' assistance need to an educational and pedagogical need. Several factors have contributed to this path and to the development of education at all levels. The main and decisive point is the need to form a new society with good citizens in all the emerging regimes and states and in every place of these states and regimes. With a focus on improving the living conditions of the children, there has been a decline in infant mortality rates, which has made the investment in children worthwhile. Industrialization led to a need for a new reorganization of society with a higher concentration of population in urban centres: "Entre os restantes fatores destacam-se uma industrialização e urbanização crescentes, que provocaram profundas mudanças na organização da sociedade ocidental relativamente à produção de bens de consumo, bem como mudanças na organização e na estrutura familiar" [Other factors include a growing industrialization and urbanization, which has caused profound changes in the organization of Western society in relation to the production of consumer goods, as well as changes in the family organization and structure] (Spodek, 2002, p. 193).

When institutions aimed at Early Childhood Education appeared, the primary concern was merely to enrol children with their older siblings. It was the first approach to children's education. At first time they were more focused on assistance, and later they became more focused on preparing the child for the entrance in the Elementary school. However, there was a conviction that experiences lived by children in early childhood would influence the emerging adult. Diachronically, Early Childhood Education has undergone major changes in Portugal. According to Gomes (1977, p. 20), "percorreu as mesmas etapas que noutros Países da Europa, embora com significativo atraso no que concerne ao calendário e ao

número de 58 estabelecimentos" [It has undergone the same stages as in other European countries, although with a significant delay in the calendar and in the number of 58 establishments]. Above all, such a delay was due, in the opinion of Cardona (2006, p. 132), to the fact that the process of industrialization and the development of social policies for early childhood were slow. The earliest institutions had mainly welfare and social purposes.

In Portugal, children protection services emerged in the 15th and 16th centuries with the creation of the *Misericordia's* by Queen Leonor (1458–1525), a fact that has been referred to by several authors (Gomes, 1977; Ramirez, Penha and Loff, 1988; Bairrão/Vasconcelos/Cardona, 1997). "Its establishment marked the beginning of the creation of structures dedicated to the practice of charitable works for the poor, sick people and children without family" states Cardona (1997, p. 26). Many were the designations given to these institutions, such as "*rodas*", "*refúgios*", "*hospícios*", and "*asilos*". Tt can thus be inferred that social assistance was their predominant goal.

Though these institutions remain, from the 18th century onwards, more precisely during the Industrial Revolution, a distinction was made between institutions that proposed social or welfare objectives, and institutions that proposed predominantly pedagogical or educational objectives. There were times when institutions emerged that combined these two goals – welfare and education. According to Magalhães (1997, p. 122), this growing concern with the child and its educational success led to the need to create "structured and consequent educational plans" giving rise to a "meta-schooling of Early Childhood Education that tended to reduce the educational action to a school propaedeutics".

From the 1870s onwards there was a growing need to create more Early Childhood Education institutions, with the gradual replacement of the spirit of care for a new educational concept (Castanheira, 2006).

In the last years of the monarchy, which ended in 1910, there was an intense pedagogical activity, although the creation of Early Childhood Education institutions is much reduced. According to Gomes (1977), an Early Childhood Education setting was created in Oporto in 1906, through the adoption of the Fröbel method. In 1910, Adolfo Coelho states that in Portugal there is only one early childhood center that which had been created in Lisbon in 1882. He was referring to the *Associação das Escolas Móveis pelo Método de João de Deus*, indeed created in 1882 which "precedeu, em 1907, à Reforma dos estatutos, passando, a incluir nos seus objectivos a criação das escolas maternais" [antecipated the Reform of the statutes in 1907, and included in its objectives the creation of "*escolas maternais*" (nursery schools)] (Sampaio, 1968, p. 90; Gomes, 1977, p. 51). In 1908 it was renamed to "*Associação de Escolas Móveis pelo Método de João de Deus, Bibliotecas Ambulantes e*

Jardins-escola" (Gomes, 1977:51).

During the period of the First Republic in Portugal, between 1910 and 1926, although the different governments of the Republic emphasized the role played by education in the country's progress, by combating illiteracy and the generalization of the Elementary School, Early Childhood Education was indeed a priority of this political regime (Cardona, 1997, p. 35). It was considered, by the same author (2006: 135), "como sua missão primordial a preparação para a escola, paralelamente foi predominada a tendência para valorizar a especificidade deste ensino, tendo em conta as caraterísticas das crianças" [as its primary mission the preparation for school and in parallel there was a tendency to value the specificity of this type of teaching, taking into account the characteristics of the children]. Until the mid-1930s, legislation sought to provide specificity and coherence to Early Childhood Education and, above all, to the training of early childhood educators with the integration of scientific subjects, such as Psychology, Child Psychology and Pedagogy, Pedagogy of Children, General and School Hygiene or Childcare.

In 1936, during the *Estado Novo* (the dictatorial political regime that ruled Portugal between 1933 and 1974), a new course for early childhood education emerges, which would lead, in practice, to the extinction of official Early Childhood Education in Portugal. The *Estado Novo* concentrates its investments in a compulsory education of 3 years, building a maternalist ideology that values the role of mothers and families (Nóvoa, 2005, p. 109). This reinforces the private initiative through a network of private early childhood centers directed primarily at the favored social groups, even though a significant proportion of children (about one third in 1950) are covered by unprotected child support systems. In 1960 there were just over 6,000 students in early childhood education in Portugal (*Ibid.*). Alongside with this formal network, in which the establishments depend from the Ministry of Social Security, an important market of nannies and day care centers that take care of the children during the working hours of their mothers develops. There is also a very significant reinforcement of the assistance perspective with the creation of organizations and institutions for poor children.

The socio-educational and psycho-pedagogical currents that emerge in the 1960s tend to value an educational logic (private early childhood education establishments) instead of an assistance logic (public or private institutions with childhood protection roles). The preparatory work for the *Estatuto da Educação Nacional* (National Education Statute) places the problem in a dual perspective, both pedagogical and social, referring in particular to the new situation of women in the labour market. Clear proposals were then defined to generalize and formalize public early childhood education, ensuring an education for all, as soon as possible. This policy was pursued and legislated by the Minister of Education in

1973, seeking to practice the principle that the expansion of the education system translates and supports, basically, the institutionalization of early childhood education, although optional (Castanheira, 2013).

With the end of the dictatorial regime in 1974 a democratic period began that still continues today. After 1974, several nurseries and early childhood centers of popular initiative were set up in rural and urban areas, initiated by political parties, factories, residents' committees and several associations, thus constituting an important real human network. The Childhood Education services had been scattered by several ministries and the need for greater coordination began to be felt. Efforts were made to respond to the social needs felt by workers with respect to the education of their children. There was an urgent need to organize society, both in the field of Early Childhood Education and in many other sectors of the society, where there was a lot of disorganization. The official network of Early Childhood Education appears in 1977 and in 1979 the Early Childhood Education Settings Statutes were created by the Ministry of Education, a subject we will return to later in the text. Although not sufficient, these two measures proved to be fundamental. Until then there had been no formal education policy regarding Early Childhood Education. However, there were (and still are) many public Early Childhood Education institutions, which depend from other government departments, namely the Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity. For many years, the statutes proved to be a reference document in the panorama of Early Childhood Education in Portugal, at least until the publication of the Early Childhood Education curriculum guidelines in 1996. Despite being regulated for the public network, these guidelines were also followed by private institutions. In this sense, the Ministry of Social Affairs also publishes the Statutes of Private Social Solidarity Institutions in the same year. They also refer to non-profit Early Childhood Education institutions. The supervision of the existing early childhood centers is carried out by two different entities: inspection services from the Ministry of Education, such as the public early childhood centers, and those dependent on the Social Security, which supervise their Regional Centers and private institutions in their dependency.

The context changed slightly, as far as Early Childhood Education is concerned, in the beginning of the 1980s. According to Cardona's study (1997), 1,801 public Early Childhood centers were created in Portugal up to 1982. The number of educators exceeded a thousand, which justified, as it happened in the same year, the definition of a new placement system, specific to these professionals. So far, placements were carried out according to existing norms for Elementary School Teachers, which did not facilitate the process, given the diversity of characteristics of the two institutional networks. As regards the creation of more classrooms there was a slight stagnation.

In 1983 and 1984, no Ordinances for the creation of Early Childhood Education settings were published by the Ministry of Education, but new institutions were still being created by initiatives of local authorities. In turn, Social Security had only maintained the existing initiatives. This situation is due to the financial difficulties felt in the country. Only in 1985 did the Ministry of Education decide to publish Ordinances related to the creation of Early Childhood Centers. In 1986, the institutional coverage rate for Early Childhood Education children was 35.6% (Cardona, 1997, p. 94). Despite all the constraints, the sector, although slowly, grew consistently. In the school year 1985/86 it included 128,089 children (Gabinete de Estatística e Planeamento da Educação (GEPE), 2009, p. 102). This growth is due to the creation of the public network in 1977 and to the publication of the Statutes of Early Childhood Centres in 1979, which led to the opening of many Early Childhood Centres throughout the country. It should be noted that there is a decrease of 6-year-old children attending this level of education, probably because they have moved to Elementary School.

With the public network having been established in 1977, and with the publication of the Statutes of Early Childhood Centres in 1979 and the Basic Education Act of the Portuguese Educational System in 1986, the Early Childhood Education System was finally organized, although there was yet no national plan for Early Childhood Education. The training of Early Childhood Educators was done through a three years Bachelor's degree.

Since 1995, the policies for the development and expansion of early childhood education in Portugal have received priority attention from the constitutional government and civil society.

From the perspective of lifelong education and training and the reduction of social inequalities, the enlargement and expansion of Early Childhood Education was part of the government's program, with education in general and primary education being specifically stated as a national priority (Ministério da Educação, 1996; 1998). The Outlining Law 5/97 of February 10th, the so-called Outlining Law for Early Childhood Education was approved. Subsequently this Law is regulated through a coherent, integrated and comprehensive set of legislation, so that Early Childhood Education can have both educational and social functions. In 1997, the Ministry of Education published the document "Guidance for Early Childhood Education", which mirrors the principle of single tutelage for Early Childhood Education in Portugal (3 to 6 years old). As of this year the training of Childhood Educators also changed and a bachelor's degree with the duration of 4 years became mandatory for the profession. This system of training of Early Childhood Educators was kept until 2010, when, in the aftermath of the Bologna Process a Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education became compulsory.

Organization of Pre-School Education

Model and organization of Pre-school education

There is no mandatory national program for pre-school education, but there are Curriculum Guidelines (CGPSE) which are based on the overall pedagogical objectives defined by the abovementioned Outlining Law (Law No 5/97, of 10 February) which "destinam a apoiar a construção e gestão do currículo no Jardim--de-infância, da responsabilidade de cada educador/a de infância em colaboração com a equipa educativa do estabelecimento educativo/agrupamento de escolas" [are intended to support the construction and management of the curriculum in Early Childhood Centres, which is the responsibility of every early childhood educator in collaboration with the educational team of the educational establishment/grouping of schools] (Silva, I., Marques, L., Mata, L., & Rosa, M. 2016, p. 5). The first CGPSE was published in 1997 and still continues to be defined as a set of general and organized principles to be used by the educator in order to make decisions about their practice, in other words, to plan and evaluate the educational process to be developed with children.

The main objectives of Early Childhood Education in Portugal are: to promote the personal and social development of the child based on democratic life experiences in a perspective of education towards citizenship; to encourage the inclusion of the child in diverse social groups, with respect for the plurality of cultures, favouring a progressive awareness of their role as a member of society; to contribute to equal opportunities in school access and learning success; to stimulate the overall development of each child, respecting their individual characteristics, including behaviours that favour significant and diversified learning; to develop expression and communication through the use of multiple languages as means of relation, information, aesthetic awareness and understanding of the world; to stimulate curiosity and critical thinking; to provide each child with conditions of well-being and safety, particularly in the area of individual and collective health; to proceed to the screening of maladjustments, deficiencies and precociousness, promoting the best guidance and directioning of the child; to encourage the participation of families in the educational process and to establish effective collaboration relationships with the community.

The Early Childhood Educator has complete freedom to choose the educational model he intends to work with in his group of children.

According to Silva at. al (2016, p. 5), the professional action of the Early Childhood Educator is characterized by an educational intentionality, which implies a reflection on the purposes and meanings of its pedagogical practices and the ways in which he organizes his action. This reflection is based on an interactive cycle

– to observe, to plan, to act, to evaluate – supporting different forms of register and documentation, which allow the Early Childhood Educator to make decisions about the practice, and adapt it to the features of each child, group and social context in which he works. The development of this process, with the participation of different agents (children, other professionals, parents/families), includes forms of communication and strategies that promote the involvement and facilitate the articulation among the different contexts of each child.

In Portugal, each Early Childhood Educator has autonomy for their pedagogical activity, adopting their own and diversified methodologies, in accordance with its pedagogical model. Among the most followed models I refer to the Portuguese Modern School Movement by Sérgio Niza, the American HighScope Model by David Weikart and the Italian model Reggio Emilia by Malaguzzi. All of them are social constructivist models, where children are involved in creating their own knowledge through their action. There is also pedagogy-in-participation, which has been growing considerably in the last years in Portugal.

Since the 1980s, the Portuguese Modern School Movement (MSM) has reoriented its cooperative training and its pedagogical model of school intervention for a cultural and communicative perspective, derived from the works of Vygotski and Bruner, among others. In the wake of Freinet, the MSM practises pedagogy of educational cooperation, in which children and educators negotiate activities and projects to develop around the programme contents, based on the interests and knowledge of the children and on the cultural context of the communities. This cooperative organization promotes moral and civic development, the power of initiative, the co-responsibility of students for their learning and the learning of democracy. Each child defines an autonomous work plan and the educator must monitor its execution and avoid the accumulation of difficulties. It is therefore sought to respect the rhythm and the characteristics of each child and to guarantee everyone's success. All children are involved in their own success, through the support given by those who have more facility to those with more difficulties. It is based on the works of Freinet and Vygotsky and relies on a class cooperative organization. Children are organized according to their interests, working individually or in groups. The educator promotes individual free expression, in a spirit of mutual aid and cooperation.

The High Scope model, following the path of the HighScope Educational and Research Foundation was created in 1970 by David P. Weikart with the objective of continuing research and activities he had begun as administrator of the Ypsilanti Public Schools in Michigan, USA. Five aspects stand out in this model that makes the difference, also the plan-do-review process. Practice is grounded and carried out based on a solid theory. It is not a mixture of models, it is something with

beginning, middle and end; Active learning for children and adults; Assessment – to assess is a process containing several tasks – to observe; to interact and to plan. The daily records are followed by the intentional practice, the Key Developmental Indicators (KDI) are an integral part of this work. There are assessment tools, such as the COR (Child Observation Record) and quality evaluation through the Program Quality Assessment (PQA). To assess means working together to support and develop the interests and potential of the child, guided by the Curriculum.

In this process the child chooses with intention, performs with concentration and reflects on what was learned. With a child's step, a giant step is taken towards the internalization of a fundamental methodology in active learning!

The Reggio Emilia model began in 1945, just after the end of World War II, when a group of citizens, including Professor Loris Malaguzzi, voluntarily decided to build the town and the school of Villa Cella in Reggio Emilia, where the funding was achieved through the sale of abandoned war material: "ver um tanque de guerra, seis cavalos e três camiões gerando uma escola para crianças pequenas é algo extraordinário. **O facto de a escola ainda existir e continuar a funcionar bem é o mínimo que se poderia esperar desse início**" ["seeing a war tank, six horses and three trucks generating a school for young children is something extraordinary. The fact that the school still exists and continues operating well is the least that could be expected from this beginning] (Malaguzzi, 1999, p. 67).

We can see that one of the pillars of the Reggio Emilia model is living consciously in a community where the different educational actors (teachers, educators, parents and others) constitute a work team that, together with the children, in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration, are able to build a better quality educational response where everyone involved learns from one another (Lino, 2007).

The Pedagogy-in-Participation created by the *Associação Criança*, where Júlia and João Formosinho stand out, has been growing in recent years in Portugal and is based on new forms of space and time, activities and projects organization, as well as on new pedagogical materials for Early Childhood Education.

We also find a minority of early childhood educators who follow other models, such as:

- Project Pedagogy: this model strats from specific motivations, associated to social reality and which assumes an action plan built by the children and the educator, who coordinates it. It is based on a flexible and open plan, whose fundamental objectives are the development of sensitivity, creative imagination, autonomy and the socialization of the child.
- *João de Deus* Method: this model favours learning in the areas of reading, writing and arithmetics, according to an established plan, with the aim of preparing the child for school. The educator is in line with a directive pedagogy, in

view of the child's performance and school success.
- Cognitive Orientation Curriculum: it is based on Piaget's development theories and is part of an active pedagogy. The child learns by doing. The activities take place in an environment organized by areas, where children can make their choice. The educator has the role of encouraging and promoting action.
- Situational Pedagogy: it is inspired by non-directive pedagogies. The early childhood educator may also follow undifferentiated practices, not identified with a specific method. Educators must start from what the child already knows and value their knowledge as the foundation of new learning, as well as to stimulate the participation of all children.

Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education

In Portugal, there is no compulsory national curriculum to be followed in Early Childhood Education. There is a set of Curricular Guidelines created in a first phase in 1997 and renewed with some changes in 2016. Both are based on the Outlining Law on Early Childhood Education, Law no. 5/97, of 10th February. Early Childhood education became part of the Portuguese education system as the first stage of primary education in the process of lifelong education, complementing the educational action of the family, with which it should establish close cooperation, favoring the training and the balanced development of the child, with a view to its full insertion in society as an autonomous, free and supportive human being. The CGPSE review those guidelines in force since 1997, highlighting that early childhood education settings do not serve to classify children because the rhythm of child development differs and what matters is their progress. Assessing the progress of children is to compare each one to itself in order to situate the evolution of their learning over time; the assessment must be "formative"; the child should be involved, describing what he did, how and with whom, how he could continue, improve or do otherwise. The definition of desirable or expected objectives will eventually be used as a reference to situate and describe what the child has learned and the evolution of that learning, or also to alert the early childhood educator of the need to reformulate his intervention, thus encouraging the progress of every child. A summative assessment that quantifies or establishes levels of learning does not fit into this formative assessment approach. The new CGPSE define which skills must be acquired by children between the age of 3 and the entry into compulsory schooling – since early childhood education is considered as "the first stage of basic education in the process of lifelong education."

There are some differences between the CGPSE created in 1997 and the guidelines published in 2016. For example, a new field of Physical Education is created,

when in the 1997 document only motor expression was mentioned. Other new terms appear, such as "Artistic Education" (Visual Arts, Drama Roleplay / Theater, Music and Dance), when formerly the reference was to dramatic, plastic and musical expression. The three major "content areas" are maintained – Personal and Social Training Area, Area of Expression and Communication (it ranges from "the construction of mathematical concepts and the relations between them" to oral language and approach to writing, and the World Knowledge Area (where "awareness of the various sciences" happens). However, there is a greater exploitation and reinforcement of the integrative perspective of all areas. These guidelines are to be adapted according to the characteristics of the groups of children that the educator has in front of him and of their diversity.

The pedagogical component of early childhood education is free in both public and private institutions. The family is given the first role in the education of the children, but its universality for children who are 4 years old is recognized. Early childhood education settings are understood as institutions that provide services aimed at the development of the child, providing educational activities and family support activities. The main aims of the early childhood education are: (i) to promote the personal and social development of the child based on experiences of democratic life, from a perspective of education for citizenship; (ii) to encourage the integration of the child in diverse social groups, respecting the plurality of cultures, favoring a progressive awareness of their role as a member of society; (iii) to contribute to equal opportunities in access to school and learning success; (iv) to stimulate the overall development of each child, respecting their individual characteristics, incorporating behaviors that favour significant and diversified learning; (v) to develop expression and communication through the use of multiple languages as means of relation, information, aesthetic awareness and understanding of the world; (vi) to awaken curiosity and critical thinking; (vii) to provide each child with conditions of well-being and safety, particularly in the area of individual and collective health; (viii) to proceed to the screening of maladjustments, deficiencies and precociousness, promoting the best orientation and referral of the child; (ix) to encourage the participation of families in the educational process; and (x) to establish relationships of effective collaboration with the community (Adapted from Law no. 5/97, of 10th February (Outlining Law on Early Childhood Education).

The new CGPSE devote special attention to continuity and educational transitions, since at before initiating their early childhood education children have already had a developmental and learning path in a family or institutional context that is fundamental to be continued. Silva points out that "o desenvolvimento das potencialidades de cada criança no Jardm-de-infância criará condições para que

tenha sucesso na transição para o 1º ciclo do ensino básico, numa perspetiva de continuidade das aprendizagens que já realizou" [the development of the potential of each child in the Early Childhood Centre will create the conditions for her to succeed in the transition to the first cycle of basic education, in a perspective of the continuity of the learning that she has already done] (Silva, 2016, p. 6). The foundations and educational principles they present, together with the development of learning as inseparable aspects, always have the child as the subject of the educational process, responding to their needs in an articulated construction of knowledge. The educational intentionality of the early childhood educator, through observation, registration, documentation, planning and continuous evaluation is essential, in a continuous process of articulation and communication. A good organization of the educational environment of the educational establishment and the children's room, as well as the relations and interactions, are very evident in the CGPSE.

Conclusion

Early Childhood Education has already come a long way in Portugal, with advances and regression, however, there is still much to grow and evolve. To this end, it is essential to continue the research that has been done in this area in order to favour its development. The training of Early Childhood Educators has to provide new teachers prepared to work with the new children of the 21st century. Educators of the 21st century must be prevented from using 19th century pedagogies for children of the 21st century (Nóvoa, 2005). The new educator of the 21st century must be more complete, more global, a true citizen of the world, more multifaceted and must know well the new pedagogies that best adapt to the children he faces year after year. An educator who works together with society, with the family, with children and with new learnings that should be promoted holistically (Silva, 2016).

The child development takes place as a whole, in which the cognitive, social, cultural, physical and emotional dimensions intertwine and act together. Besides, their learning is carried out in a proper way, assuming a holistic configuration, both in the attribution of meanings in relation to the world, and in the understanding of the relationships established with others in the construction of their identity.

The origins of the Early Childhood Education in Portugal can be identified through characteristics that are specific to it: the historical independence of the other sectors of the school system; the intervention of several competing or complementary services; the integration into communities; the strong link with

parents and, for a long time, a specific continuous training for Early Childhood Educators (Castanheira, 2013). The historical evolution of Childhood Education always happened between the need for a social response to the children that must be freed from the mothers, so that they can be used, in complete freedom, in an immediate productive work, and the reception in private structures with pedagogical concerns for children of privileged strata who have been able to construct for their use the appropriate structures for the treatment they want for their children in order to maximize their potential. This level of education has been widespread both in the name of the liberation of parents and in the name of effective training, since to democratize it is necessary to gather and care for individuals from an early age.

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Slovene and Portuguese Pre-School Teachers about Collaboration with Parents

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Abstract

The objectives and strategies of collaboration between parents and pre-school teachers depend on how collaboration is defined at the level of pre-school institutions. In Slovenia, collaboration between parents and pre-school teachers is determined by a formalized framework and legislation (Kindergarten Act, 1996; Organization and Financing of Education Act, 1996; Kindergarten Curriculum, 1999); in our view, individual articles therein already contain parts of partner cooperation policies. Similarly, the pre-school education in Portugal has grasped a sense of support and social assistance to families (Framework Act – Law n. 5/97, of February 10 Art. 4). The purpose of this paper is to compare the views of the Slovenian and Portuguese pre-school teachers on the importance of collaboration

with parents, whereby it highlights some personal views of pre-school teachers onvarious ways of collaboration with parents, parental influence on the life and work of the pre-school institution, and the competencies of the pre-school teachers regarding their collaboration with parents. The research conducted in 2017 in Slovenia and Portugal (N=386) showed that the Slovenian and Portuguese pre-school teachers were aware of the importance of sharing their responsibilities and powers with parents, although the formal aspects of collaboration (Parents' Council and Public Kindergarten Council) are more clearly defined in the Slovene legislation; consequently, in Slovenia parents can more effectively express their comments and proposals for kindergarten work via their representative in the Parents' Council, and those proposals are considered and decided on.

Key words: *Pre-school teachers, parents, partnership, life and work of the pre-school institution*

Introduction

The objectives and strategies of collaboration between parents and pre-school teachers depend on how cooperation is defined at the level of pre-school institutions. In Slovenia, collaboration between parents (and the limits of their influence) and pre-school teachers is determined by a formalized framework and legislation (Kindergarten Act, 1996; Organization and Financing of Education Act, 1996; Kindergarten Curriculum, 1999); in our view, individual articles therein already contain parts of partner cooperation policies. According to the principle of collaboration with parents as per Kindergarten Curriculum (1999), parents not only have the right to be informed of the programmes and their child, but also have the right to participate in the design of life and work in the pre-school institution, and even the right to actively participate in the educational work. In the parents – pre-school teachers' relation the importance of sharing the responsibilities and powers is stressed as this is the basis for the partnership development. The partnership between parents and the pre-school institution should contribute to the commitment to the success of every child, promote the ethos of understanding and openness in relations between parents and pre-school institutions, and help parents develop a positive attitude towards participation in their child's education. Previous research showed collaboration between pre-school teachers and parents to be crucial for effective education.

Theoretical Background

Pre-School education in Slovenia

Formal Collaboration Framework

The system solutions that were enacted in the Republic of Slovenia 1996, were conceptually justified in the White Paper on Education of the Republic of Slovenia, 1995 (hereinafter: White Paper 1995) and later upgraded in the White Paper on Education 2011 (hereinafter White Paper 2011). With regard to cooperation between parents and kindergarten, according to the White Paper (1995), the state should provide for the possibility of choice at all levels, including at the level of choice of kindergartens and schools, and that parents should be provided with the possibility of "including their children in one of the programmes of pre-school education in public kindergartens" (ibid, p. 48 White Paper, 2011, p. 74). Parents also have the right to choose the programme in accordance with their and the child's interests and needs" (White Paper, 1995; White Paper, 2011). It also highlights the need to raise the quality of work with parents by more appropriate and accessible information, greater diversity in the range of programmes, and enhancing direct cooperation between kindergarten and parents (ibid, p. 56).

The Kindergarten Act (2005) defines the rights of parents in Article 9, which states that parents have the right to choose /.../ pre-school programmes for their children in public or private kindergarten. For children who cannot be included in the nursery due to illness, it can also perform pre-school education at home /.../ "(ibid). Kindergarten should present parents with a special publication, which should "/.../ mention the running programmes, objectives, contents and methods of work" (Kindergarten Act 2005, Article 11). Rules on Kindergarten Publication (1996) state that the publication should also contain "/.../ the rights of parents and children and the ways of exercising the rights, the obligations of parents towards kindergarten, and the ways of integration and collaboration with parents" (ibid, Article 4). In compliance with the Rules it is necessary to present parents with the publication prior to enrolling their child in kindergarten (ibid, Article 5). The programme for pre-school children in public kindergarten is adopted by the Council of Experts for General Education and should comprise ways and forms of collaboration with parents (ibid. Article 12). Thus, parents are familiar with the collaboration mode prior to enrolment of their children in kindergarten.

Kindergarten Curriculum (1999), a national document, which constitutes the scientific basis for work in kindergartens, defines parental involvement as an important aspect of the quality early childhood education, as it contributes to appropriate complementarities of family and institutional upbringing (ibid. p. 24). The

division of responsibilities and different powers is important for cooperation between parents and kindergarten (ibid). Emphasis is also placed on the duty of the kindergarten to provide services to parents and not to interfere with their privacy; however, parents should also take into account the limits of their involvement, which should not interfere with the professionalism of the institutions (ibid). In the chapter Working with Parents (ibid. p. 24) it is stated, that parents can stay in the playroom for a shorter or longer time period and engage in various activities, in consultation with the pre-school teacher (ibid). Thus, the rights of parents and the boundaries of professionalism that are in the domain of professionals are clearly defined, which is also in line with the conceptual framework of the White Paper (1995, p. 26; White Paper, 2011, p. 75). In collaboration with parents, pre-school teachers should respect the private sphere of families, their culture, identity, language, worldview, values, beliefs, attitudes, habits and customs, their right to privacy and to personal data protection (Kindergarten Curriculum,1999, p. 24). The mentioned principles are in compliance with the general theoretical principlesof the White Paper (1995).

Among the objectives of the Kindergarten Curriculum the goal to improve information and collaboration with parents is stressed (Kindergarten Curriculum 1999, p. 10); accordingly, the principle of collaboration with parents was adopted, which defines obligatory public availability of written and oral information about the various programmes in kindergarten (Kindergarten Curriculum, 1999, p. 15). Parents also have the right to prompt exchange of information and to an in-depth interview about their child with pre-school teachers and their assistants; kindergarten should present parents with continuous and systematic information of their rights and responsibilities (ibid).

To conclude, the Kindergarten Curriculum (ibid.) conceptually builds on establishing a partnership between parents and kindergarten. The partnership between parents and the kindergarten is defined as a relationship in which professionals and parents are conventionally involved in setting the optimal conditions for the realization of educational goals. The partnership model of cooperation between parents and kindergarten also implies the involvement of parents in their child's achievement of educational goals.

Formal and Informal Collaboration with Parents

Formal Forms of Collaboration with Parents
It can be concluded, that at the forefront of the partnership model there are joint actions, in which parents, children and pre-school teachers work together to achieve a common goal (Bastiani 1993). This joint actions can be developed

through formal and informal forms of colaboreation with parents. Among the formal forms of collaboration parent-teachers meetings, contact hours, Parents' Council and the Public Kindergarten Council can be mentioned, often also written messages, phone calls and e-mails. Meetings of the Parents' Council and of the Public Kindergarten Council fall under the obligations of the kindergarten management, while other forms of formal collaboration are in the domain of pre--school teachers.

Parent-teacher meetings are, according to Vaupotič (1998), the basic form of addressing common issues in education, usually used for the dissemination of information, which is of interest to all the participants. According to OECD (1997), this is the most frequent collective form of collaboration between pre-school teachers and parents in countries, such as Denmark, Germany and Spain. The first parent-teacher meeting is also the first and only option for the pre-school teacher to explain toparents the significance and importance of mutual collaboration and mutual expectations regarding the collaboration. The first parent-teacher meeting is also crucial for the development of further collaboration in the direction of the client or, more desired, the partnership cooperation. Lepičnik-Vodopivec (1996) highlights that often the problem of collaboration between parents and pre-school teachers is entering their communication with different needs, desires and goals. The study (ibid, p. 51–52) showed, that parents, in communication with pre-school teachers, expect mostly feelings of acceptance and understanding of their children, to be listened to and to be recognized as good parents. On the other hand, pre-school teachers expect acceptance by parents and their children, respect, companionship and partnership, in order to ensure the quality life at home and in kindergarten and they also expect feedback as regards collaboration. The needs that drive relationships between parents and pre-school teachers are, therefore, often different, which may cause dissatisfaction and discomfort. In our study, the expectations of parents and pre-school teachers as regards collaboration with parents will also be examined.

Office hours are the most widespread form of communication or collaboration between parents and pre-school teachers (Malić 1988). According to Intihar (2002) parents are especially interested in this form of collaboration, as the focus is on the conversation about their children. The aim of the office hours is in-depth information about the child as well as the exchange of information and professional advice on how to handle various issues. In his study Troha (1989) similarly notes that office hours will be at the forefront of parental interest. In his opinion, the office hours allow parents to fullfill their primary interest: to influence the pre-school institution for the benefit of their child. Prodanović (1981) also believes that parents learn about the general development of their child during the office

hours, and, how to act in specific circumstances in order to comply with the social criteria; further, parents get to know more about the extent to which they meet their child's needs, and learn about the child's particular achievements, etc. The pre-school teacher gets to know the parents more personally during the office hours, and also learns about their views and opinions about their child; further, the pre-school teacher learns about the child's development and family life (including about the other family members), and about the conditions in which the child is growing up; all the aforementioned can contribute to a better understanding of the child's kindergarten behaviour. In our opinion, well-planned and well-organized office hours are certainly one of the most important aspects of establishing a partnership between pre-school teachers and parents.

Written messages are an indirect individual form of communication between kindergarten and parents. Written messages are a form of official correspondence, sometimes also less formal, and closer to parents. The contents of the written messages are usually invitations, notices, official notices, letters, sometimes also parents' messages. A telephone conversation is a rarer form of formal collaboration and is usualy used when the child is not feeling well (Intihar 2002). A telephone conversation is much used in the introduction period in kindergarten, whereby the pre-school teacher informs the parents of the wellbeing of their child. In the last few years the worldwideweb and electronic messages have quite frequently been used; this kind of commnication currently still falls under the informal form of collaboration. A special form of collaboration is also the kindergarten's website through which the kindergarten informs the parents of the kindergarten events, of the latest developments, changes, the food menu, and of other news.

Parents' Council is defined in Article 66 of the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (2005). It consists of representatives of parents, who advocate their common interests. Each section (in kindergarten and in school) has one representative, elected by the parents at the first parent-teacher meeting. The tasks of the Parents' Council are as follows: to propose local programmes, to give consent to the Principal's proposal of the abovestandard services, to give the opinion on the proposal for the kindrgarten's development, to give the opinion on the annual work plan, to give the opinion on the candidates, who fulfil the requirements for Principal, to discuss the Principal's reports on educational issues, to address the complaints of parents regarding the education process, to approve of the representatives in the Kindergarten Council, to perform other tasks in accordance with the law and other regulations.

Parents' representatives also participate in the Public Kindregarten Council, which is composed of the representatives of the founder, the representatives of the workers of the kindergarten, and of the representatives of the parents. When

the Organisation and Financing of Education Act was adopted for the first time in 1996, the Public Kindregarten Council was composed of there representatives of the founder, five representatives of the kindergarten workers, and three representatives of the parents; the Act was amended in 2006, harmonizing the representation of all the parties involved, providing for three representatives of each party; in 2009, the composition of the Kindergarten Council changed again to the original formula, i.e. three representatives of the founder, five employee representatives, and three representatives of the parents (Article 46). The members of the Council are appointed or elected to the four-year term of office; the mandate of the parents is related to the status of the child. The powers of the Public Kindergarten Council are as follows: to appoint and dismiss the kindrgarten's Principal, to adopt the kindergarten development plan, to adopt the annual work plan, to adopt the reports of its realization, to decide on the introduction of the above standard and other programmes, to examine the reports on educational or training issues, to decide on the complaints in connection with the status of children, as the second-level authority to decide on appeals pertaining to the rights, obligations and responsibilities of workers in the employment relationship, to examine the issues submitted to the Council by Teaching Association, School Inspection, Trade Union, the employees, Parents' Council, community of children, and to perform other tasks determined by law and the Establishment Act.

Informal Forms of Collaboration with Parents

The most common form of informal communication between parents and pre-school teachers linked to younger children is communication at the time of the children's arrival in kindergarten and at the time of their departure from kindergarten (Fritzell Hanhan 2008, p. 112). Bahovec and Golobič (2004) also point out that the so-called »conversation at the doorstep« cannot be designed for the report, complaint or resolving conflicts. At the heart of such a conversation is the welcoming and the support for the child in the transition to kindergarten or home. Fritzell Hanhan (2008, p. 112) observes, that this kind of converstaion, if it is carried out with respect and with sincere interest for the child, is very important, precisely because it does not take place in a formal environment, such as office hours, where the parents often have the feeling that their feedbacks are formally recorded. Of course, this form of informal communication is problematic, if it is too long, because the pre-school teacher cannot focus on the child and the parents at the same time.

Another very common form of communication is a telephone conversation, which is becoming increasingly relevant in kindergartens; it begins already with the introduction of the child (the exchange of phone numbers, calling parents by

the pre-school teacher in the case when their child misses the parents too much, the calls of worrying parents) and continues with daily communication about the child's from the kindergarten. Conversing with many pre-school teachers has also raised the issue of prevalent and inappropriate communication by phone, since some parents use the opportunity of the pre-school teacher's attention, for other, not presing matters. Despite certain issues, Fritzell Hanhan (ibid) highlights that the phone call to the parents of each child over the course of the first month in the kindergarten is the key to parental knowledge, that the pre-school teacher is accessible and expresses genuine concern for their child and their opinion.

Communication with parents may also take place via the kindergarten website, which is a case of one-way communication. On the website, there is usually basic information about the kindergarten, in addition to the other information intended for parents. Often websites also contain photo galleries, to which parents have access only with a password (for reasons of the personal data protection). The web pages also publish e-mail addresses of pre-school teachers, so one-way communication changes in two-way communication via e-mail. Electronic mail can be used for regular communication with parents (you can write an e-mail at any time, not only during office hours) (ibid). Rogers and Wright (2012) point out that innovative technology, such as mobile phones, electronic mail and websites, present new tools for reaching and informing all parents. The traditional "live" communication is very effective, but requires (usually specific) time. Websites allow families 24/7 access to information, regardless of where they are. It is important to point out that electronic communication should not completely replace »live« communication, but it can complement or upgrade it.

Pre-school teachers in certain educational programmes, such as Head Start, also visit parents at home for various reasons. Most often, the reason for the visit of the child's home is to inspect the circumstances in which the child lives, so as to better understand the childs life. In addition to the above reasons, however, home visits in the beginning of the kindrgarten year may be good for establishing two-way communication with parents. The pre-school teacher's visit can prove the parents, that the pre-school teacher is really interested in their child, and in forming a partnership relationship with them (Fritzel Hanhan 2008). Those visits are not common in Slovenia.

Pre-school teachers should plan informal forms of collaboration and they need to be aware, that they always represent the educational institution.

Pre-School education in Portugal

Formal Frameworks of Collaboration

Pre-school Education (PSE) in Portugal is targeted at children between the age of three and the moment they enter compulsory education, which is the 1st Cycle of Basic Education (Framework Act (Law n. 5/97, of February 10). Therefore, this is the first stage of basic education in individuals' lifelong learning process. In Portugal, there are state Pre-School Education nstitutions and private Pre-school Education institutions. Parents are free to choose where to enrol their children. Although the instructional component is free in Portugal, high monthly fees are paid in private institutions due to the non-instructional or social components that they offer. Most private institutions are run by religious orders. Pre-school education became universal for four-year-old children in the school year of 2016/2017 (Law n. 65/2015), when changes were made to a previous law which laid down the legal framework for compulsory education and thus established the universality of pre-school education from the year in which children completed five years old. At present, such universality is established for "all children from the year in which they complete four years of age."

According to the primary legislation (Law no. 85/2009), which has been maintained in this regard, universality implies a duty from the State to ensure the existence of a pre-school education network which allows the enrolment of all the children covered by law as well as their free attendance of the instructional component. There is no national compulsory syllabus for pre-school education, but there are Curricular Guidelines for Pre-school Education (CGPSE), which are grounded on the global pedagogical goals defined by the referred Framework Act (Law n. 5/97, of February 10) and are "meant to support the construction and management of the curriculum by each kindergarten's teacher in cooperation with the educational team of the institution/school centre" (Silva, Marques, Mata, & Rosa, 2016, p. 5). The first CGPSEs were published in 1997 and are still defined as "(…) a set of general and organised principles to be used by pre-school teachers to make decisions regarding their practice, i.e., to plan and assess the educational process developed with the children (…)" (Silva, 2001, p. 53 citado por Infante, 2008, p. 29).

Pre-school Education grasped a sense of support and social assistance to families throughout its history, which is why it can be defined as "(…) a set of services which are complementary and/or supplementary to the family educational action and in close articulation with the family" (Homem, 2002, p. 24). We can say that it was seen as a support and continuity of the education given by the family, with an additional goal of providing equal opportunities as regards access to school and

the additional duty to provide children with moments of well-being and safety (Bairrão & Vasconcelos, 1997). When the aim is to offer children the best service and the best conditions, their families' involvement becomes paramount. Therefore, some institutions structure their timetables so that they manage to provide a type of service that most suits the families' needs.

Family Participation

As far as pre-school education is concerned, it is the parents and guardians' duty to: a) Participate in the pre-school education institutions' boards through elected representatives or representative associations; b) Develop a relationship of cooperation with educators within a formative perspective; c) Give an opinion as regards the working hours of the pre-school education institution; d) Participate, on a voluntary basis and under the institution's pedagogical board's guidance, in entertainment and assistance activities. (Ibid.Art. 4)

Therefore, according to the law which regulates Pre-school Education in Portugal, parents' participation is crucial and one of its main goals is to "promote families' participation in the educational process and establish relationships of effective cooperation with the the community" (Silva, 1997, p. 15). Also, families should adopt an active role in this process, providing children with opportunities to learn and cooperate with others, since children also relate and interact directly with other families and other community services and institutions, and since such interactions have an influence on their education.

The recent Curricular Guidelines published in 2016 are clear in stating that the pre-school teachers' professional action is characterised by an educational intention, which implies a reflection on the goals, and aims at their pedagogical practices. In the 21st century, PSE is facing new challenges and the pre-school teacher should not only be an educator of children but also an educator of families, acting in both the children's and parents' educational process. The development of this process involves the participation of several stakeholders including the children, families/parents and professionals other than teachers, and it requires ways of communication and strategies which may promote such involvement and may facilitate the articulation between the child's several life contexts. The work done by pre-school teacher's in the kindergarten during the day cannot be destroyed by parents in the evening. Therefore, parents' participation and involvement in the kindergarten is more and more crucial.

In pre-school education, children develop and learn better in relational environments where caring and educating are intimately connected. There is an increasing demand for parents and pre-school teachers to work jointly and contribute to the improvement of the educational environments. both at home and in the

kindergarten. According to (Silva, et al. 2016):The relationships established by the child with adults and other children as well as the experiences provided by the social and physical contexts surrounding them all represent the learning opportunities which will contribute to their development. Thus, learning both influences and is influenced by the child's physical and psychological development process, especially at a life stage where such evolution is very quick. (Ibid. p. 8)

It is paramount that pre-school teachers collect the most information possible on their pupils' life context and act within the families and the community to provide a diversity of opportunities for them to get involved and take part in the daily activities of the educational institution. It is also of utmost importance that parents participate in meetings and classroom activities as well as in the relationships with community partners. Pre-school teachers should understand the child within his specific context in order to get the maximum possible information about him, and, consequently, to better support their own reflection and grounding when planning and assessing activities which should aim at the child's holistic development. It is the parents' right, but not their obligation, to participate in the kindergarten's activities and in the planning, implementation and assessment of educational opportunities in order to broaden interactions and enrich the educational process. Parents/families are mainly responsible for their children's education, which is why they also have the right to take part in the development of their pedagogical path, not only by being informed about what happens in the kindergarten, but also by being given the chance to contribute to the enrichment of the educational practice planning and assessment. (Ibid. p. 16)

Pre-school teachers are responsible for creating the necessary conditions for such participation to take place, by finding the most appropriate ways of communication and articulation. By informing the parents of their intentions and of their group curricular projects, teachers have the opportunity to involve families in the planning process, and also to hear their proposals. Also, sharing this plan enables them to find a set of possibilities for parents to take part in the kindergarten's educational process. Therefore, it is paramount that parents are given the opportunity to participate in the planning and assessment of children's activities. The evaluation report should be drawn bearing in mind that families will be the recipients of such documents.

In Portugal, the organisation of a pre-school education institution always implies an institution/school centre educational project, an institution/school centre curricular project, and a children's group curricular project. Parents should participate in the drafting of all these projects by contributing their ideas. Within these institutions, there are always different types of relationship between different stakeholders, following a systemic and ecologic perspective. The human development ecologic

theory and Brofenbrenner's ecologic model are the ones which best "(…) adapt to a new kindergarten philosophy (…)" (Magalhães, 2007, p. 23). This approach is anchored in the assumption that human development represents a dynamic process of "connection to the environment, in which individuals are influenced by, but also influence their surrounding environment" (Silva, et. al. 2016, p. 21). However, parents' participation in the construction of the kindergarten's educational project and of the teacher's pedagogical project for the children's class constitutes a reality, which is not always experienced in Portuguese kindergartens. Such participation is foreseen by the CGPSE: "(…) parents and other community members can also participate in the teacher's educational project (…)" (ME, 1997, p. 44), and this communication should happen through informal contacts and meetings, where parents can be asked to come up with their proposals.

Formal and Informal Collaboration with Parents

Contact between the home, the kindergarten, the community, etc., is fundamental in enabling direct interaction between the various stakeholders including the child, the teacher, the parents/family in the development of interpersonal relations. The result is more complete education of the child and a better relationship between the kindergarten and the parents, since they all know each other better, which improves the quality of the child's education, as well as of the family and the pre-school environment. Obviously, both the kindergarten and the parents/family are different social contexts, contributing to the child's education, which demands a good social relationship and good communication, "The relationships with parents/families may take various shapes and levels, in which we can distinguish the relationship established with each family from the organisational relationship, which involves parents/families collectively" (Silva et. al., p. 28). Such relationship is based on informal contacts (oral or written) or on planned moments, such as meetings with each family. These are indispensable moments for parents to acknowledge their needs and educational expectations, as well as for the pre-school teachers, who should listen to the parents' opinions and suggestions, encourage their participation and also set the ways of participation which best match their availability. According to Silva (2016), the planning of diversified strategies will enable the participation of all stakeholders. Some parents may be able to come to the kindergarten to tell a story, talk about their job or participate in school trips, etc. For those parents who cannot come to the classroom, other ways wil be found to obtain their contribution to what is being implemented, thus ensuring that all children see their parents/relatives' contributions represented. (ibid. p. 29)

It often depends on the pre-school teacher to enable a good participation of the parents in pre-school education. By scheduling parents' meetings, they promote

collective participation since they can share their educational intentions as well as the process they will develop with the group during that school year, and, also involve families into participating in the several activities to be held throughout the year. This collective involvement facilitates parents' participation and understanding of the pedagogical work developement. Besides this, it is also a formative moment for parents since "as the primary and main responsible for their children's education, parents have the right to know, choose and contribute to the educational response they expect for their children" (Ibid.). This gives rise to the need for parents' associations to be formed and to take part in the implementation of the various projects, as a global way of organisation of the educational institution aiming to provide a better response to the children's education, the parents' needs and the community's specificities. However, the existence of parents or parents' representatives' associations is not common in Portugal. Nonetheless, it is the right that they are entitled to. Such associations result in mutual cooperation between families in order to help each other in their children's several educational situations, thus enabling new relationships to flourish. Parents should feel comfortable to participate in their children's classroom and in the institution's dynamics. The pre-school teacher should apply the best strategies to promote parents' cooperation in situations that are diversified enough for all the parents to be given the opportunity to participate.

Parents' Role in the Development of Several Content Areas

In the Portuguese CGPSE, there are three areas of content which should be covered in pre-school education and which are subdivided into domains and sub domains: Personal and Social Development Area; World Knowledge and Understanding Area, and Communication Area, subdivided into Physical Development domain; Creative and Aesthetic Development domain, subdivided into the visual arts, drama, music and dance subdomains; and Mathematical Awareness domain. In all these areas, domains and subdomains, parents may and should play a very important role in the development of several activities. The content areas should be articulated since knowledge is built in an integrated way, through connections between ideas and contents "(...) within the curricular dynamics, they must be represented in an interconnected, integrated, transversal and contextualised way (in the institution and in the surrounding environment or community), highlighting children's natural curiosity as well as their critical thinking and learning to learn skills (...)" (Marchão, 2012, p. 37).

As far as the personal and social development area is concerned, educating for values is paramount and demands parents' involvement. Bearing in mind that the child is a subject as well as an agent within the educational process, their identity

builds up from respecting others and from knowing what is right and wrong, what they can and cannot do, the rights and duties they have for themselves and towards others, etc. The importance of the parents' role can be seen in the way the child performs in role-plays depicting situations of their family culture, when acknowledging their belonging to various social groups. The pre-school teacher promotes such learning when showing respect for the child's culture of belonging to a community, when facilitating interactions with people and resources as well as with the surrounding context, when involving families in the child's independence and autonomy building, namely, as far as safety and healthcare are concerned. With respect to the remaining areas, domains and sub domains, both parents and pre-school teachers play a crucial role in the way they jointly work in the implementation of pedagogical activities which are distinctive and enhance significant and innovative learning aimed at children's development and learning.

In Portugal, the display of pre-school teachers' office hours in a place that is visible to parents, such as the institution's entrance for example, is compulsory. Teachers should always have some weekly available time to communicate with parents whenever they feel the need to. The general trend is for parents to communicate with pre-school teachers when they drop off their children in the morning or when they pick them up in the afternoon. Another way of communication is through the pupil's register and mark book, where any relevant information can be written both by parents to teachers and vice versa.

Families play several roles in their childrens' lives: they have cultural, social and biological functions, which enrich the child's development. For Magalhães (2007, p. 44), the family represents a "(...) context which provides primary care and affection and promotes a variety of opportunities (...)". The same author quotes James Gabarino (1992), who claims that "(...) a child inappropriately cared for or loved, or a child who grows up within a dysfunctional family may show developmental issues (...)". We can say that families serve purposes which include procreation, feeding, protection and education. This claim is supported by Magalhães (2007, p. 50) when stating that "(...) the remaining family functions are those of reproduction, financial support, socialisation/education, emotional support, childhood support and the performance of social roles (...)". As far as the educational role is concerned, we can say that it is within the family environment that children acquire some concepts and attitudes which will be reflected in the future, since as it was mentioned before "(...) the family constitutes the individual's first educational instance (...)" (Homem, 2002, p. 36).

In the light of this, we can say that although schools/kindergartens complement the educational process, education first arises within the family. Therefore, "(...) as the primary educators of their children, parents are responsible for their

survival as well as for providing an environment that promotes children's cognitive and emotional development (...)" (Berger, 2001, p. 37 cited by Magalhães, 2007, p. 19). Each family corresponds to a system which is part of other wider systems such as the community, the society and the country. This idea is in accordance with Brofenbrenner's perspective since according to this author, "(...) the individual grows up and adapts through interchanges with their immediate ecosystem (the family) and more distant environments (such as higher education)". Considering this perspective, the family may be contextualised as "(…) an ecosystem which under normal circumstances, will remain in a state of dynamic balance, characterised by the appropriate balance between its resources and the stress levels (...)" (Silva & Ferreira, 2009, p. 107).

Currently, children spend a long time in the kindergarten, often due to the demands of their parents' working conditions. This long stay in the kindergarten's educational environment should be accompanied by a closer relationship between the institution and the parents/family in order to reinforce children's education. Magalhães (2007, p. 123) supports the idea that families' participation is the "(...) complement to a process which starts at the kindergarten (...)" thus requiring the existence of "(...) teaching stability and continuity of the pedagogical relationship with children and families (which currently still constitutes a pedagogical problem to be solved) [and] the integration of the school/kindergarten into a different organisational unit which may allow the interchange of knowledge, the sharing of experiences and teamwork (which happens in many cases) (...)" Magalhães (2007, p. 98). Families' involvement in kindergartens' activities is increasingly seen as an indicator of educational quality. This means that pre-school teachers are aware of the importance of the relationship between the institution and families, which suggests better quality as far as the pedagogical practice implementation is concerned.

In the light of this, a distinction can be made between three types of teaching modalities (Magalhães, 2007): The tutorial modality: This kind of modality is directly connected to the transfer of knowledge, a role assigned to the pre-school teacher. This modality is not based on parents' participation, i.e. there is no parents' involvement with the instituition whatsoever. Their only functions consist of enrolling the child in the kindergarten and acknowledging the institution's role in their child's life.

The collaborative modality: the main goal of this modality is to enrich the curriculum through parents/families' active participatory role. Here, the institution is in charge of training and guiding parents in the different ways of their participation. This modality assumes several levels of parents' involvement and participation in the kindergarten's activities. It implies a relevant participation,

however restricted to the institution's goals and to certain moments of the school year such as the child's adaptation period (at the beginning of the school year), the implementation of some activities within the classroom environment, school trips and parties. Nowadays, this is the modality most commonly used by pre-school teachers – "(...) we believe that most pre-school teachers' interventions fall into this collaborative modality (...)" (Magalhães, 2007, p. 124).

The co-participatory modality: this modality requires a stronger involvement of parents and teachers. It is essentially based on the existing communication between parents and the institution as well as on the support and help provided by parents to the teachers as far as the work to be developed in the kindergarten is concerned (Fontão, 1998 referred by Magalhães, 2007).

Parents/families play a crucial role in the lives of pre-school children, providing them with a wide set of values, principles and rules, transmitting them ethical and moral values, such as politeness and preparing them to become responsible individuals in the future. Therefore, the family is considered as the primary educational space. Simultaneously, pre-school teachers should assume an active and strong role throughout the entire educational process. Consequently, they should plan activities for and with the children which provide new learning and they should create the opportunities for the interaction with parents and families in order to promote the involvement of all the stakeholders intervening in children's education.

Research

Purpose of the study and problem definition

In the paper the authors compare the views of Slovenian and Portuguese pre-school teachers on the importance of collaboration with parents. They focused on some personal views of pre-school teachers on different ways of collaboration with parents; on parental influence on the life and work of the pre-school institution, and on their competencies as regards collaboration with parents. Professional and scientific literature (Maleš 1991; Resman 1992a; Rockwell 1995; Vidmar 2001; Patrikakou, Weissberg, Redding in Walberg 2005; Smit, Sluiter, Driessen in Sleegersu 2007; Bakker in Denessen 2007; Lim 2008; Šteh 2008; Cankar et al. 2009; Kalin 2009; Downer and Myers 2010; Laroque et. al 2011) uses different scientific terms for collaboration between the pre-school institution and parents, but they all incorporate parental involvement in the pre-school institution and/or at home. The objectives and strategies of collaboration depend on how collaboration is defined at the pre-school institution level. Previous research showed

that collaboration with parents is crucial for effective education, as well as for the sustainable development of effective education. The quality of interpersonal relations is an important element of effective education, as we are increasingly faced with cultural diversity, with individuals of different language backgrounds and different religious affiliations. Today, it is necessary to take into account the interpersonal differences and different social contexts, which on the one hand enable the flow of knowledge and experience, and on the other hand, require better communication and social skills. The partnership between the pre-school institution and parents should encourage a shared commitment to the success of the individual child, formed in an ethos of understanding and openness in the relations between the pre-school institution and parents. In this paper, the reasons for the collaboration between pre-school teachers and parents are discussed, and it is shown that participation has a positive impact on the child, as well as on pre-school teachers and parents. The authors also show how the pre-school institution should plan high-quality collaboration with culturally diverse parents and pinpoint the elements of high-quality collaboration.

Methodology

Research questions

In accordance with the research problem, five research questions were formulated as follows:

R1: What are the pre-school teachers' views on parental awareness of the forms of collaboration with the pre-school institution?

R2: What are the pre-school teachers' views on parental influence on the life and work in pres-chool institutions?

R3: What are the pre-school teachers' views on consulting the parents about the decisions, which influence the children's well-being and their success in achieving the curricular goals?

R4: What are the pre-school teachers' views on including parents in the quality assessment?

R5: What are the pre-school teachers' views on their competencies as regards collaboration with parents?

Description of used measurement instruments

In the empirical research, based on the quantitative pedagogical research, the descriptive method and the causal-empirical methods were used. In the research,

more than 100 pre-school teachers from the Ljubljana region in Slovenia and the pre-school teachers from Bragança, Portugal participated. The questionnaire used was of partly closed and partly open type, and it was distributed from May to the first half of June 2017. The research was completed in August 2017. The data were processed by the statistical software packages SPSS-X PC and EXCEL.

Sample description

The study conducted included 240 pre-school teachers in Slovenia and in 146 pre-school teachers in Portugal.

Table 1: *Gender*

Gender	Frequency		Percentage	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
Male	7	4	3%	3%
Female	233	142	97%	97%
Together	240	146	100%	100%

Among the pre-school teachers in Slovenia and in Portugal, there were only 3% male pre-school teachers, which is consistant with the statistical data. In the school year 2015 in Slovenia, there was only 1.55% (65) male pre-school teachers employed in the first age group and 76% (185) in the second age group.

Table 2: *Education*

Education	Frequency		Percentage	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
Highschool	86	3	36%	2%
High professional education	113	96	47%	67%
University degree	40	45	17%	31%
Together	239	144	100%	100%

The majority of the pre-school teachers included in the study had finished high professional education (47% in Slovenia, 67% in Portugal). There is a difference in the education required to become a pre-school teacher between Slovenia and Portugal. In Slovenia, pre-school teachers should complete higher education according to the educational or study programme for pre-school education or higher education of the appropriate orientation, and a study programme for care and

education designed for pre-school education. Pre-school teachers in Portugal, on the other hand, are required to obtain a specific professional qualification, which is acquired by attending a higher education course leading to a licenciatura degree obtained at colleges of higher education and universities.

Table 3: *Kindergarten Environment*

Environment	Frequency		Percentage	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
Urban	142	119	60%	85%
Suburban	95	21	40%	15%
Together	237	140	100%	100%

The mojority of kindergartens were located in the urban areas (60% in Slovenia, 85% in Portugal).

Table 4: *Kindergarten Type*

Answers	Frequency		Percentage	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
Public	227	62	97%	44%
Private	7	80	3%	56%
Together	234	142	100%	100%

The mojority of kindergartens in Slovenia were public kindergartens (97%), whereas the mojority of kindergartens in Portugal were private institutions (56%).

Results and Discussion

Pre-school teachers' views on parental awareness of forms of collaboration with parents

First, we were interested in the pre-school teachers' views on parental awareness of the forms of colaboration with parents. The first research question was "*What are the pre-school teachers' views on parental awareness of the forms of collaboration with the pre-school institution?*"(R1).

Table 5: *Pre-School Teachers' Views on Forms of Collaboration with Parents*

Subq.	NEVER		RARELY		OFTEN		ALWAYS		Sum		Average		Std. dev.	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
1.	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	5 (3%)	44 (18%)	48 (31%)	206 (82%)	103 (66%)	250 (100%)	157 (100%)	3.8	3.6	0.4	0.6
2.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (4%)	6 (4%)	53 (21%)	42 (27%)	185 (74%)	105 (69%)	249 (100%)	153 (100%)	3.7	3.6	0.5	0.6
3.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	4 (3%)	8 (3%)	18 (12%)	240 (96%)	128 (85%)	249 (100%)	150 (100%)	4.0	3.8	0.2	0.4
4.	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	13 (5%)	10 (7%)	63 (26%)	44 (30%)	163 (67%)	92 (62%)	242 (100%)	148 (100%)	3.6	3.5	0.7	0.7
5.	1 (0%)	6 (4$)	14 (6%)	37 (25%)	66 (27%)	50 (34%)	166 (67%)	54 (37%)	247 (100%)	147 (100%)	3.6	3.0	0.6	0.9

Legend:

1. Kindergarten informs the parents of everything they need to know about their child's well--being in the kindergarten.
2. Kindergarten informs the parents of the rules and regulations that they should know to be able to exercise their rights or the child's rights.
3. Kindergarten informs the parents of all contacts, meetings, office hours, parent-teacher meetings.
4. Kindergarten informs the parents of what to do if they want to provide information about their child.
5. Kindergarten presents various other forms of collaboration to the parents, such as a school for parents, kindergarten open days …

The majority of the pre-school teachers in Slovenia (96%) and in Portugal (85%) believe that the kindergarten always informs parents about all contacts, meetings, office hours and parent-teacher meetings (Subquestion 3); the majority of them also believe, that the kindergarten always (SLO 74%, PT 69%) informs parents of the rules and regulations that they should know to be able to exercise their rights or the child's rights (Subquestion 2). A good half of Slovene and Portuguese pre-school teachers believe that the kindergarten always (SLO 67%, PT 62%) or often (SLO 26%, PT 30%) informs the parents of what to do if they want to provide information about their child (Subquestion 4). Some differences in the pre-school teachers' opinions were noticed in the answers to the Subquestion 1, in which the majority (82%) of the Slovene pre-school teachers believe, that the kindergarten always informs the parents of everything they need to know about their child's well-being in kindergarten, but only 66% of the Portuguese pre-school teachers

believe the same. There is even greater difference in the answers to the subquestion 5, in which 67% of the Slovene pre-school teachers believe, that the kindergarten always presents various other forms of collaboration to the parents, such as a school for parents, kindergarten open days, but only a good third of the Portuguese pre-school teachers (37%) believe the same. The differences are probably due to different ways of informal collaboration with parents in Portugal, where the organisation of a pre-school education institution always implies an institution/school centre educational project, an institution/school centre curricular project and a children's group curricular project. Parents should participate in the drafting of all these projects by contributing their ideas, and such participation should be exercised through informal contacts and meetings, where parents can be asked to come up with their proposals. In Portugal, it is the parents and guardians' duty to participate, on a voluntary basis and under the institution's pedagogical board's guidance, in entertainment and assistance activities. (Framework Act – Law n. 5/97, of February 10 Art. 4).

Table 6: *Information for Parents*

Subquestion	YES		NO		Sum		Average		Std. dev.	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
Information for parents are up-to-date.	243 (98%)	137 (89%)	4 (2%)	17 (11%)	247 (100%)	154 (100%)	1.0	1.1	0.1	0.3
Information for parents are clearly written/orraly presented, and easy to understand.	246 (100%)	138 (93%)	0 (0%)	11 (7%)	246 (100%)	149 (100%)	1.0	1.1	0.0	0.3

The results (Table 6) also showed, that the Slovene as well as the Portuguese pre-school teachers believe the informaton for parents to be up-to-date (SLO 98%, PT 89%), clearly written/orraly presented, and easy to understand (SLO 100%, PT 93%) as it is the goal of the Slovene Kindergarten Curriculum and of the Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Teachers and Parents to work jointly and contribute to the improvement of the educational environments, both at home and in kindergarten.

Parental influence on the life and work in pre-school institutions

The second research question was "*What are the pre-school teachers' views on parental influence on the life and work in pre-school institutions?*".

Table 7: *Parental Influence on the Life and Work of Kindergarten*

Sub-ques-tions	NEVER		RARELY		OFTEN		ALWAYS		Sum		Average		Std. dev.	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
1.	1 (0%)	1 (1%)	58 (24%)	17 (11%)	122 (51%)	68 (46%)	56 (24%)	63 (42%)	237 (100%)	149 (100%)	3.0	3.3	0.7	0,7
2.	3 (1%)	8 (6%)	38 (16%)	42 (29%)	126 (53%)	59 (41%)	71 (30%)	36 (25%)	238 (100%)	145 (100%)	3.1	2.8	0.7	0,9
3.	4 (2%)	5 (3%)	14 (6%)	17 (12%)	43 (18%)	35 (41%)	180 (75%)	88 (61%)	241 (100%)	145 (100%)	3.7	3.4	0.7	0,8
4.	6 (3%)	6 (4%)	15 (6%)	13 (9%)	68 (29%)	49 (35%)	147 (62%)	73 (52%)	236 (100%)	141 (100%)	3.5	3.3	0.7	0,8
5.	0 (0%)	12 (8%)	5 (2%)	24 (17%)	52 (22%)	42 (29%)	182 (76%)	65 (45%)	239 (100%)	143 (100%)	3.7	3.1	0.5	1,0
6.	0 (0%)	25 (17%)	10 (4%)	29 (20%)	74 (31%)	50 (35%)	154 (65%)	40 (28%)	238 (100%)	144 (100%)	3.6	2.7	0.6	1,1
7.	1 (0%)	28 (20%)	13 (5%)	23 (16%)	40 (17%)	48 (34%)	188 (78%)	43 (30%)	242 (100%)	142 (100%)	3.7	2.7	0.6	1,1

Legend:

1. Kindergarten management consults the parents on all the decisions that affect the well-being of their child and his success in various occupations.
2. Kindergarten management takes into account the parents' proposals in the preparation of the programme for the current year.
3. When the kindergarten plans the activities, which require additional payment, the parents are asked for their advice and consent.
4. In paying contributions, the kindergarten takes into account the financial status of the parents.
5. Parents can effectively make their comments and come up with the proposalsabout the work of the kindergarten through their representative in the Parents' Council, and those recommendations are considered and decided on.
6. The parents' representatives effectively address the comments and recommendations concerning the work of the kindergarten within the Kindergarten Council.
7. Parents are informed and aware of the the conclusions of the Parents' Council.

The research showed, that in the opinion of the majority of the Slovene pre-school teachers parents are always (7) informed and aware of the conclusions of the Parents' Council (78%); (5) parents can always effectively make their comments and come up with the proposals about the work of the kindergarten through their representative in the Patrents' Council and those recommendations are considered and decided on (76%); (3) when planning activities, which require

additional payment, the parents are asked for their advice and consent (75%); (6) the parents' representatives always effectively address the comments and recommendations concerning the work of the kindergarten within the Kindergarten Council (65%), and (4) in paying contributions, the kindergarten always takes into account the financial status of the parents (62%). The subquestins 3,4 and 5 were similarly answered by the Portuguese pre-school teachers, however, there is a difference in the opinion regarding the work of the Parents' Council. Only a good third of the Portuguese pre-school teachers (35%) believe, that the representatives of the parents often effectively address the comments and proposals concerning the work of the kindergarten within the Kindergarten Council, as well as, that parents are often informed and aware of the conclusions of the Parents' Council (34%). In our opinion, the explanation is accounted for by the legal framework providing for the collaboration between kindergarten and parents, and as already mentioned in the theoretical part, the existence of parents or parents' representatives' associations is not common in Portugal.

The third research question was "*What are the pre-school teachers' views on consulting the parents about the decisions, which influence the children's well-being and their success in achieving the curricular goals?*"(R3).

Table 8: *Planning Kindergarten Work*

Subq.	Yes		No		Sum		Average		Std. dev	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
1.	230 (96%)	142 (97%)	10 (4%)	5 (3%)	240 (100%)	147 (100%)	1.0	1.0	0.2	0.2
2.	204 (86%)	106 (73%)	34 (14%)	39 (27%)	238 (100%)	145 (100%)	1.1	1.3	0.4	0.4
3.	193 (83%)	130 (91%)	40 (17%)	13 (9%)	233 (100%)	143 (100%)	1.2	1.1	0.4	0.3

Legend:
1. Do parents have the opportunity to get acquainted with the kindergarten annual work plan?
2. Do parents have the possibility to (co)influence the drafting of the kindergarten annual work plan with their proposals?
3. Are parents aware of the kindergarten's long-term development plans?

The majority of the Slovene and Portuguese pre-school teachers answered, that the parents have the oportunity to get acquainted with the kindergarten annual work plan (SLO 96%, PT 97%); that the parents have the possibility to (co)

influence the drafting of the kindergarten annual work plan with their proposals (SLO 86%, PT 73%), and that the parents are aware of the kindergarten's long-term development plans (SLO 83%, PT 91%). The results are in accordance with parents' right to take part in the development of their child's pedagogical path, not only by being informed about what is going on in the kindergarten, but also by being given the chance to contribute to the enrichment of the educational practice planning and assessment. In Slovenia, the parents's representative gets acquainted with annual work plan through the Parents' Council, which gives the opinion on the proposal of the kindrgarten's development programme and on the annual work plan.

Kindergaten quality assurance

The fourth research question was *"What are the pre-school teachers' views on including parents in the quality assessment?"* (R4).

Table 9: *Including Parents in the Quality Assessment*

Subq.	NEVER		RARELY		OFTEN		ALWAYS		Sum		Average		Std. dev.	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
1.	2 (1%)	9 (6%)	70 (30%)	56 (38%)	147 (62%)	62 (42%)	18 (8%)	22 (15%)	237 (100%)	149 (100%)	2.8	2.7	0.6	0.8
2.	0 (0%)	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	5 (3%)	33 (14%)	26 (18%)	206 (86%)	113 (78%)	239 (100%)	145 (100%)	3.9	3.7	0.3	0.6
3.	2 (1%)	7 (5%)	38 (16%)	37 (26%)	103 (43%)	56 (39%)	96 (40%)	45 (31%)	239 (100%)	145 (100%)	3.2	3.0	0.7	0.9

Legend:
1. How often does kindergarten ask the parents about the quality of its services (eg. Through a questionnaire, a round table discussion)?
2. Pre-school teachers are available when parents want to learn about or discuss the child's habits and problems (phone, other)?
3. How often does the kindergarten ask parents about the appropriateness of its working time?

Parents play an important role in kindergarten quality assurance. The research showed, that the majority of the Slovene (86%) and of the Portuguese (78%) pre--school teachers believe, that the pre-school teachers are always available when parents want to learn about or discuss the child's habits and problems (phone, other), but only a good half of the Slovene pre-school teachers (62%) and 42% of the Portuguese pre-school teacher believe, that parents are often asked about the quality

of kindergarten services (In Slovenia they can use a questionnaire drafted in advance). A slight difference was also shown in the answer to the question *How often does the kindergarten ask the parents about the appropriateness of its working time?* A quarter of the Portuguese pre-school teachers (26%) answered that they are rarely asked. It is important to include parents in all elements of the quality assurance, because they are an integral part of quality pre-school education. The partnership between parents and pre-school teachers should encourage a shared commitment to the success of the individual child, formed in an ethos of understanding and openness in the relations between the pre-school institution and parents.

Table 10: *Satisfaction with Parental Collaboration*

Number		Average		Std. dev.		Min		Max	
SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
251	133	7.7	7.4	1.71	1.96	1	3	10	10

On the scale from 1–10, the Slovene and the Portuguese pre-school teachers responded that they were satisfied with parental collaboration.

Competencies for working with parents

The last research question was”*What are the pre-school teachers' views on their competencies as regards collaboration with parents?*”(R5)

Table 11: *Satisfaction with Competencies as regards Collaboration with Parents*

Number of units		Average		Std. dev.		Min		Max	
SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
251	158	8.2	8.0	1.32	1.68	3	3	10	10

The majority of the Slovene and the Portuguese pre-school teachers also answered, that they were satisfied with their competencies as regards working with parents. However, prewious research (Berčnik, 2014) showed that parents and pre-school teachers have different expectations regarding collaboration, which means that we would have to question pre-school teachers in more detail, which competencies they think they have and which they lack. Mostly, the problem is addressing or establishing cooperative communication with the so-called "difficult parents".

Table 12: *Professional Development*

Subq.	Yes		No		Sum		Average		Std. dev.	
	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT	SLO	PT
1.	72 (31%)	69 (48%)	163 69%)	76 52%)	235 (100%)	145 (100%)	1.7	1.5	0.5	0.5
2.	230 (98%)	133 (94%)	5 (2%)	8 (6%)	235 (100%)	141 (100%)	1.0	1.1	0.1	0.2
3.	205 (87%)	131 (92%)	30 13%)	11 (8%)	235 (100%)	142 (100%)	1.1	1.1	0.3	0.3
4.	24 (75%)	10 (59%)	8 (25%)	7 (41%)	32 (100%)	17 (100%)	1.3	1.4	0.4	0.5

Legend:

1. In the scope of the studies, we gained sufficient knowledge of the collaboration with parents.
2. Knowledge of the collaboration with parents is an important part of the pre-school teacher's professional development.
3. I would like to broaden my education in the field of collaboration with parents.
4. Please, justify your answer.

The majority of the pre-school teachers believe, that knowledge of the collaboration with parents is an important part of the pre-school teachers' professional development (SLO 98%, PT 94%), but only a good two thirds of the Slovene pre-school teachers (69%) and a little more than a half of the Portuguese pre-school teachers (52%) answered, that they had not acquired enough knowledge of the collaboration with parents in the scope of their studies. The majority of them would also like to broaden their education in the field of collaboration with parents (SLO 87%, PT 92%). The pre-school teachers stated that collaboration with parents was an important part of pre-school education and that it was important to gain new knowledge and professional insights into the topic. Henderson and Berla (1994) report the summary key findings of the studies: 1) Family contributes significantly to the child's achievements from early childhood to secondary school; all efforts to enhance the child's success are more effective if they include his/her parents; 2) When parents are involved not only at home but also in school, their child's school achievements are better; 3) When parents are involved, the school that their child attends is better (parental involvement also affects the functioning of schools); 4) Child excels at school when his/her parents take on one of the four key roles: co-teacher, assistant, consultant or representative of the school management; 5) The more the model of collaboration between parents and schools resembles that of the partnership, the higher the child's academic achievement; 6) Parents, the

school and the community contribute to the child's achievement, with the results being optimal when all three actors work together (ibid., p. 14–16).

Conclusion

Kindergartens should help parents adopt a positive and active role in complementing and supporting the life and work of kindergartens in educating their children. According to the research results, the majority of the Slovene and the Portuguese pre-school teachers believe that parents are aware of different forms of collaboration with parents since the kindergarten always or often informs them about the rules and regulations and about what to do if they want to provide the information about their child. There is a difference in the opinions of the Slovene and the Portuguese pre-school teachers about enabling parents to collaborate via various other forms of cooperation, such as a school for parents, kindergarten open days, but we believe that this difference is due to different ways of parental collaboration in Slovenia and Portugal. The majority of the Slovene and Portuguese pre-school teachers also believe that information for parents are up-to-date, clearly written and easy to understand as it is the goal of the Slovene Kindergarten Curriculum and of the Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-school Teachers and Parents to work jointly and contribute to the improvement of the educational environments both at home and in kindergarten. In the opinion of pre-school teachers, parents influence the life and work of kindergarten but, as parents' representatives' associations are not common in Portugal, only a third of the Portuguese pre-school teachers believe, that the parents can effectively address the comments and recommendations concerning the work of the kindergarten within the Kindergarten Council. The majority of the Slovene and the Portuguese pre-school teachers also believe that the parents have the oportunity to be acquainted with the kindergarten annual work plan, that the parents can influence the annual work plan and they are aware of the kindergarten's long--term development plans. These results are in accordance with the parents' right to take part in the development of their child's pedagogical path, not only by being informed about what is going on in the kindergarten, but also by being given the chance to contribute to the enrichment of the educational practice planning and assessment. In the pre-school teachers' opinions, parents also adopt an important role in the kindergarten quality assurance as they are often asked about the quality of kindergarten services. In general, the Slovene and Portuguese pre-school teachers are satisfied with parental collaboration and with their competencies as regards working with parents, however the majority of them would like to broaden their education in the field of the collaboration with parents as they realize, that

knowledge of the collaboration with parents is an important part of pre-school teachers' professional development. In establishing collaboration, it is important to define parental purposes and desires, to explore forms of the collaboration with parents that are already in place in the educational institutions, to evaluate them on a regular basis, to update and change them, with the assistance of everyone involved: children, professionals and parents.

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Collaboration with Parents as Part of Kindergarten's Educational Concept

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Abstract

Global changes in Slovenia requested changes in the education system. The new design provides more plural early childhood education, in terms of programmes and organizational, forms as well as in terms of content and working methods. Practical application of the objectives of the Kindergarten Curriculum significantly contributes to a broader understanding of early childhood education and its relation to the family, to the other levels of education, other professional bodies and to the local community. The kindergarten's educational concept as a reflection of joint educational activities of the educational institution and of each individual in it requires the collective agreement between (pre-school) teachers, children and parents. Due to the importance of the collective agreement, the aim of the study was to analyse the pre-school teachers' and parents' expectations as regards their participation in the educational concept creation, whereby the focus was mainly on the individual elements of the educational concept (the kindergarten values, the responsibilities of children and parents, the rules of the agenda, collaboration with parents and the wider community, as well as specific educational strategies) which is particularly important, since parents directly influence the remaining elements of the educational concept.

Starting Point of Education Changes in Kindergartens in Slovenia

In the past, the organization of life in kindergartens in Slovenia was, due to lacking the theoretical outcomes of early childhood education, often failing to meet primarily health and sanitary standards and practical requirements of daily routines (Batistič Zorec 2003). A significant shift was made by the Educational Child Care and Education Programme (1979), which followed the development of early childhood education in the world. Until the systematic and content kindergarten reform in the mid-nineties (Kindergarten Curriculum), early childhood education was divided itno the education and care, which was also shown in the division of the activities in the so-called educational activities (targeted activities, such as physical, health, intellectual activities, art, music, physical-rhythmic education) and the so-called care activities (daily routine, rest, childcare, feeding), whereby pre-school teachers were primarily responsible for the educational activities, whereas pre-school teachers' assistants were responsible for the protection activities (Marjanovič 2002). Even more than in the educational programme scholarization was reflected in its practical application, which was characterized by precise timing and duration of all daily routine activities, by the detailed content and by strict adherence to the methodology and rules. In such strictly planned kindergarten life, children did not have many posibilities to choose the activities according to their interests, abilities and biorhythm, but they had to constantly adjust to the framework set outside of the kindergarten (White Paper on Education, 1995). Despite very carefully organized and planned life and work in kindergarten some innovative pre-school teachers were looking for new approaches to educational work, which would be reflected in greater flexibility in the organization of kindergarten life, in compliance with the child's uniqueness, that would be flexible in planning and in pursuing the educational activities.

Global changes in Slovenia (the gaining of independence, the establishment of a multiparty political system and the adoption of a new constitution) required changes in the education system. Modern changes of our education system, as well as of many other education systems are not only the result of political, economic or other similar changes, but are also the result of changes of the expert views and scientific paradigms, which are not obvious at first glance. The mentioned changes are often the predictor of a global change. The new design provides more

plural early childhood education in terms of programmes and organizational, forms as well as in terms of content and working methods. The basic premise is the integration of the various approaches that enable the most individual treatment, and also contribute to the relaxed atmosphere and the exercise of children's rights within the entire group and kindergarten. In doing so it is necessary to pay attention to the difference between formal rights (enshrined in the legal acts) and actual (substantive) rights, in other words, to the actual resources, mechanismsand ways of their realization. Consequently, plural education at the level of principles as well as at the level of meeting practical needs of children and parents should be established. Principles which govern the general theoretical framework for the transformation of the public education system at the pre-university level arise from the concept of human rights and the rule of law (Bahovec, Golobič 2004, White paper on Education 2011). It is necessary to build a public education system based on the broadest possible consensus on what is a good kindergarten, a good school, because, as stated in the first White Paper on Education (1995), in modern pluralistic societies there are several value systems and different pedagogical theories simultaneously presented. At the same time, it is necessary to provide private kindergartens in order to satisfy the specific interests of those parents who wish to educate their children in accordance with specific religious, moral or philosophical affiliations and beliefs. Another reason for plural education are the rights which are mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in other international documents. These rights are a reflection of an already achieved consensus on fundamental values which apply irrespective of the political and value systems. In the modern state, the system of education is based on the principles of democracy, autonomy and equal opportunities, which are grounded in human rights and in the rule of law. If the concept of the rule of law should be integrated in all segments of the educational system, and if children's rights should be enforced, it is necessary to first remove the obstacles, such as ideology as a form, as everyday practice set – "the hidden curriculum". Therefore, it is necessary to redefine the boundaries of the conception of education as a systematic and oriented process, which is characterized by continuity and effectiveness of the pre-school teacher's function, and is grounded in the assumption that (all) human activity is in the range of conscious control and professional supervision (ibid). At this point Kroflič (2002a) addresses the process model, which tries to overcome the classic design by not seeing the educational goals as predefined but as internal, in the educational process integrated principles. The child is conceptualized as an active link in the educational communication, the educational process is understood as active mutual communication between pre-school teachers and children, and finally, the educational

process is no longer seen as an instrument of convergence of the firmly identified goals, but as its own goal with its own intrinsic value. Practical application of the objectives of the Kindergarten Curriculum significantly contributes to a broader understanding of pre-school education and its relation with the family, other levels of education, other professional bodies and the local community (Curriculum. 1999). Kindergarten Curriculum supports team planning and the implementation of educational activities, and anticipates the participation of professional workers within the department, within the kindergarten and, also cooperation "outside" the kindergarten (e.g. with parents)

Kindergarten's Educational Concept

Children often experience education as an unwanted moralizing and unreasonable discipline, separated from other activities and relationships, and therefore resist it. In the Kindergarten Curriculum moral development is defined as an interprofessional activity. A mindful pre-school teacher will use a number of (mostly random) everyday occasions to develop a child's sense of empathy in moral dilemmas, to enhance his justification of possible solutions, and to develop appropriate behaviour in moral situations. Pre-school teacher's susceptibility to the exploitation of the moral development potential of everyday resolving peer conflicts is especially important. Surpassing the ideological design of the curriculum is therefore associated with a different line-up of educational goals and the fundamental conceptual educational solution (Kroflič, 2001). Kovač Šebart[1] (2007) understands educational concept as a reflection of joint educational activities of the educational institution and of each individual in it. She states, that the formation of the educational concept is demanding and requires collective agreements – between (pre-school) teachers, children and parents. A public educational institution should rely on the statutory basis, based on the objectives and principles of education: the principle of equal opportunities, absence of indoctrination in education, the principle of fairness, tolerance and solidarity, etc. It should also rely on common values, which are set by the Constitution and in accordance with them regulate the relationship to particular values, and various worldviews.

While doing so, it is important to develop tolerance to them, not to give priority and, neither to exclude nor favour any children. The educational concept should be the result of the reflection on how to act, where the traps are and what problems the (pre-school) teacher will encounter, when enforcing these generally acceptable principles and values in practice. The educational framework of a public educational institution is also formally defined by other statutory provisions

1   At this point the author addresses school, but we believe it is transferrable to kindergartens.

and laws. Each educational institution establishes its own rules thereupon. The dialogue about their understanding and enforcement is one of the keys to the educational concept creation. The author stresses that it is necessary also to consider the kindergarten/school culture, which indirectly affects the relationships within and contributes to the educational power of the (pre-school) teacher. However, parents and the social environment also give the weight the pedagogical practices in public educational institutions, therefore the educational concept must also define the collaboration between the educational institution –in our case kindergarten – and parents as well as wider community, and in this context determine the area of professional autonomy of (pre-school) teachers. In each educational institution, we are also faced with – conditionally speaking – educationally challenging children, who cannot be considered as the starting point for the creation of an educational concept, but should nevertheless be taken into account in terms of specific educational strategies.

As Kroflič (2002a) points out (also at this point the author addresses school) that the planning of the educational design is divided between the directive set by the state, the autonomous jurisdiction of educational institution, and (the pre-school) teacher. The pre-school teacher's educational activity is, therefore, also divided between formal and non-formal educational practices. Thus, the educational concept should encompass a daily routine (the agenda), the rights and obligations, the guidelines for a comfortable atmosphere in kindergartens, an agreement on direct educational operations, specific educational strategies, an agreement on the kindergarten's common values and an agreement on collaboration with parents. Medveš (2007, p. 8) defines the educational concept as a more or less complex set of anthropological views, their corresponding educational goals, established conceptual work conditions in the educational institution while constituting certain community rules and relevant principles of the functioning of educational staff. The educational concept, according to the author, defines the legitimacy of educational institutions operations, thus determining the relationship between the value orientation, working conditions (educational climate) and care for the individual child. Kroflič (2002b, p. 71) upon consideration of the educational concept draws attention to the dichotomy between the formal framework and the professional autonomy of (pre-school) teachers. The design of the educational concept is in his opinion similarly as the preparation of the operational plan of instruction, divided between the directive set at the state level and the autonomous jurisdiction of the educational institution. The author emphasizes that the educational process is affected by many educational factors (the pre-school teacher's character, kindergarten's culture, methods of work, work content, special educational activities, peer relations, organization of life, rules, etc.), which are interconnected within the educational concept.

Kovač Šebart and Krek (2009) view the importance of the educational concept in the reflection of educational practices and of the understanding, and as the quest for principles, rules and norms that will support the actual conduct of (pre-school teachers), children, kindergarten/school management, and parents. The educational concept bridges the gap between the norms set by the state and the autonomous jurisdiction of the (pre-school) teacher. Thereupon the authors state that the educational institution should carry out comprehensive educational reflection on the: 1.) Formal framework; 2.) Conceptualization of the (pre-school) teacher as the authority; 3.) Kindergarten/school culture; 4.) Collaboration between the kindergarten/school and parents, 5.) Collaboration with the wider community, 6.) Hidden curriculum and 7.) Specific educational strategies. Each of the featured dimensions require a thorough analysis at the educational institution level, and a common agreement about understanding each and every dimension, and strict adherence to the agreements and practices that fallow (Kovač Šebart, Krek and Vogrinc 2006; Devjak, Kovač Šebart, Krek, Vogrinc 2007; Kovač Šebart, Krek 2009). Such arrangements, which include all professional workers in the educational institution should not be forced in any way, neither by the management nor by the individual group of professionals. The arrangements should be the result of a comprehensive reflection and should contain the goals that can be achieved by professional consensus. (Pre-school) teachers who professionally do not agree with the content and wish to preserve their way of (equally justified) working, are entitled to do so. Each (pre-school) teacher has a professional autonomy, which is to be protected by the adoption of common understanding of educational practices in the educational institution. As the authors indicate, the professional's educational work can only be effective in relation to the conduct, which he believes is professionally appropriate (Ibid, p. 31).

Role of Parents in the Design of Kindergarten's Educational Concept

Education in public kindergartens in Slovenia, a democratic and multicultural society with various traditions, value systems and several worldviews, should, therefore, draw on the values and norms, justified in a particular society (Kovač Šebart and Krek 2009, p. 76). Slovenia, as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (1994) adopted the concept of human rights as a fundamental ethical and legal norm, which is to be followedin the public kindergarten education in Slovenia (Devjak, Kranjčan 2009; Kovač Šebart 2013, p. 34).This is a general social norm preventing the interference with the individual's personal

integrity in the areas that form the foundation of humanity and of human existence (ibid). Public kindergartens should guide its participants in the educational process, so the value guidance imposes duties and conducts, which are based on the respect of each and every person. Pre-school teachers, who rely on the values derived from human rights, should always consider in their actions, how to proceed, that none of the children should feel excluded or privileged on the grounds of the value system, religious, philosophical or religious affiliation, gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation or other personal circumstances (Devjak, Kranjčan 2009; Kovač Šebart and Krek 2009; Kovač Šebart 2013). A common framework of values, principles and norms provides for the basic guidelines for judging the circumstances; on their basiseducational practices in public kindergartens should be designed.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), states in Article 26 that parents have the right to choose the kind of education for their child, which coincides with their right to provide education and training for their children in accordance with their own philosophical and religious beliefs, according to several international documents (the international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); the Convention against Discrimination in Education (1965)). Slovenia should, in the educational and academic field, abide by the right of parents to educate their children in conformity with their own religious, moral and philosophical beliefs; however, it is not obliged to provide such education in public kindergartens and schools (Kodelja, 1995; Šimenc, Kodelja 2015). In accordance with our school legislation, this right of parents is ensured because they have a right to choose a public or a private educational institution for their child (Elementary School Act, 2006, Article 5) and there is also the possibility of the establishment of private educational institutions (ZO-FVI, 2007 Article 40). In public educational institutions, the right of parents to have their children educated in accordance with their own philosophical and religious beliefs is respected by ensuring the absence of indoctrination and by the provision of education based on the principles of objectivity, criticism and pluralism (ZOFVI, 2007, Article 92; School Inspection Act 2005, Article 8), while the educational practices should be based on values that are common and are based on human rights. As regards parents, the boundary of their right to have their children educated in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions is provided for by the Constitution and established by the human rights value framework and by the related obligations. Thus, public kindergarten education should not be contrary to the values and beliefs of the parents, but should also avoid the logic of letting the parents interfere with technical decisions about the learning content by exercising their particular values (Kodelja, 1995, p. 40).Conversely, this means that pre-school teachers also cannot educate by applying a particular, though the prevalent system

of values, they cannot indoctrinate and should always act professionally when the constitutionally protected rights of children and parents are violated (Kovač Šebart and Krek, 2009, Kovač Šebart 2013). From the perspective of the educational concept, it is therefore necessary to reflect on the collaboration with parents. Although the knowledge of the prescribed formal forms of work with parents is an integral part of the competence of kindergarten professionals, the question of collaboration with parents does not refer merely to techniques or skills, but also to the relationship –to the specific arrangements of the public kindergarten educational concept (Kovač Šebart and Krek, 2009, p. 204). A pre-school teacher who wishes to employ a quality educational process, should require the support of parents; it, therefore, makes sense that parents are involved in the creation of the kindergarten's educational concept and that they jointly reflect on all the analysed elements thereof.

Research

Definition of Research Problem

Educational concept creation calls for collective agreements between pre-school teachers, children and parents. Those agreements cannot be forced, therefore, the discussion on the understanding and implementation of educational activities is crucial fordrawing up the educational plan (Kovač Šebart, Krek and Vogrinc 2006; Kovač Šebart and Krek 2009). Due to the importance of adopting common arrangements in designing the kindergarten's educational concept, we formulated the research question: In the opinion of pre-school teachers and parents, how should collaboration with parents be designed in the creation of the educational concept? The aim was to examine the pre-school teachers' and parents' expectations in terms of parents' participation in drawing up the educational plan, whereby the focus was mainly on the following elements of the educational concept: Kindergarten values, responsibilities of children and parents, the rules of the agenda, collaboration with parents and the wider community. as well as specific educational strategies. In these elements, collaboration with parents is particularly important, as it directly affects the remaining elements of the educational plan.

Methodology

In the empirical part the causal non-experimental method of pedagogical research was used, which allows for determining the status of the collaboration with parents in public kindergartens, as well as for the justification of the causal links between beliefs and expectations of the pre-school teachers and the parents, and

collaboration between them. The survey questionnaires were divided into two substantive parts–the former was dedicated to the collaboration with parents in their daily work and the latter to the collaboration with parents in the in drawing up of the kindergarten documents. The questionnaire consisted of closed, open and combined Likert scale questions. The sample included 54 public kindergartens, of which 282 were pre-school teachers and 226 parents. Of the pre-school teachers, there were 99.2% of female pre-school teachers and only 0.8% of male pre-school teachers. Similarly,of the parents there were 90.5% of women and only 9.5% of men. Most of the surveyed pre-school teachers have had less than 10 years of service (41.4%), followed by the participants in the age group from 20 to 30 years (22.7%). More than half of the parents completed higher professional education (57.6%) and a good third of them completed a secondary vocational school, a secondary technical school or the gimnazija (34.5%).The data was processed by the statistical package IBM SPSS Statistics 20 on the level of descriptive and inferential statistics. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested by Cronbach's Alpha (α), whereas its internal validity by the factor analysis. Variables on the rational level, were examined using descriptive statistics (frequency table (f, f% arithmetic mean – M, standard deviation – SD), in the case of deviations from the normal distribution, we observed median – Me mode – Mo or range. In certain assumptions we used descriptive statistics and the t-test for independent samples.

Results and Discussion

Collaboration with Parents in Drawing up Individual Elements of Kindergarten's Educational Concept

First, we focused on the pre-school teachers' opinion about the importance of their participation in the individual elements of the educational plan: 1. Kindergarten values; 2. Children's and parent's responsibilities; 3. Kindergarten rules; 4. Collaoration with parents; 5. Collaboration with the wider community and specific educational strategies such as 6. Planning of work with children with special needs and 7. Planning of work with difficult children. The elements were evaluated on the five-level scale ranging from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important).

Table 1: *Importance of Collaboration Between Pre-school Teachers and Parents as Regards Individual Kindergarten Elements of the Educational Concept*

Num	Elements of the educational concept	Respondents	Numerous	Arit. mean	Stand. dev.	Examination of the homogeneity of variance		T-test	
			n	$\overline{x}$	s	F	p	t	p
1.	Kindergarten values	Pre-school teachers	196	3.43	1.142	18.807	0,000	−1,610*	0,108
		Parents	118	3.61	0.796				
2.	Children's and parents' responsibilities	Pre-school teachers	206	4.24	0.878	0.006	0,938	0,176	0,860
		Parents	120	4.22	0.874				
3.	Kindergarten rules	Pre-school teachers	206	3.33	1.126	1.911	0,168	−1,654	0,099
		Parents	120	3,54	1,020				
4.	Cooperation with parents	Pre-school teachers	208	3,87	0,949	4,280	0,039	−0,905*	0,366
		Parents	120	3,96	0,864				
5.	Cooperation with wider community	Pre-school teachers	208	3,55	0,894	0,311	0,577	−0,053	0,958
		Parents	120	3,56	0,887				
6.	Planning of work with children with special needs	Pre-school teachers	205	4,05	1,016	0,104	0,747	2,594	0,010
		Parents	120	3,75	1,023				
7.	Planning of work with difficult children	Pre-school teachers	206	4,08	1,019	0,045	0,833	2,037	0,042
		Parents	119	3, 84	1,000				

* calculated approximate T-test

The analysiss of the collected data (Table 1) shows that, according to both, the surveyed pre-school teachers as well as parents, collaboration with parents is important in all the stated elements of the educational concept, as their average rating was above 3.30 in all aspects. The standard deviation shows that the values of the surveyed pre-school teachers were the least diversified in the item "Children's and Parents' Responsibilities" (SD = 0.878), while they were the most diversified in the item "Kindergarten Values" (SD = 1.142). We believe that the most diversified value in the item"Determining the Common Values" wasdue to different understanding of this item. In modern societies, the public education system must

be build on the broadest possible consensus on what a good kindergarten or good school is, while relying on the rights mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and in a number of international documents that reflect a consensus on fundamental values (White Paper on Education 1995, 2011). This means that the common public kindergarten values are set from the outside and, therefore, parents cannot participate in their identification, but they can participate in their realization. The standard deviation of the answers of the surveyed parents shows that the values were the least dispersed in the item "Kindergarten Values" (SD = 0.796) and most diversified in the element "Planning of Work with Children with Special needs". In our opinion, the dispersion of this value may be attributed to differences in the interpretation of parental participation. On the one hand, the parents who have children with special needs are most intensively engaged in the planning of the work of children with special needs, but on the other hand, it is also important to collaborate with other parents or at least familiarize them with the situation in the kindergarten group.

The surveyed pre-school teachers as well as the surveyed parents believe that collaboration with parents is most important in the item "Determining Children's and Parents' Responsibilities" (the pre-school teachers – 4.24, the parents – 4.22). As the analyzed data shows, the respondents are aware of the importance of sharing responsibilities, which is highlighted as an important part of collaboration with parents in the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999). As pointed out before, in the relationship between kindergarten/pre-school teachers and parents the allocation of responsibilities and of various jurisdictions is most important. The fact that the respondents selected the item "Determining Children's and Parents'Responsibilities" as the most important element of collaboration shows the beginning of a partnership which, as noted by the authors (Bastiani, 1993; Lim, 2008; Larocque, Kleiman, Darling,2011), includes the division of power and responsibilities, and commitment to work together. The results also show that the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents believe, that the collaboration between them is most important when the work of an individual child is affected, such as the items "Planning of Work with „Difficult" Children" (the pre-school teachers – 4.08, the parents – 3.84) and "Planning of Work with Children with Special Needs" (the pre-school teachers – 4.05, the parents – 3.75), which is also the most common cause of collaboration between pre-school teachers and parents. The remaining elements of the educational concept also received high average importance ratings, reflecting the awareness and observance of the rights of parents to be involved in the planning of life and work in kindergarten (Kindergarten Curriculum, 1999). The surveyed pre-school teachers as well as parents rated the

item "Collaboration with Parents when Setting the Kindergarten Rules" (the pre-
-school teachers – 3.33, the parents – 354) the lowest, which, in our opinion, is the
result of the comprehension of the kindergarten agenda as informal passing of
the day. This includes the elements of the daily routine, such as a feeding and re-
sting, which form the the basis of Kindergarten Crriculum (1999); they should be
flexible and synchronized with the peculiarities of the environment and parents.
We believe that, every kindergarten bases its own rules of engagement on formal
frameworks, but as pointed out by Kovač Šebart (2007), the set of rules should be
followed by a discussion of their understanding and satisfaction, which is crucial
for formulating the educational concept. Parents therefore have an important role
in applying those rules, so it is necessary that the educational concept should de-
fine the collaboration between kindergartens, parents and the wider community,
and in this regard determine the space of professional autonomy of pre-school
teachers. Looking at Table 1, the result of the general t-test as regards the differen-
ces between the arithmetic mean of the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents
shows statistically significant differences between the arithmetic means of the su-
rveyed pre-school teachers and parents in the items "Planning of the Work with
Children with Special Needs" (t = 0.747, p = 0.010) and "Planning of the Work
with „Difficult" Children" (t = 0.833, p = 0.042) . The collaboration with parents
in the planning of the work with children with special needs was rated to be more
important by the surveyed pre-school teachers (4.05).

Below the results are analysed regarding the collaboration between the pre-
-school teachers and parents in the activities such as specific educational strategies
("Solving Individual Child Problems", "Addressing Educational Problems", "Plan-
ning the Work with Children with Special Needs", "Carrying out the Work with
Children with Special Needs", Table 2) and Collaboration with Parents ("Planning
and Implementation of Cooperation with Parents", Table 3), which were rated as
more important in table 1.

Table 2: *Importance of Collaboration with Parents in Activities that fall Within Specific Educational Strategies*

Activities	Respondents	Numer-ous	Arit. mean	Stand. dev.	Examination of the homogeneity of variance		T-test	
		n	$\overline{x}$	s	F	p	t	p
Solving individual child problems	Pre-school teachers	274	4,49	0,853	17,828	0,000	4,950*	0,000
	Parents	221	4,03	1,154				
Addressing educational problems	Pre-school teachers	272	4,31	0,845	0,316	0,575	2,835	0,005
	Parents	222	4,07	0,981				
Planning the work with children with special needs	Pre-school teachers	272	4,30	0,997	24,002	0,000	6,351*	0,000
	Parents	221	3,64	1,267				
Carrying out the work with children with special needs	Pre-school teachers	271	4,14	1,070	15,486	0,000	4,928*	0,000
	Parents	220	3,61	1,272				

* calculated approximate T-test

The analysed data (Table 1) showed that the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents rated the items that are part of specific educational strategies as important. The results in Table 2 show in more detail, that in the surveyed pre-school teachers' opinion, the following activities of specific educational strategies are especially important: Solving Individual Child Problems (4.49), Collaboration in Addressing Educational Problems (4.31), Collaboration in Planning the Work with Children with Special Needs (4.30) and Collaboration in Implementation of the Work with Children with Special Needs (4.14). The highest score was assigned to the activities related to the individual child, which has already proven to be one of the main ways or reasons of collaboration with parents, whereas the lowest score was assigned to Carrying out the Work with Children with Special Needs, which indicates that the parents are not directly involved in the pre-school group. The standard deviation of the results of the pre-school teachers shows that the value was least dispersed in the item Addressing the Educational Problems (SD = 0.845) and most dispersed in the element Implementation of the Work with Children with Special Needs (SD = 1.070). The data of the surveyed parents show similar results; however, the parents feel that collaboration is slightly more important when addressing educational problems (4.07), followed closely by solving

idividual child problems (4.03), planning the work with children with special ne-eds (3.64) and the carrying out the work with children with special needs (3 , 61).

The result of the general t-test differences between the arithmetic means of the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents in Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference in Solving Individual Child Problems (t = 4.950, p = 0.000), Addressing Educational Problems (t = 2.835, p = 0.005), Planning Work with Children with Special Needs (t = 6.351, p = 0.000) and in Carrying out the Work with Children with Special Needs (t = 4.928, p = 0.000). In all the listed items, collaboration with parents was marked as more important by the surveyed pre-school teachers.

Table 3: *Importance of Collaboration with Parents in the Planning and Implementation of Collaboration with Parents*

Activities	Respondents	Numer-ous	Arit. mean	Stand. dev.	Examination of the homogeneity of variance		T-test	
		n	$\overline{x}$	s	F	p	t	p
Planning collabora-tion with parents	Pre-school teachers	273	3.99	1.101	0.024	0.876	1.713	0.097
	Parents	223	3.82	1.085				
Implementing collaboration with parents	Pre-school teachers	269	4.25	0.920	0.038	0.847	4.237	0.000
	Parents	215	3.88	0.991				

One of the elements of the educational concept marked as important by the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents was also Planning Collaboration with Parents (the pre-school teachers – 3.87, the parents – 3.96). The data analysed in Table 3 shows that both, the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents believe, that their collaboration is important in the implementation of collaboration with parents (the pre-school teachers – 4.24, the parents – 3.88) as well as in the plan-ning of collaboration with parents (the pre-school teachers – 3.99, the parents – 3, 82). The results show that the surveyed pre-school teachers abide by the Kin-dergarten Curriculum (1999), which emphasizes parents' rights to participate in the planning of life and work in kindergarten in agreement with the pre-school teacher, and also their right to actively participate in the educational work. Active participation in planning and implementation is important for the development of partnership cooperation, which is characterized by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and willingness to negotiate (Pugh 1989; Bastiani 1993; Lim, 2008; Berčnik 2014). The standard deviation shows that the values are more dispersed in

the item Planning of Collaboration with Parents (SD = 1.101, SD 1.085). The calculation of the t-test shows, that there are statistically significant differences between the arithmetic mean of the respondents in the item Collaboration with Parents in the Implementation of Collaboration with Parents (t = 4.237, p = 0.000). In this item Collaboration with Parents was marked as more important by the surveyed pre-school teacher.

Pre-school Teachers' and Parents'Expectations as regards Collaboration with Parents in Individual Elements of Educational Concept

First, we asked the pre-school teachers and parents whether, in their opinion, parents should participate in the creation of kindergarten documents. We were surprised by the findings, because more than half of the surveyed pre-school teachers (62.5%) responded that parents should be involved, and, with that being said, the most frequently stated answer was, that parents should participate in the formulation of the annual work plan (38.3%), in the shaping of the agenda (daily routine and kindergarten rules) (7.8%), and that they should participate by launching their ideas and giving proposals (7.8%). On the other hand, more than half of the surveyed parents (64.5%) responded, that parents should not collaborate. The surveyed parents justified their answer by the fact that pre-school teachers were professionals qualified for making the decisions on their own (84.4%), and that this was a part o their professional autonomy. We agree, that kindergarten documents are in the domain of the kindergarten and its professional staff; however, parents can greatly contribute with their suggestions and ideas, because they are the experts on their children and they can also contribute in their fields of expertise.

Further questions were supposed to be answered only by those respondents who had answered, that parents should participate in the formulation of kindergarten documents, and, consequently in the design of the kindergarten educational concept (the pre-school teachers n = 158; the parents n = 76). However, while processing the data we discovered that the respondents did not take into account this rule. Since the issue of how to collaborate with parents in the creation of the kindergarten educational concept was important for the research, we decided to use all the information and to this end write the respondents' numerous under each question.

Table 4: *Pre-school Teachers' and Parents' Expectations as regards the Way of Parental Involvement in Individual Elements of Educational Concept*

Num	Elements of the educational concept	Numerous		Parental suggestions		Parents' Council		Parent – teacher meetings		They cannot be involved	
		A	A1	A	A1	A	A1	A	A1	A	A1
				f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%	f%
1.	Setting kindergarten values	186	107	17.7	17.8	21.5	24.3	46.8	49.5	12.4	8.4
2.	Setting children's and parents' responsibilities	188	109	9.6	11.0	23.9	22.0	61.7	62.4	4.8	4.6
3.	Setting kindergarten rules	188	110	12.8	5.5	19.7	22.7	35.1	38.2	30.9	33.6
4.	Planning of collaboration with parents	193	111	20.7	18.0	11.4	11.7	64.2	67.6	2.1	2.7
5.	Planning of collaboration with the wider community	191	107	25.1	11.2	25.1	24.3	46.6	48.6	2.6	15.9
6.	Planning of work with children with special needs	188	108	36.2	15.7	11.7	18.5	30.9	35.2	16.0	28.7
7.	Planning of work with »difficult« children	184	107	31.0	16.8	12.0	17.8	41.3	42.1	12.0	20.6

Legend: A – Pre-school teachers A1 – Parents

Less than half of the surveyed pre-school teachers (46.8%) believe that the parents can participate in the identification of kindergarten values at parent-teacher meetings in which they can discuss the proposals already made by the kindergarten. A fifth (21.5%) of them believes that parents should cooperate in the examination of the proposals made by the kindergarten within the Parents' Council. On the one hand, the results point to the understanding of the importance of the active role of parents in the understanding and implementation of kindergarten values. Those are, as pointed out before, already formally determined by the Constitution, Kindergarten Act and other formal documents, which should be taken into account by a public kindergarten, and, consequently, parents are unable to get

involved therein, as this would be contrary to the formal framework. The surveyed parents responded similarly – most of them chose the answer that they should be involved in addressing the proposals made by the kindergarten at parent-teacher meetings (49.5%), and through the Parents' Council (24.3%). The majority of the respondents (61.7% of the pre-school teachers, 62.4% of the parents) similarly decided, that parents could participate in the setting of the children's and parents' responsibilities through the discussion on the proposals made by the kindergarten at parent-teacher meetings. In the item Setting the Kindergarten Rules, the answers were distributed between two different sides. More than a third (35.1%) of the surveyed pre-school teachers and a few more surveyed parents (38.2%) believe that parents should participate in setting the kindergarten rules by addressing the proposals there of at parent-teacher meetings. Approximately one-third (30.9%) of the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents (33.6%) believes that parents should not participate in the setting of the kindergarten rules. The difference in the responses can be accounted for by different interpretations of the kindergarten rules or the agenda, i.e. as something that is defined at the level of kindergarten or that is to be agreed on in each pre-school group separately. This difference was already visible in the section outlining the Current Collaboration in Kindergartens. The majority of the surveyed pre-school teachers (64.2%) and parents (67.6%) think that parents should be involved in the planning of their collaboration with parents only by discussing the proposals submitted by kindergarten in parent-teacher meetings. 20.7% of the surveyed pre-school teachers and 18.0% of the surveyed parents believe that parents should participate by giving their own suggestions, and adopting their active role. The differences in the responses may be accounted for by the understanding of the planning of collaboration (from setting timeframes of formal forms of collaboration to the overall design of forms of collaboration, as well as their implementation). As regards cooperation with the wider community, again the majority of the respondents answered, that parents could participate in the planning of collaboration with the wider community by addressing the proposals in parent-teacher meetings (46.6% of the pre-school teachers, 48.6% of the parents). A more detailed data analysis shows an interesting picture - 25.1% of the surveyed pre-school teachers replied that parents could participate in this element by giving their own suggestions, whereas 25.1% of the surveyed pre-school teachers answered that parents could only collaborate by addressing the proposals submitted to Parents' Council by the kindergarten. When planning collaboration with the wider community, there can be discussions about the above-standard programmes which are actually proposed by the Parents' Council (ZOFVI, 2007, Article 66) or there can be discussions regarding informal collaboration with individuals, establishments, institutions and companies outside the kindergarten.

In the item Planning of the Work with Children with Special Needs the results are again very diverse. A good third of the pre-school teachers (36.2%) responded that parents could participate by giving their own suggestions, whereas almost a third (30.9%) of the respondents also answered, that they could only collaborate by addressing the proposals submitted to Parents' Council by the kindergarten in parent-teacher meetings. A good third of the parents (35.2%), on the other hand, believe that they should collaborate through the parent-teacher meetings, whereas more than a quarter of them (28.7%) believes, that parents cannot participate in this element. It is possible that the parents responded so differently, because they believe that only the parents who have children with special needs, should make proposals, which is also confirmed by the statement of one of the parents, who wrote that "in their kindergarten it is not in the habit to talk about the child's difficulties in front of the whole group of parents". The answers were similar in the item Planning the Work with "Difficult" Children. Most of the surveyed pre--school teachers (41.3%) and parents (42.1%) believe that parents can collaborate through the discussions in the parent-teacher meetings. However, almost a third (31.0%) of the surveyed pre-school teachers believes that parents should participate by giving their own suggestions, which was considered only by 16.8% of the surveyed parents. The surveyed parents largely (20.6%). believe that parents cannot participate in this element. The analysis shows that the surveyed pre-school teachers expect more active involvement of the parents than the surveyed parents.

A joint review of all the responses indicates that the expected role of parents in the planning of individual elements of the kindergarten educational conceptis mainly passive, since the average response empowers parents primarily to address the proposals made by kindergarten in parent-teacher meetings or witin Parents' Council. Parents should therefore be familiar with the elements of the kindergarten educational concept and with the documents containing them, but they are not supposed to be actively involved, as this is, as they mostly wrote in their open answers, the domain of professional autonomy of the kindergarten. We agree that parents cannot be presented with a blank cheque for drafting the kindergarten documents, and that collaboration should be handled and lead by the kindergarten, but we believe that parental involvement in the design of the kindergarten educational concept is important, at least in the phase of its agreed realization.

Conclusion

Designing of the kindergarten educational concept calls for joint arrangements among pre-school teachers, among pre-school teachers and children, and among kindergarten and parents, which should not be forced in any way (Kovač Šebart,

Krek and Vogrinc 2006). In the research the focus was on individual elements of the educational concept (kindergarten values, children's and parents' responsibilities, kindergarten rules, cooperation with parents and cooperation with the wider community, as well as specific educational strategies), in the drafting of which collaboration with parents is especially important, because it also indirectly affects the remaining elements of the educational concept, such as conceptualization of the pre-school teacher's authority, kindergarten culture and hidden curriculum. According to the research results both, the surveyed pre-school teachers and parents believe that parental participation is important in all researched elements of the educational concept. Collaboration was rated as most important for determining the children's and parents' responsibilities, whereas it was rated as least important for setting the kindergarten rules. The surveyed parents rated as important to some degree the participation in the elements, which are linked to the planning of work with individual children, which can also be observed in other similar studies (cf. Poulou and Matsagouras 2007; Cankar, Kolar and Deutsch 2009). The analysed data show the actual situation as regards the collaboration with parents, which is most often linked to individual child's problem-solving. Parents are usually not included in the elements of the kindergarten educational concept, which refers to the entire educational operation –to the values, rules, the planning of the collaboration with parents and the community; accordingly there is no partnership cooperation with parents. The participation in all aspects of the educational concept, especially in the determination of the responsibilities, and consequently in their allocation between pre-school teachers and parents, is important for establishing partnership cooperation, which involves sharing of power and responsibilities in the areas where this is consistent with the professional autonomy of the pre-school teacher. If we want to establish partnership cooperation, we need to design ethos of understanding and openness in relations between kindergarten and parents, and help parents adopt an active role in the upbringing and education of their children. If the parents are involved in determining responsibilities, the limits of their cooperation will be clearly defined, which will allow the establishment of partnership cooperation in all other areas of cooperation, too.

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Pedagogical Supervision as a Collaborative Process of Vocational Training

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Abstract

In this paper we will discuss the role of pedagogical supervision in the initial training of early childhood educators/teachers. Supervision is understood as the process that supports and regulates the learning and professional development, which forms part of a social constructivist and ecological approach. The importance of embarking on a reflexive (inter)action committed to the construction of quality educational and training responses is emphasized. Worth noticing are also the contributions of the different actors and institutional contexts in the creation of a supervising environment that could facilitate their learning and professional development.

Keywords: *Supervision, teacher training, collaboration, professional development*

Introduction

In recent years the quality of initial training of teachers/early childhood educators has been on the political agendas of the European Union countries. Recognizing the importance that pedagogical supervision of the initiation to professional practice can assume in this process, it justifies questioning how to understand and promote it, within the framework of the close relationship with the current thoughts on education and the development of the teaching profession.

Thus, knowing that the supervision process can assume different nuances and be based on different principles and values (Alarcão & Canha, 2013; Moreira 2015), this reflection relates to the clarification of these dimensions and the knowledge that supervisors need to possess, so that they can better accomplish this task. Assuming that initial training is a key moment for the professional development of the educator/teacher, but also that it requires lifelong continuity, we underline the importance of investing in this process in order to favour an ethically and socially responsible identity construction in the context of complexity and uncertainty that characterizes societies nowadays.

Taking into account the conclusions of some studies carried out in Portugal (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2002a, 2002b; Alarcão & Roldão, 2008; Matias, 2008; Vasconcelos, 2009), among others, as well as our professional experience as teachers and supervisors of the educational practice of early childhood educators, we can underline the crucial value that is recognized to the supervising process in the training and professional and personal development of trainees and supervisors. We are also aware that this process is still fraught with tensions and contradictions which are important to consider and help to overcome.

It is in this sense that this paper is presented. We begin by contextualizing the progression of the concept and the supervisory practices, trying to make the current approach explicit. We will firstly focus on how, in the current legislative framework of early childhood education/teachers, supervision of educational practice is envisaged. Secondly, we will reflect on the dimensions that should be considered in the supervisory process. Then, we will address reflection as a means of training and regulating the professional development process of each person. Finally, we will focus on the role and training to be promoted so that the quality of the supervisory processes can be enhanced. We will end by presenting some considerations arising from the reflexive questioning raised throughout the text.

Pedagogical Supervision: Concepts and Practices

The diversity of perspectives on supervision founded in the literature illustrates both the concerns and the investment that have been felt in thinking about this process. Alarcão and Canha (2013), by re-focusing on the recent historical and epistemological trajectory of the development of supervisory thinking in Portugal, have highlighted the contributions of several authors (Alarcão, 1982, 1992, 2000; Alarcão & Tavares, 1987/2003; Alarcão & Sá-Chaves, 1994; Sá-Chaves, 2000/2011, 2002); Alarcão & Roldão, 2008; Vieira, 1993, 2006/2010; Oliveira-Formosinho, 1997, 2002a; Vasconcelos 2009; Vieira & Moreira, 2011, among others), to which we seem to be able to add other recent works (Moreira, 2015; Mesquita & Roldão, 2017).

These works allow us to perceive that the conception of supervision has presented, in the last three decades, as Alarcão and Canha refer (2013, quoting Alarcão, 2010), "traços evolutivos no sentido da promoção do desenvolvimento profissional numa perspetiva menos hierarquizada e mais colaborativa, menos orientada por técnicas e normas e mais baseada no questionamento, na reflexão e na assunção pessoal de decisões tomadas" (p. 36) [evolutionary traits in the sense of promoting professional development in a less hierarchical and more collaborative perspective, less guided by techniques and regulations and more based on questioning, reflection and personal decision making]. Some ideas regarding education for sustainability and for ethics in interpersonal relationships were also welcomed.

Supervision has been following the evolution of approaches to teacher education and training, and the current orientation tends towards a training and collaborative dimension. As far as initial training is concerned, supervision focuses on the guidance of the educational practice. There is the assumption that it supports and facilitates the development of trainees and children with whom the intervention takes place, but also of the trainers/supervisors involved in this process and the institutions in which they are integrated. The field of pedagogical supervision has also extended to the training and intervention in the work context, with emphasis on the induction of teachers in their professional career (probationary period) and on the evaluation of their professional performance.

According to Moreira (2015), pedagogical supervision is seen as a "ação de acompanhamento da atividade geralmente (pré-) profissional ou institucional (…) com uma intencionalidade orientadora, formativa, transformadora, desenvolvimentista assente numa metodologia de natureza reflexiva, colaborativa e capacitante (p. 53)". [Follow-up action of the activity usually (pre-) professional or institutional (...) with guiding, training, transformative and developmental

intentions based on a reflexive, collaborative and enabling methodology].

This definition builds upon the thought of Alarcão and Roldão (2008) by defending that it is based on "em princípios de indagação e intervenção crítica, democraticidade, dialogicidade, participação e emancipação" (Moreira, 2015, p. 53). [Principles of inquiry and critical intervention, democracy, dialogue, participation and emancipation].

An approximate idea is presented by Vieira (2009), who defends a transformative supervision, in which the articulation of the purposes and of the supervisory and pedagogical practices are expected, as well as that these integrate an emancipatory orientation. In this process it is considered that both the supervisory action and the pedagogical action aim to investigate and improve the quality of the educational practice. It is in this context that the author defines supervision as "teoria e prática de regulação de processos de ensino e aprendizagem em contexto educativo formal, instituindo a pedagogia como o seu objeto" (Vieira, 2009, p. 199). [Theory and practice of regulation of teaching and learning processes in a formal educational context, instituting pedagogy as its object].

Thus, and considering the reflection focus of this work, it is important to re--examine how, in the present legislative framework of initial training of early childhood educators/teachers, the supervision of professional practice is addressed. In this sense we take the legal regime of professional qualification for teaching in early childhood education and in primary and secondary education as reference (Decree-Law no. 43/2007, of 22nd February 22, revised by Decree-Law no. 79/2014, of 14th May).

As provided by these diplomas, training is organized in two study cycles, and the professional qualification for teaching is only obtained with the second cycle of studies (master's degree). The first cycle of studies is to ensure basic training in the area of teaching, granting a degree in basic education. The second is to complete and reinforce this training in the areas of teaching for which the master degree qualifies. In the case of the training of early childhood educators, students may choose a master degree that only grants professional qualification for teaching in early childhood education or a master's degree that qualifies for teaching in early childhood education and in the 1st cycle of basic education. In both study cycles (bachelor and master) the activities of initiation to professional practice are supervised, but it is mainly in the second cycle of studies that the term "supervision" becomes central, with the training component corresponding to a traineeship defined as "Supervised Teaching Practice" (Decree-Law no. 79/2014, of 14th May, art. 14).

The initiation to professional practice is organized in order to ensure the trainees: opportunities for observation and collaboration in educational settings and for supervised practice; planning, teaching and evaluation experiences; professional

development opportunities, which promote an attitude oriented towards the permanent improvement of children's learning (Decree-Law No. 79/2014, of 14th May, art. 11). We highlight the importance of future educators/teachers becoming aware of the professional responsibility of working with children and developing the skills that the task of educating, caring for and supporting their development requires, as well as investing in their own development and in the contexts in which they are integrated. In order to correctly accomplish the initiation to professional practice activities, it is foreseen that cooperation protocols with the cooperating institutions are signed. Teachers who cooperate in the supervision of the initiation to professional practice are designated in the document above mentioned as cooperating supervisors, and they must meet the following requirements: training and professional experience appropriate to the duties to be performed; teaching practice of not less than five years (art. 23). Preference criteria in the choice of cooperating supervisors are: post-graduate education; specialized training in pedagogical supervision and professional experience in supervision (art. 23).

In the evaluation of the trainees the participation of the coordinator of the curricular department or of the coordinator of the board of teachers is also foreseen or, in the case of private or cooperative teaching, of the teacher who assumes equivalent functions (Decree-Law No. 79/2014, of 14th May, art. 24). This suggests that supervision should not be understood as limited to the traditional supervisory triangle comprised by the institutional supervisor, the cooperating supervisor and the trainee. It is also possible to appreciate the valorisation of the interinstitutional cooperation process as a means for the development of schools. The abovementioned law also provides that higher education institutions will support teachers from cooperating schools and, in particular, the cooperating teachers in their professional development (art. 23). In this line of thought, we corroborate the idea of Tracy (2002), namely that supervision cannot be confined to the activities room, and an intentional opening to the institutional contexts and the surrounding culture should be promoted.

We realize that from the normative point of view the supervision process is based on quality criteria. However, the constraints identified in some studies relating to this process, such as the lack of specific training and the lack of time for the performance of supervisory tasks should be considered (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2002a, 2002b; Alarcão & Roldão, 2008; Matias, 2008). As far as training is concerned, although there have been some ongoing training courses and postgraduate courses in pedagogical supervision, our experience tells us that there are still few cooperating supervisors who possess such training. On the other hand, the diversity of tasks that the school demands today to early childhood educators/teachers limits their involvement in supervisory tasks.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the role that the supervised teaching practice represents for the students' entry in professionalization. As Vasconcelos (2009) states: "é no contexto de uma situação de trabalho e de uma escola ou jardim de infância (ou agrupamento de escolas) que o estudante se irá descobrir como profissional, procurando construir um 'saber fazer' que se realiza na ação através de práticas reflectidas e promotoras de inovação nas escolas (p. 113)". [It is in the context of a work situation in a school or early childhood centre (or grouping of schools) that the student will discover himself as a professional, seeking to construct a ‚know-how' that is carried out in the action through reflected practices that promote innovation in schools].

Educational practice (traineeship) makes it possible to establish (inter)actions that are supposed to support and facilitate the (re)construction of knowledge and representations about the professional activity and about oneself, towards a quality professional training and performance. This process requires continuity, and the (trans)formative potential that supervision assumes in the course of professional activity should not be ignored. It is in this context that Alarcão and Canha (2013) define supervision as "uma ação de acompanhamento e monitorização das atividades (profissionais, incluindo pré-profissionais e institucionais) contextualizadas e realizadas por pessoas em desenvolvimento, tendo uma intencionalidade orientadora e formativa" (p. 83). [**an action to follow-up and monitor contextualized activities (professionals, including pre-professionals and institutional) carried out by people in development, having a guiding and training intentionality**].

However, the guideline assumed by the supervision should be considered, since it can be exercised in the sense of inspection and control or in the sense of collaboration and emancipation, assuming that it integrates the latter sense.

The Supervisory Process

The recognition of the active role of the person in their learning and development and of the influence that the interactional contexts exert in this process, led to the substantiation of the supervision in social constructive and ecological approaches, as observed in the work by Alarcão and Sá-Chaves (1994) and Oliveira-Formosinho (1997, 2002a), as well as in several other recent studies.

Adopting an ecodevelopmental perspective, Alarcão and Canha (2013) argue that the characteristics of people (supervisors and trainees), activities and contexts, and their inter-influences should be taken into account in the supervision process.

With regard to people, it is important to consider that some have characteristics that become interaction facilitators, such as those related to the manifestation of curiosity, attention, initiative, reaction and persistence. However, there are

other people who have characteristics that tend to inhibit the development of positive interactions, such as "impulsividade, agressividade, dispersão, desequilíbrio emocional, apatia, falta de atenção, irresponsabilidade, falta de interesse, insegurança e timidez (Alarcão & Canha, 2013, p. 77).[Impulsiveness, aggressiveness, dispersion, emotional imbalance, apathy, lack of attention, irresponsibility, lack of interest, insecurity and shyness].

It is also worth noting that there are people who show preference for conceptualization and others for action, some who like to work in groups and others individually. Assuming that the process of supervision should favour progression of every one, it is important that it meets the characteristics of each trainee and that it promotes the creation of an interactive climate that facilitates and supports their development.

Emphasizing the importance of promoting supervision capable of meeting the personal characteristics and to create development opportunities to the trainees, it is important to consider the style of supervision to be adopted. Glikman (1985), according to Alarcão and Tavares (2003), points out three styles of supervision: directive, non-directive and collaborative, each integrating different discursive structures. In the directive supervision, the supervisor assumes as major concerns the provision of guidance, establishing criteria and conditioning the trainees' attitudes. In non-directive supervision, the supervisor seeks to listen and respond to the trainees' initiatives, to encourage them and to help them to clarify their ideas and feelings, asking them for additional information when necessary. In collaborative supervision, the supervisor presents suggestions, helps to find solutions and promotes negotiation. In the sense that supervisors can strategically adapt their actions to each trainee or group, Sá-Chaves (2002) advocates the use of a *non--standard* supervision model, which allows us to adopt the supervisory style that, in each situation, can promote the best progression of each one and to meet the complexity of each situation.

As far as activities are concerned, it is important to consider, among other aspects, the purposes, nature, interrelationships and learning potential they present. These activities include those that the trainees develop with children, but also those related to the observation, monitoring and follow-up of their action.

With regard to the characteristics of the contexts, it is important to take into account the development opportunities they foster. As it is known, there are schools that assume a position capable of generating more dynamics and development, while others present an environment of apathy and immobility. There are also differences at the level of interaction with other institutions and the community, because while some schools create conditions for openness to dialogue and cooperation, others close in on themselves. Hence it is important to take into account

the interactional environment that is created in each educational context and how it is perceived by the actors involved in this process.

There are three types of development of the supervisory action: vertical; horizontal and intrapersonal, of self-supervision (Alarcão & Roldão, 2008).

Vertical supervision refers to the interaction established by the supervisors, both institutional and cooperative, with the trainees. Their experience and knowledge, as well as the role they play in relation to the trainees, assign them a responsibility that places them in a hierarchically superior place, as far as the decision-making regarding the training process is concerned (Alarcão & Canha, 2013). It is from this point that the supervisor's follow-up, support and stimulate the learning and development of the trainees, this action being vertical supervision.

Horizontal supervision refers to the supervisory action that the trainees can develop among themselves, which allows them to increase their possibilities of knowing the educational reality and professional development. It is in this line that the organization of the trainees in pedagogical pairs for the accomplishment of the initiation to professional practice and supervised teaching practice (traineeship) activities can be understood, as it happens in the training institution we are part of, as facilitator of supervisory support. The supervisory added-value offered by the internship group stems from the critical but friendly environment promoted among the trainees.

Self-supervision presupposes the inquiry and the personal responsibility of the trainees to invest in their training and professional development. In this context, supervisors are expected to value the personal knowledge, experience and ambition of each trainee and to provide them with spaces for self-reflection on the training process. It is therefore necessary to emphasize "a formas de autossupervisão capazes de conduzir o formando na observação sistemática de si próprio e, através dela, na gestão do seu trajeto formativo" (Alarcão & Canha, 2013, p. 53). [forms of self-supervision capable of leading the trainee in the systematic observation of himself and, through it, in the management of his training path].

In this process, it is important to consider the insecurity that the trainees feel in the first stages of their training, and one must remember that fears can be overcome if they are there is support by both supervisors and peers with whom they discuss and define strategies for action. Consequently, trainees can be more easily involved in the implementation of innovative proposals.

Thus, supervision can be understood as an activity that can combine the perspective of the trainee himself, that of the other trainees and that of the supervisors, within a framework of co-responsibility for everyone's training path. So, the focus on the individual is shifted to a focus on the group by creating learning communities which help to know and cope better with the educational reality and to co-construct and (re)construct meanings about it (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2002b).

Efforts will be made to raise the quality of supervisory practices, as some studies promoted in the field of supervision of the training of early childhood educators have been alerting.

Reflection as a Supervisory Strategy

The studies of Schön popularized the reflection in the field of teacher training as a strategy for training and professional development (1983, 1987). The author emphasizes the role of reflexivity in the construction of professional knowledge, which contributed to the awareness of the richness epistemology in practice. This social constructivist approach advocates a constant interaction between action and thought, a process that is the basis of contextualized and systematized professional knowledge. For reflection to favour the construction of this knowledge, it is important that it is oriented towards reasoning, analysis and interpretation of the educational practice in its multiple dimensions, and for the emancipation of the trainees. However, it is important to consider that the emancipatory potential of reflection can vary depending on the orientation and level of depth that it integrates. In this context, Vieira (2010, going back to the idea of Van Manen, 1997), says that it is possible to consider three types of reflection: technical; practical and critical or emancipatory.

The technical reflection level is mainly oriented toward the achievement of short-term goals in order to ensure the improvement of trainees' performance. The practical reflection level focuses on the analysis of assumptions, predispositions, values and consequences of the educational practices promoted by the trainees. In turn, the critical or emancipatory reflection level encompasses the ethical, social and political dimension of the practices developed by the trainees, in a perspective of problematization, reasoning and evaluation of these practices. It integrates an approach that seeks to promote the autonomy of future educators/teachers and the children with whom they develop their action.

The development of reflexivity presupposes the valorisation of (inter)subjectivities by the confrontation of theoretical and practical knowledge, the negotiation of meanings, languages and decisions, within the framework of openness to dialogue and the possibility of making adjustments and changes that may be considered pertinent. The potential that this process can assume in the construction of professional knowledge are highlighted. According to Alarcão and Roldão (2008), the results of studies in which the authors became involved highlight the role of reflection, considering that:

> it motivates for higher demand and self-demand; it makes aware of the complexity of the teaching activity and the need to seek and produce

theoretical knowledge to act on it; it contributes to the perception of the theory-practice relationship as a process of knowledge production and not as a dichotomy served by a logic of application; it promotes an analytical attitude towards action and professional practice; it develops self-knowledge and autonomy; it provides greater security in the action of teaching; it raises the interest and ability to experiment new approaches (p. 30).

We emphasize the importance of engaging in a joint and collaborative reflection because of the secure and training potential it can assume. This should allow the questioning of thoughts and decision-making underlying the process of teaching and learning and to assume, therefore, an interpretive attitude. It should also encourage the trainees to do an investigative action that also contributes to their professional development.

Since the supervisor is an experienced professional, a joint reflection allows him, as Sá-Chaves (2002) states, to understand the complexity of situations, and letting himself be accompanied by the candidate to be a teacher in the "exercício dialogante com a situação, com os materiais e consigo mesmo, pelo candidato a professor permite que, lado a lado, também este dialogue, questione e reflita" (p. 166). [dialogue with the situation, with the materials and with himself, allows the latter to dialogue, question and reflect side by side]. This can be understood as a process of guided discovery that allows the trainees to discover and to know in the course of reflection. This reflection can occur in the pre- and post-action phase and presupposes the use of observation records. It is necessary to consider the pertinence that the feedback provided to the trainees assumes in this process, which should be understood as a reflexive dialogue and not as a mere means of evaluation, although it also includes this dimension.

In this context, reflection should be envisaged as a praxis involving support, observation, monitoring and evaluation, all of this within the framework of a dialogic relationship, which is supposed to encourage everyone to assume a constructive critical attitude, to negotiate decisions and, consequently, to perform a collaborative construction of knowledge. When the reflection is collaborative and focuses on diverse educational situations and problem-solving, this constitutes a strategy with great training potential (Alarcão & Tavares, 2003). It is also worth considering that, as Alarcão and Roldão (2008) state, "um trabalho supervisivo, assente no acompanhamento e discussão permanente do processo e da ação e seus resultados, parece ser um alicerce para a construção do conhecimento profissional" (p. 54). [a supervisory work, based on the constant monitoring and discussion of the process and the action and its results, seems to be a foundation for the construction of professional knowledge].

However, as evidenced by the studies developed by these authors, the practices of reflection are still incipient, since they are confined to educational activities. The time factor, in particular that attributed to the post-action reflection, appears as a constraint to the development of this process. Difficulties in using reflexive approaches are also identified, such as interpreting, questioning and confronting trainees, as well as providing them with critical feedback that can encourage them to progress, without undermining their self-esteem (Alarcão & Roldão, 2008). The lack of experience of the trainees and the fact that they are being evaluated are factors that, as mentioned by Vieira (2010), also contribute to a reflection which does not always assume the desired reflexive and critical dimension. Supervisors can, in this process, help to formulate and deconstruct issues that allow mobilization and depth in reflection. They may also help to make data collected by each trainee on the educational practice more meaningful, favouring their interpretative analysis.

Therefore, the importance of investing in the quality of reflection processes promoted within the introduction to professional practice activities, and in particular, within the practice of supervised teaching, creating better opportunities for learning and development of the future educators/teachers is emphasized.

The Praxis of Supervision: Role and Knowledge

Since the performance of supervisory tasks requires specific preparation, we need to ask ourselves about the dimensions to be taken into account in order to promote them. Thus, and considering that the primary task of supervisors, both institutional and cooperative, is to help trainees become good professionals, it is important that they challenge them to invest in their own training path and in the teaching-learning process they develop with children. As such, it is important for supervisors to master not only knowledge in the various subject areas, content domains, curriculum development and teaching-learning methodologies, but also to have a good knowledge of themselves and the contexts in which they are integrated and to base their action on responsible ethics.

So, we corroborate the opinion of Mesquita and Roldão (2017), when they state that "o supervisor deve ter uma consciência ética sobre a função que desempenha, agir atendendo a esses princípios e ajudar a promover uma atitude responsável dos formandos (supervisionados), conhecendo-os na sua individualidade e sem generalizar" (p. 75). [the supervisor must have an ethical conscience about the function that he/she performs, act on these principles and help to promote a responsible attitude of the (supervised) trainees, knowing them in their individuality and without generalizing]. Their ethical responsibility also depends on their

social responsibility to promote the relationship and dialogue among the members of the educational community, favouring the sharing of ideas and knowledge.

In order to perform the supervisory functions, Vasconcelos (2009, based on Alarcão, 2007) names a set of qualities that she considers essential in the supervisor: "possuir uma enorme capacidade de observação e interpretação; ser conhecedor das matérias sobre as quais faz supervisão; saber ir buscar os saberes de referência; valorizar a dimensão da relação interpessoal e manifestar inteligência interpessoal" (p. 101). [to have an enormous capacity for observation and interpretation; to be knowledgeable about the subjects he or she supervises; to know how to get the knowledge of reference; to value the dimension of the interpersonal relationship and to manifest interpersonal intelligence].

Mosher and Purpel (1972) gave another important contribution to delimit the knowledge to be developed by supervisors. Alarcão and Tavares (2003) identify six areas of characteristics that supervisors must have, namely:

a) Sensitivity to perceive problems and their causes; b) Ability to analyse, dissect and conceptualize the problems and prioritize the causes that gave rise to them; c) Ability to establish effective communication in order to perceive the opinions and feelings of teachers and express their own opinions and feelings; d) Competence in curriculum development and teaching theory and practice; e) Interpersonal relationship skills; f) Social responsibility based on clear notions about the purposes of education (p. 73).

The ability to pay attention, to listen, to understand and to integrate the perspective of others, through the clarification of the senses and the active participation of every one, are part of a knowledge that can also be understood as fundamental. Supervisors also need to be able to analyse, in a prospective, interactive and retrospective manner, the implications of their performance, not only at the technical and practical level, but also from the critical, reflective and emancipatory point of view of the trainees.

Considering that the supervisors should evaluate the professional performance of the trainees, and that this task may inhibit the relationship of encouragement that is intended to provide them, this difficulty can be minimized by building a positive interpersonal relationship, committed to the development of a quality process of teaching-learning. This contributes not only to the learning and to the development of children, but also of the trainees and supervisors, as well as of the contexts in which they are integrated.

In this context and corroborating the idea of Alarcão and Tavares (2003), we stress the importance of creating a positive affective-relational and cultural environment, based on a reciprocal, spontaneous, authentic, friendly, empathetic, collaborative and solidary support among all (p. 61).

The role of trainees is to collaborate with the supervisors so that this process develops positively and favours their professional and personal development. It is important to consider that the basis of their professional and personal emancipation is the development of a theoretical and practical knowledge, which helps to better understand, organize, guide and evaluate the educational action and to participate actively in the life of schools and its relationship with the community.

Thus, recognizing the importance of self-supervision, in a process of a continuous and sustained self-training (Alarcão & Roldão, 2008), the development of self-support and self-regulation skills, both by the trainees and the supervisors, it becomes equally relevant to their professional and personal development.

Final Considerations

In this text we focused on the role of pedagogical supervision as a process that facilitates the learning and development of early childhood educators/teachers, bearing in mind their repercussions on the teaching-learning process of children.

Throughout the text we emphasize the importance of promoting a collaborative, training and emancipatory supervisory action, emphasizing that it is based on (inter)actions that encourage and challenge the trainees to learn and develop the knowledge, attitudes and dispositions that enable them to become capable of professional performance.

Besides, we also underlined the important contribution that the introduction to professional practice and supervised teaching practice activities can assume in the construction of teaching professionalism, which require a supervisory monitoring. It is in this line that we understand pedagogical supervision as the process that supports and regulates the learning and professional development, integrating a reflexive and autonomous training intentionality. That is why we foresee the development of an initial training committed and oriented to "serve the children" and to the (re)construction of a more just and democratic society (Vasconcelos, 2009).

The contributions of different types of supervision to challenge and support the trainees in the development of their educational and training action, as well as the role that joint reflection can take in this process has to be taken into account.

It is necessary to underline the importance of fostering the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and predispositions that facilitates ethically responsible pedagogical supervision in the context of complexity and uncertainty that characterizes the world today. We value the development of positive interpersonal relationships and processes of collaborative construction of professional knowledge, highlighting the sharing of knowledge and ideas among the different actors, in order to create a true educational community.

We also consider that the supervisory process requires continuity so that each one can feel supported in the development of the professional activity, an aspect that requires attention and further study.

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Modern School Movement (MSM)

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Abstract

In this article we have highlighted the pedagogical model of Portuguese Modern School movement (M.E.M.) as an excellent contribution to ensure the construction of a perceptive quality, achieved several ways by each institution, either in the performance graduates ' professional either in production of professional knowledge in the field of childhood education. We feature initially, in the model, one of its principal founders and your organizational structure of professional cooperation. After we stress the relevance of democratic construction in the social organization of the learning of children in pre-school age. We discuss the Organization of the Group of children, the room and the daily routine, as well as the system of pilotage of the pedagogical work cooperative.

Keywords: *pedagogical model Portuguese; childhood education; professional performance*

Introduction

The pedagogical model of the Modern School Movement (MSM) is well known and implemented by several early childhood educators in many Portuguese early childhood education schools as well as in other cycles of education. It is also recognized by national and foreign universities as a model of cooperative self-training and a pedagogical model for in-service training of teachers, as a consequence of the positive results obtained from its practical and scientifically based application (Grave-Resendes & Soares, 2002).

In fact, the MSM develops a pedagogical practice that is permanently reflected and committed to the comprehensive way of thinking and doing what is educational, the integrative mode of what the educator does and of what the children do.

In this publication we seek to contribute to reshaping the role of the early childhood education school and of its educator, through the dissemination of the setting developed within the MSM. Having Sérgio Niza as one of its main founders, we begin by briefly presenting his biography and explain the historical and organizational evolution of this movement. Subsequently, we will seek to clarify the objectives and principles that underlie the movement, and then present some dimensions of pedagogy as examples of how MSM practices reflect the philosophical and theoretical bases of this Pedagogical Model. In the model we highlight the organization of the group of children, of the activity classroom and of the daily routine. We also address the pedagogical evaluation, underlining its formative character through a set of instruments that help the educator and the children to guide what happens in the room. We will then conclude with some final considerations.

Sérgio Niza: Brief Biographical Notes

Sérgio Niza was born in 1940 in Campo Maior. He comes from a wealthy family and he was a professor of primary education in Évora, obtaining a postgraduate specialization diploma in educational research (1963) and a postgraduate specialization in education psychology (1996).

Due to his school model based on the respect of the individual and his freedom, he was forbidden to teach in public schools by decision of the Salazar regime in 1963–64. When he returned to Lisbon and after being prevented again from teaching at a private school, he entered the Helen Keller Children's Centre, where a group of professionals based on Freinet's techniques was rehearsing a pioneering project of school integration for the blind, partially sighted and visually impaired children. Once there, he elaborates on useful references for the definition of his

educational path, thus originating the Modern School Movement (MSM) in 1966. This movement was not legally formalized, but still the International Federation of Modern School Movements, in the Perpignan Congress, appointed Rosalina Gomes de Almeida and Sérgio Niza as delegates of the Portuguese movement.

It was only after political change in the country, more specifically after the Carnation Revolution, in 1974, that the legal formalization of the MSM was effected, in 1976, when the constitutional Portuguese democratic regime was already consolidated.

This was the first formalized step of a long process of associative organization of teachers that prevails since the 1960s, and which currently mobilizes members of different levels of education throughout the country, always giving voice to the pedagogical experiences of its members through the quarterly publication of the *Revista da Escola Moderna*, initially developed as a newsletter in 1974. It can thus be said that the history of the Modern School Movement (MSM) is fairly confused and intertwined with the life story of Sérgio Niza, briefly portrayed resourcing to Nóvoa, Marcelinoand Ramos do Ó (2012, p. 685). He is undoubtedly a contemporary Portuguese scholar who is distinguished in the Portuguese pedagogy essentially by the coherence and persistence of pedagogical practices convergent with a coherent set of values and educational principles.

Organic and Functional Structure: For a Deeper Understanding

The Modern School Movement, whose origins and development dates back to the 1960s, is an association of early childhood educators and teachers of several levels of education, from pre-school to higher education, for the cooperative self-training of its members and the support of in-service training and pedagogical context of educational institutions.

The historical creation of this movement arises after the fusion of three convergent practices: the design of a "*município escolar*" (school municipality) in a primary school in Évora (1963/1964), the educational integration practice of visually impaired children at the Hellen Keller Children's Centre and the organization of courses of Professional Development at the union *Sindicato Nacional de Professores* (1963/1966). Within this context great Portuguese pedagogues stand out as builders of its foundations (Serralha, 2009).

The MSM comprises 15 regional centres with headquarters in cities that cover the Portuguese territory, each with an elected coordinating committee. This committee encourages the training and activity of its area, including cooperative self-training programs. Each regional hub also organizes, on a monthly basis, the pedagogical Saturday, where the practices of MSM are disseminated and reflected

on. Every month, the regional hubs coordinate their activity in a national collegiate body, the Pedagogical Coordination Council, which includes the management, the committees coordinating the centres and other specialized permanent committees. In fact, there are several training support structures: the Cooperative Groups, the National Easter Meeting, the National Congress, the Speciality Meetings (Pre-School, 1st Cycle, Teaching through Subjects, Higher Education, of the Support and Training, all of them of national scope), the initiation courses to the Pedagogical Model of the MSM (Workshop and internship) and the Pedagogic Coordination Council Afternoons (Serralha, 2009,p. 8).

Although we opted not to describe each of these formative structures, we would like to emphasize that the MSM organizes an annual open congressto members and non-members, a privileged moment of training where the work carried out throughout the school year is analysed through reports and discussions of pedagogical practices. There is also a national meeting, only for members, for reflection and deepening of the pedagogy of the Movement, as well as pedagogical intervention of its members. The movement also publishes a quarterly magazine called *Escola Moderna* (Modern School), which serves as a newsletter to share pedagogical practices (Nóvoa, Marcelino, & Ramos do Ó, 2012). It can therefore be said that one of the most significant aspects of the MSM is undoubtedly the construction of networks and communities of reflection and sharing.

In fact, the concept of cooperative self-training is central to the understanding of its ideas (Niza, 1995), because it portrays the "projeto de uma comunidade de profissionais que proporciona aos seus membros a construção cooperada da profissão docente, por retroação do ato pedagógico, que se (re)constrói continuadamente, por meio da reflexão crítica e avaliativa de práticas no coletivo, de onde resulta, consequentemente, a construção de uma pedagogia" [project of a community of professionals that provides its members with the cooperative construction of the teaching profession, by the retrospection of the pedagogical act, which is (re)built continuously through the critical and evaluative reflection of practices in the collective, consequently originating the construction of a pedagogy] (Serralha, 2009, p. 5).

Thus, the teacher is mobilized as both an agent and subject of his own training in a cooperative and interactive dynamics, in which he recognizes not only the valorisation of his experiential knowledge but also finds the wealth and, in cooperation with his peers, the value of growing and progressing as a person and as a professional. According to Niza (1992a), "não somos uma cooperação, não é a um 'espírito de corpo' que aspiramos. Constituímos antes um colégio colaborante onde em comum trabalhamos sobre as nossas obras. O tudo que nos vai espantando por sermos vários, multiplicando cada coisa, é o deslumbrante movimento

de cultura pedagógica que assim vamos erguendo insatisfeitos. Mas sempre reno-vadamente curiosos e críticos. Continuamos olhando no espelho poliédrico do Movimento as nossas práticas. São as nossas vidas profissionais que co-avaliamos"

[we are not a cooperation, it is not a ‚spirit of body' that we aspire to. On the contrary, we were a cooperative college where we work together on our works. Everything that amazes us by being several, multiplying each thing, is the dazzling movement of pedagogical culture that we are raising dissatisfied, although always being curious and critical. We continue to look at our practices in the polyhedral mirror of the Movement. It is our professional lives that we "co-evaluate] (p. 40).

It is in this system of shared development, where each one assumes himself as a trainer and student and must think and critically reflect his paths through shared awareness in solving the problems of the profession, in the transformation of knowledge and in the revision of practices. This shared form of practicing and building the profession is inspired by the same concepts and principles, which should be used later with children themselves. In other words, it points to the relevance of an epistemological homology, incorporating an integrative vision of the goals and principles of education, which we will now explain.

Influences and Pedagogical Principles

The Modern School Movement started with Freinet's pedagogy, the Institutional Pedagogy and the Non-Directive Procedures in education (Niza, 1998; Santana, 1998). Later it has moved away from this matrix and evolved to a perspective of learning development through social centred interaction, rooted in the socio-cultural heritage to be rediscovered with the support of the peers, following the research line of Vygotsky and Bruner (Niza, 1998; Santana, 1998), and more recently, the theoretical post-Vygotskyan idea (Folque, 2012). Thus, according to Vygotsky's theory, Niza stresses that the social organization of learning is essential. On the other hand Bruner places the construction of meaning on and within practice, since many innovations are more apparent than real. These authors also follow the cultural roots, the role of language and of the Other.

In pedagogy it is not enough to deconstruct, but it is necessary to define the pillars of construction. This is what MSM does when it defines the three interdependent purposes that give meaning to the act of teaching: (i) the initiation into democratic practices; (ii) the re-imposition of values and social meanings and (iii) the cooperative reconstruction of culture (Niza, 1998, p. 141). It is through the direct democratic participation of children in the organization and management of the curriculum, with the educator, that we proceed, through progressive negotiation, from the planning to the sharing of responsibilities and consequent evaluation.

It is also in this interactive cooperation system that knowledge is acquired and integrated, through the formal communication circuits which circulate the products and, that learning take place. The systematic exchanges of productions and knowledge do not only materialise the social dimension of learning but also the solidary sense of the cultural construction of knowledge and of the instrumental skills which express them.

From the purposes referred to above arise the following structuring principles regarding pedagogic action:

- The pedagogical means have to convey, in themselves, the democratic ends of education. This more comprehensive principle gives ethical significance to the choice of materials, processes and forms of organization that best fit the rules and objectives imposed in the educational process.
- School practice, as a social and educational contract, takes place through the negotiation among adults and children and children amongst themselves;
- The democratic practice of the organization shared by all is imposed in the Cooperation Council. It covers the entire school life from the planning of activities and projects to its accomplishment and cooperative evaluation. The Council is the formal institution which regulates the school life from the moral and social viewpoint.
- Working processes must be similar to the processes of productive social life, and the learning strategies must be as close as possible to the several scientific, technological or artistic areas.
- All the information and achievements of children are shared through systematic communication circuits as social validation of production work and learning.
- School practices have to provide immediate social meaning to the children's learning, through the sharing of knowledge resulting from the various work projects, thus structuring knowledge.
- Children challenge social environment and bring people from the community into the classroom to act as a source and resource of knowledge and culture (Niza, 1998a, p. 142).

The principles mentioned result in three strategic movements that guide and illuminate the teaching-learning process (Niza, 1998): from production to understanding, from intervention to communication, and from personal experience to subsequent didactics.

The first strategic movement argues that the awareness exercise from production processes should be reinforced, as they are essential to their understanding (from production to understanding). The second shows that intervention

is essential, since its validity will only make sense if it is socially communicated (from intervention to communication). The third suggests the transition from personal experience to subsequent didactics, in other words, it is necessary to consider the previous experiences of children in order to give meaning to new constructions. This means that the learning process is embodied in a social centered and structuring interaction of communication, cooperation and negotiation among adults and children and children amongst themselves (Novo, 2009, p. 75).

According to Niza (quoted in Folque, 1999) "esta perspectiva de fazer do grupo-turma em cooperação, o centro de toda a actividade e de toda a dinâmica social, retira a este modelo de trabalho o enfoque pedocêntrico em que as actividades e organização do trabalho se centram na criança em abstracto" [this perspective of making the cooperating group of students the centre of all activity and of all the social dynamics takes out to this work model the pedocentric approach in which the activities and organization of work focus on the child in abstract] (p. 6). Thus, the major purpose is to implement a model where the democratic practice of content management, activities, materials, space and time is done cooperatively, being the group the motor of moral and social development.

Constitution of the Group of Children

One of the key conditions for the social dynamics of educational activity in the early childhood education school is the constitution of cross-age groups (the vertical form) with the purpose of ensuring *heterogeneity* that guarantees respect for individual differences. Diversity is perceived as enriching and as a promoting an ethos of inclusion (Folque, 2014), based on the unavoidable value of respect and openness to human relationships. Within the instructional line of Vygotsky and Bruner, diversity also allows to know how to highlight the mediating importance of children's knowledge obtained from the free expression of their interests, experiences and ideas, but reinforced by a public validation in the group. The need for a *free expression* environment, referred to in the work of Freinet, and the existence of a *playful nature* in the exploitation of ideas, materials and documents for questioning, are essential conditions for children to get actively involved and to try to understand the world around them (Folque, 1999, 2012). The MSM roorts itself in extracurricular knowledge as a *potential*, namely in the plans and projects that will meet the goals of life in early childhood education schools. Sharing the conceptions of Niza (1992b), "por isso nos repugna a invasão indiscriminada de meios didáticos pré-fabricados que reforçam a tendência infantilizadora [do jardim-de-infância] [we are repelled by the indiscriminate invasion of prefabricated didactic means that reinforce the chidlishly tendency [of early childhood education

school] (p. 7). As such, it is necessary to emphasize the relationship between the real world and knowledge, because it is this that gives meaning to the world they communicate. We will now explain the organization of the educational area.

The organization of the educational area

In this pedagogical model the classroom is organized by a central polyvalent area, which is in the centre of the activity classroom intended for the development of activities in large groups, and by a set of six basic areas of activities, which are described below (Niza, 1998, p. 146):

- The *library area* is a small documentation centre where, in addition to books and magazines, there are works produced within the framework of activities and projects by the children who attend or have attended the early childhood education school, their friends or from other early childhood education schools.
- *The writing workshop* is an area that integrates several text and illustration reproduction materials like typewriter, press, computer with printer, among others. In this workshop the texts of the children and the various attempts of pre-writing and writing are exhibited, since they mediate the memory and the reflection. Writing is present throughout the room, because an extreme value is given to the orality of the child, to the report of their stories and their news, all of them recorded.
- *The arts workshop* integrates the materials for painting, such as inks, pens, pencils, different types of paper, cutting and gluing material and modelling and tapestry material.
- The *carpentry workshop* is used for the production of several constructions, whether they improvised or designed to serve other projects. These constructions can be built by the children, the parents or guests.
- In the *science laboratory* activities of measurement and weighing (with measures of capacity, length, scales, etc.) are provided, as well as creation and observation of animals (birds, fish, rabbits, etc.), experiment reports in illustrated files, record of climatic variations (weather map) and other materials to support the recording of observations and problem-solving within scientific initiation. In this area we observe more closely the phenomena of nature by questioning, experimenting and recording the results, since children are indeed small-scale scientists.
- The *toy area* includes role-play activities and traditional games, sometimes integrating the traditional dollhouse. This area has a trunk with clothes and props that help the children to build their characters and drama projects.

– The *multi-purpose area* consists of a set of tables and chairs sufficient for all type of collective meetings of the whole group (welcome, advice, communications and of other kind) and which will serve as support for other small group or individual activities and projects.

These different areas of the room, where different types of activities are developed, are not necessarily fixed. They are open and flexible areas, allowing children to move freely and they have different uses, identified and enriched according to the age configuration of the group.

It is also noteworthy that the materials are not specifically addressed to children, so that they can recognize in them the approximation to their social world. Consequently, an attempt to escape the pressure of educational toys industry, which sometimes infantilizes the child, is made.

The environment of the activity classroom should be organized in a stimulating and aesthetic way, and it should represent several cultures as well as the children's productions, "utilizando as paredes como expositores permanentes onde rotativamente se revêm nas suas obras de desenho, pintura, tapeçaria ou texto" [using the walls as permanent exhibitors where rotatively they review themselves in their works of drawing, painting, tapestry or text] (Niza, 1998, p. 148). In fact, it is important to post the instruments of regulation and piloting of learning (activities chart, weekly project list, tasks/responsibilities chart, attendance chart and the classroom diary) on the walls, in order to facilitate the management and evaluation of educational activities.

Organization of the educational routine

The organization of the daily and weekly routine is a basic organizer, a source of security that allows to recognize the reason of the activity in which children are involved and, thus, to participate in them with autonomy and protagonism. In this sense, rather than defining the daily sequence of activities, it is important to identify them by explaining their reason, thus supporting the educators to maintain their social and cultural setting.

The daily routine is composed of two distinct periods, namely: the morning period and the afternoon period. The morning focuses essentially on the work or activities chosen by the children, with the discreet support of the educator. On the other hand, the afternoon is composed of " sessões plenárias de informação e de atividade cultural, dinamizadas por convidados, pelas crianças ou pelos educadores" [plenary sessions of information and cultural activity, boosted by guests, children or educators] (Niza, 1998, p. 150). Therefore, the organization of the day

takes place in nine different moments:
1. Reception.
2. Planning Council.
3. Activities and projects.
Break.
6. Communications.
7. Lunch.
8. Outdoor activities.
9. Collective cultural activities.
Evaluation council.

The reception is intended to gather all the children around a first conversation after the attendance register, in which everyone participates. The educator stimulates participants and registers what is more relevant, gathering texts to be exhibited during in the writing workshop. After the first welcoming conversation, the activities and projects are planned, based on the suggestions made during the welcome or the sharing from the day before. Then, in whole or in small groups, the children choose and record the activities, and move on, autonomously or with the collaboration of their peers, to the actions that they set out to accomplish. Children should not stay for more than an hour in the different areas. The break in the morning has the duration of about half an hour and usually involves a fruit meal and free play. After the morning break, the children gather for the moment of communication. At this moment, the children share their discoveries, this is a moment of great social and training meaning because the communicator explains what they did, how and why, and those who listen and observe question them. Communications are performed in turn so that everyone has the opportunity to present their work.

After this, children prepare for lunch (wash their hands and set the table), this being another moment of training and social coexistence. This is followed by a one-hour recreational moment, comprising songs, traditional games and guided movement sessions. This moment is parallel to the resting period of those who need a nap and will do this autonomously. Later they meet in the multi-purpose area for a collective cultural activity, finishing the day with the balance of the educational journey. Usually, the time of cultural activity follows the model common to the educators of the Modern School, ending the day with a balance of the educational journey. So,
-   Mondays are story-telling days; the teacher reads and the children give opinions, add things and tell their stories by association;
-   On Tuesdays parents will tell things from their lives, as well as other people who know things that are related to the ongoing projects;

– On Wednesdays, the report and the balance of the study visit of the morning is made because, according to Niza (1998), "as saídas sistemáticas de estudo são a forma mais eficaz de estabelecer e garantir uma ligação constante com o meio envolvente da escola e de assegurar a colaboração da comunidade no alargamento dos conhecimentos das crianças" (p. 154); [systematic study visits are the most effective way to establish and ensure a constant liaison with the school environment and to ensure community collaboration in broadening children's knowledge];

– On Thursdays, the afternoon is made of the children's initiative. Correspondence can be completed; as well as the newspaper; the presentation of a conference; dramatization of a story or a role-play moment;

– On Fridays, it is time to gather the as Cooperation Council for the educator to read each column of the Diary and discuss the negative and positive judgments with the children (Niza, 1998, p. 153).

Despite this well-defined organization, the routine should naturally be flexible to meet the needs of the group and of the child, according to the contextual factors of daily life (Folque, 2014).

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that it is in the Cooperation Council that the group's life in the early childhood education school is built and determined. Yvone Niza and Santana (1996) point out that "o poder da tomada de decisões na gestão do espaço, dos recursos, dos tempos e dos conteúdos é partilhado com o grupo" [the power of decision-making in the management of space, resources, times and contents is shared with the group] (p. 42).

That is why the educator emerges as an element of the group, being attentive, challenging and supportive of the interests and requests of the children, always seeking consensus through negotiation on activities, means, timing, responsibilities and their regulation (Niza, 1998).

According to Niza (1998), the adult is the promoter of a participated organization that credits the child as a competent being, guiding the learning towards cultural productions which later circulate in the room, in the garden, in the community. This organization shows that knowledge is not perceived as private property and learning is not just an individual construction, given that it is systematically extended to the whole group where children are encouraged to communicate. As such, the adult is the active driver of communication circuits, hence allowing the child to build knowledge, to build values and to add meaning to the learning paths. The adult is still an active auditor, as they provoke children's free expression and stimulate cooperation, relying on the idea that one's success depends on the success of others (Folque, 2012; Niza, 1998; Novo, 2009).

Formative Evaluation: The Piloting Tools

In the MSM model, planning and evaluation are interconnected, the latter being considered as a means for learning (Niza, 1998, Folque, 2012).

Thus Niza (2006) emphasizes that " avaliar é produzir juízos de adequação e de valor. (…) Avaliar é expor e comunicar, pôr em comum a participação de cada um numa comunidade de aprendizagem. Avaliar é ajuizar sobre os percursos, os métodos e as produções para se poder prosseguir e progredir nesses projetos em comum". [to evaluate is to produce judgments of appropriateness and value. (…) To evaluate is to expose and communicate, to pool one's participation in a learning community. To evaluate is to make judgments about the paths, methods and productions in order to be able to continue and progress in these common projects" (p. 3)].

Formative evaluation, considered by MSM as an essential part of the educational development process, is based on a set of tools known as „*piloting tools*", which help the educator and the children to guide and regulate what happens in the classroom (Folque, 2012; Grave-Resendes & Soares, 2002; Niza, 1991, 2006). The piloting instruments are as follows:

Attendance Chart
It is a table with two entries that serves for the child to mark with a conventional sign its presence, in the square where its name crosses with the column of the respective day of the month and week. Every morning as children come in they mark their own presence. Presence rhythms alternating with absences help build awareness of time from experiences.

Free texts
The moment of the writing of the free texts occurs during the hosting, when the children consider that the occurrences that they are narrating are so significant that they deserve to be written. It is in this context of exposition of their novelties, in which children choose to tell their friends only or to register them through the written code, that the educator must support verbal expression and to provoke dialogue and exchange of knowledge and experiences. Thus, these texts are reports that the educator mediates because it helps the discourse to be worked, seeking the collaboration of the peers, the organization of ideas in space and time, and the enrichment of what one wants to verbalize and the development of vocabulary.

Activities Chart

It refers to a table with two entries that allows the child's name to be crossed with the possible activities, usually represented by writing or by a pictorial symbol. The children's names are in the vertical column on the left and the activity areas in the upper horizontal column. Before they start working, children plan and record what they chose on the chart, thus learning how to anticipate activities, plan and self-regulate their work, also allowing the educator to verify the children's choices regarding the group, and to make an individual evaluation with the child (what she did more, what she did not choose, why, ...).

Inventories

They allow children to have a real knowledge of the objects and equipment available, as well as their potential uses. Only through awareness of what we have we can project what we are going to do. That is why in the main areas of the classroom are written lists of materials and activities that are illustrated by the children and help them to remember and see the possibilities of working in this area.

Classroom Diary

This instrument (paper sheet with a minimum dimension og 90x60) consists of four columns: "we do not like", "we like", "we did" and "we want to do". The first two columns collect the significant occurrences arising from social behaviour; the third presupposes the registration of productions considered as the most significant, and the fourth column introduces the survey of needs or ideas for new activities and work projects.

For Niza (1991) it is in the first two that the sociomoral balance of the weekly life of the group is based. They have the role of "raising awareness of situations of diversified social interaction between children and these with the adult" (Vieira, 2004, p. 5). On the one hand, they contribute to the elucidation and the awareness of the affections that certain kind of occurrences provoke in oneself and in others. On the other hand, it makes visible the right to the word, without fear of censorship, for deepening and shared construction of the everyone's rights and duties. This reflection, which is collective, particularly discloses that rules make sense when responding to the real problems of daily life, and reveals that it is important to discuss and confront ideas. Sometimes negative occurrences can give rise to new rules that are "fixed on the wall as group laws, which should be followed democratically and are only revocable in council" (Niza, 1998, p. 153). In fact, the written record of *group rules* (or called "what we agreed") for a better management of behaviour and conflict does not arise from the imposition of adults but from a progressive negotiation between them and children, as the events have been requiring it.

Metaphorically called "Moral Thermometer of the Class" (Niza, 1991), this instrument is undoubtedly a piloting instrument in the "social construction of morality" (Oliveira-Formosinho, 1996). For this development to take place, the adult has the important role of providing a safe environment and helping the child to decentralize and be more receptive to different perspectives.

Social Rules Chart

It includes the registration of the rules that were agreed for the regulation of the group. They are always discussed together and arise from a real need based on a problem that is sought to solve. Therefore, the listing should be progressively updated to the needs that the group is showing over time.

Responsibilities Chart

It allows the visualization of the allocation of the responsibilities of the room, which must be rotating by the children and divided by all. This framework usually consists of multiple foldersheaded by the name of the maintenance and routine support tasks.

In the folders tags are inserted with the names of the children responsible for their tasks. It is an open, dynamic table under construction that allows you to add or delete tasks according to the needs of the group and the room. When performing a certain task, the child feels responsible and useful, contributing to the cooperative and social life of the group.

In this horizon, teaching moments are carried out to regulate and improve, not as the a priori direction of learning. We have chosen to present a small illustration of this organization, thus transcribing for this purpose one of the occurrences portrayed by Novo (2009) in an early childhood classroom of a group of three--year-old children. Peers are highlighted as informants of the training regulation that results from the exhibition of the works and in which the interpellation of the adult only serves to clarify the suggestions and to stimulate the cooperation and mutual help:

> The educator reads: "Yesterday I cut my snail with a pair of scissors and then I painted it. Who's making a snail in this room?" – "It's Andreia," a child responds. "It's Andreia, indeed." Meanwhile, the teacher places the snail in front of the child. "And the little horns?", asks a child. "Look, André is saying that the little horns are missing. Are you done yet?" The educator asks. – "And the eyes? I haven't seen the eyes", says another child. "The eyes are missing, too", adds the educator. "The eyes, the mouth and the nose", André, repeats. "Andreia, they are helping you, aren't they?", asks the educator. (…) Listen up. Andreia, when your friends looked at your

snail said: Carlos said that the little eyes were missing. André said that the eyes, mouth, and nose were missing. You got some help for your work today. You're going to finish the snail today, aren't you? "And the ears", says António. "And the ears. Look, so many details. Do you think you're going to need help, Andreia? Do you think you're going to need help to finish your work? Look, António, she says she needs help, okay?" – "I need to do my ant", António replies. "Your ant? Look, it may be that while you're on working the ant you can help her by reminding her what she can't forget about. What do you think? Is that ok?" António nods. "Is that fine, Andreia? He'll remind you of what you cannot forget in your snail, okay? "Andreia also nods. (translation from Novo, 2009, p. 226).

It should be emphasized then that it is in the social aspect that the child manifests itself individually and in this sense the appreciation of children's work is also achieved because they share the result of their effort with their peers. Dedication is included in the dialogue, in the form of evaluation, to launch new activities and projects (Niza, 1998). It is this critical reflection that drives the group, creating conditions for the democratic game that is experienced within the group.

In short, all those instruments are part of the group organization and arise from the information progressively recorded and analysed together. However, it should be remembered that the institutionalization of these tools along the daily routine does neither guarantee a true sociocentric approach nor the formative evaluation (Folque, 2012).

Conclusions

We believe that the study of this model may give us tools for a deeper reflection on the social organization of learning that proposes to break with the simultaneous teaching and with the early implementation of curriculum through subjects happening in early childhood education and care (ECEC). In addition to integrating a curriculum developed from a comprehensive and well-articulated perspective on how the child learns and the appropriate ways of providing meaningful learning experiences, we also believe that this model establishes that adult education should be consistent with the way in which educational contexts should be organized for children. In fact, there is an analogy between the forms of in-service training proposed by the MSM and the organization of the activities that are proposed by the educators to the children who participate in this model (Niza, 2009). Aware of these premises, and sharing the disbelief of "educational trends" and "didactic tricks" or simulations which, according to Niza, are the best

way to avoid shared reflection and debate. When this is linked to joint work on the profession; and being aware that the general description of this model does not aim at its "pre-defined reproduction", it is, however, an important scaffold to support the educator in the search for a daily life with educational intentionality.

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Improving Pre-School Education Through Self-Evaluation

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Abstract

Self-evaluation research, carried out by pre-school teachers, can significantly contribute to improving the quality of work of the pre-primary education institutions. In addition to possessing solid knowledge of pre-school education and of the child development, pre-school teachers should possess basic knowledge of conducting pedagogical research in order to carry out quality self-evaluation research. In the paper, the current situation in the field of self-evaluation research in Slovenian kindergartens (self-evaluation frequency) and the conditions provided to pre-school teachers for self-evaluation (knowledge of educators, their attitude towards self-evaluation, etc.) are highlighted. Our research was conducted on a representative sample of pre-school teachers, employed in Slovenian kindergartens. The questionnaire was completed by 398 pre-school teachers, employed in 89 kindergartens all over Slovenia. Almost four-fifths of the pre-school teachers reported to carry out self-evaluation frequently or very frequently; they most frequently checked how children followed the rules, their

social inclusion in the group, and their welfare. Almost half of the surveyed pre--school teachers evaluated their knowledge of conducting self-evaluation to be moderate, but they are reportedly best qualified for setting the self-evaluation goals (content planning, what to evaluate, etc.). More than four-fifths of the pre-school teachers estimate that carrying out self-evaluation is very important or important for their profession, they view self-evaluation as a demanding job that is necessary and effective for pedagogical practice.

Key words: *Self-evaluation research, pre-school institution, quality assurance, reflective practitioner, teacher education*

Theoretical Background

Evaluation is the systematic data collection about a phenomenon in order to give a value judgment thereof and / or to improve it accordingly. (Marentič Požarnik 1999, p. 21). Evaluation is a process of establishing to what degree, and in what manner, we have reached our goals. Through evaluation, we collect evidence and reach provable findings on the quality of programmes, projects, services, organizations, and individuals' work (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). This requires the systematic use of social science research methods to assess the plans, implementation, outcomes, and efficiency of programmes, policies, or units of analysis (Rossi & Freeman, 1993, p. 4). Although the introduction of novelties ends with the evaluation as a rule, it should not be considered as the final stage of the research process - it is only with the evaluation that the data on the effectiveness of the novelties introduced are obtained; on the basis of the collected data further work has to be planned. The factors that are proven to have a positive impact on the achievement of the set goals are retained in the future, while in areas in which the set goals have not been achieved it is necessary to consider the reasons thereof and to seek improvement. In general, evaluation is the process of gathering information (according to the relevant criteria, with measurements and the corresponding analysis) in order to establish a rational basis for assessment in decisive situations (Stufflebeam, 1985).

Evaluation falls within the realm of the applied social science research. As such, evaluation differs from the basic research, which is directed toward further theory development, in that it focuses on changing the existing conditions; its fundamental aim is practical progress. Interim and final conclusions form the basis for the development of the further work plans, which also introduce the changes and improvements directly related to pedagogical practice.

Self-evaluation can be defined as a reflection of the important aspects of

educational work and as leading to the assessment of the current work of the educational institution, or as planned, systematic, structured, and constant attention that the pre-school institution pays to the quality of its work. The data collected through self-evaluation and their interpretation, as well as the analysis of the causes of the existing situation, are the foundations to plan how to eliminate weaknesses and to maintain positive achievements. Thus, they are of key importance for the institutional and individual quality improvement and maintenance.

The basic purpose of self-evaluation is for the pre-school institution and the pre-school teachers to assess their own status by employing various research methods, data collection techniques, and instruments that can be standardised or designed to meet the needs of specific evaluation studies. The aforementioned definition of self-evaluation excludes practical, often ad hoc and unsystematic reflection in kindergartens as a way of generating practical local solutions of immediate practical problems. Self-evaluation is not, however, a subjective, arbitrary assessment of work by the individual pre-school institution or the pre-school teacher, but requires objectivity. Self-evaluation research is a "method of obtaining critical insight into a problem experienced in the real world and of solving that problem, in order to learn from the experience for a future action. The method used should be systematic, and a critical insight should – also – be obtained by using theory" (Lunenberg et al. 2007, p. 15).

Self-evaluation is always associated with a tendency to provide the highest quality of work. There are, however, differing views on what actually constitutes the quality of educational work in a pre-school institution, and which approaches are most appropriate forthe quality assessment and assurance.

Quality is an elusive concept, as it varies in space and time. It depends on the context in which it is addressed, as well as on the interests, values, beliefs, etc. of the individual society, or even on individuals. Quality in education should be viewed in the context of the respective cultural discourse (Stronach, 1999).

Quality control includes the planned and systematic supervision of the process and the status outcome, as well as the necessary adjustment of the activities in order to fulfil the set requirements. It, therefore, includes the identification and elimination of the processes and services that do not meet the standards. Quality assurance is a proactive approach whose main task is to prevent errors or their repetition. This approach is adopted internally by all employees, who aim at the quality improvement of their work; the standards and criteria to this end are established within the organisation. Quality is integrated in the process of operation of an institution, aiming at ensuring the conditions for its operation that allow for the achievement of the pre-established goals. Total Quality Management is a proactive approach that builds on the quality assurance approaches. It is a conceptual approach that relies

on internal and ubiquitous quality improvement, focusing on the integration of all employees at all times and in all processes. The philosophy behind it is never-ending, long-term quality improvement, undertaken step by step and focusing on the needs of the user (Dahlgaard, Kristensen, & Kanji, 2002; Sallis, 2002).

Self-Evaluation in Pre-School Education in Slovenia

Systematic work in identifying and ensuring the quality of pre-primary education started in Slovenia in 2000, within the framework of the oriented research project "Determining and Ensuring the Quality of Early Childhood Education in the Nursery" (the project holder was Marjanovič Umek, Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana). In the project, an overview of the theoretical foundations of evaluation and self-evaluation, quality assessment models, quality assessment tools, quality assurance approaches to self-evaluation and external evaluation processes, results of the research on the quality of kindergartens, and the effect of pre-school on child development and learning were provided (Marjanovič Umek 2011, p. 76). According to Marjanovič Umek (ibid.) one of the possible concepts of (self) evaluation was created in Slovenia; its purpose was to encourage the kindergartens to further internal development, to improving and upgrading work in kindergarten based on the planned and systematic feedback on work. The model was tested in the framework of the research project Self-Evaluation of Pre-School Education in Kindergartens: Quality Assurance (Marjanovič Umek et al., 2005). In 2008, the Organization and Financing of Education Act (in Slovenian ZOFVI 2008, Article 49) was adopted, providing for the legal framework for kindergarten self-evaluation; among the responsibilities of the Principal, the quality assessment through self-evaluation, and drawing up the annual report on self-evaluation of the school, kindergarten was defined by the Act.

When responsibility and care for quality are transferred to a single kindergarten and within it to an individual professional worker, his tasks and his role also start changing. By increasing the autonomy of a professional worker, his responsibility for the quality implementation of pedagogical practice also increases. Critical reflection and self-evaluation of pedagogical practice are becoming increasingly important factors of quality assurance in the educational institution, which presupposes the qualification of the research workers to conduct research and perform self-evaluation of educational work.

Research Purpose and Methodology

The research work of pedagogical workers can be understood as an attempt to link teaching and research, so that they are no longer two separate tasks, but

are developing into interrelated and complementary activities (Cole & Knowles, 2004). It is crucial that the research work of the pre-school teachers is carried out by themselves (possibly with the assistance of external research experts), and that it follows the criteria of scientific research, and of the principles of research ethics, accordingly. Since in Slovenia the idea that pre-school teachers should also conduct research, specifically self-evaluation research, is relatively new, and since there is much evidence that self-evaluation research can significantly contribute to improving the quality of work in pre-school institutions, we have decided to analyse the current situation in this field (self-evaluation frequency) and to examine the existing conditions thereto (knowledge of educators, their attitude towards self-evaluation, etc.) in Slovenian kindergartens.

Research Purpose and Objectives

In the framework of the empirical research, the frequency and areas of self-evaluation of pre-school teachers of Slovenian kindergartens, their assessment of their qualification for carrying out self-evaluation, and their views on the effects of self-evaluation were being examined. The core research objectives were to establish as follows:

- Frequency and areas of self-evaluation of pre-school teachers;
- Importance of self-evaluation for the pre-school teachers' profession, and their opinion on the benefits of self-evaluation;
- Qualification assessment of pre-school teachers for self-evaluation and its individual stages;
- Characteristics attributed to self-evaluation by pre-school teachers;
- Ways to assist pre-school teachers in carrying out more effective self-evaluation.

Core Research Method

The descriptive research was applied as the core pedagogical research method. The research was based on the quantitative research paradigm.

Sample

The research was conducted on a representative sample of pre-school teachers, employed in Slovenian kindergartens. The questionnaire was completed by 398 pre-school teachers, employed in 89 kindergartens from all over Slovenia, of which 96.7% were females and 3.3% were males. The average age of the pre-school teachers was 39.47 years (with a standard deviation of 10.02 years). On

average, they had 17.19 years of work experience (a standard deviation of 11.55 years). Approximately one third of the pre-school teachers completed secondary education (31.6%), more than one quarter of the pre-school teachers hold a university degree (28.8%), more than one fifth of the pre-school teachers completed higher professional education (22.0 %), and less than one fifth of pre-school teachers completed higher education (17.6%).

Data Collection

The data were collected with a questionnaire created for pre-school teachers, based on the analysis of the literature on empirical research, self-evaluation and on the professional development of pedagogical workers (e.g. Teacher Researcher and Cross-Curricular Links, more by Krek and Vogrinc, 2007).

Six questionnaires were sent to the kindergartens. Heads of kindergartens were asked to distribute the questionnaires to the pre-school teachers in an alphabetical order. In the paper, the data collected with four rating scales will be presented on the following issues: How often pre-school teachers perform self-evaluation of individual areas (Rating scale 1); How pre-school teachers are trained to carry out individual self-evaluation research stages (RS 2);In what ways could pre-school teachers be assisted with a view to getting to effective self-evaluation (RS 3), and some closed questions. The rating scales are based on the Cronbach Alpha with sufficient reliability (RS 1: a = 0,88, RS 2 a = 0,94: RS 3: a = 0,89) and validity (the first factor accounts for 40, 35% variance on GS 1, 69.74% variance on GS 2, and 37.89% variance on GS3).

Data Processing

In the empirical research we employed the descriptive method of educational research. The data from the questionnaires were processed using the descriptive statistical methods. The statistical procedures employed were as follows: Frequency distribution (f, f%) of the attributive variables, the basic descriptive statistics of the numerical variables (mean, standard deviation), the factor analysis to test the instrument validity (% of the explained variance with the first factor), as well as Cronbach's Alpha as a measure of instrument reliability. The data is represented in a tabular form.

The percentages for each question are calculated according to the number of respondents who answered individual questions (i.e. the valid answers), but notwithstanding the number of all the respondents participating in the survey.

Results and Interpretation

Carrying out Self-Evaluation in Kindergartens

The idea that pedagogical workers should also be involved in research work, or that they should be reflective practitioners stems from the English project Ford Teaching (1973-1976), in which pedagogical workers were trained for self-evaluation of educational practice and for the action research conduct (Stenhouse 1975). Self-evaluation of the educational practice was considered as an integral part of everyday tasks of the pedagogical worker, whereas the self-evaluation results provided the basis for further educational work plans. Schön (1983), who studied the development of a critically reflective practitioner, i.e. a competent professional who seeks to improve his own practice, believes that pedagogical workers an improve their work and practice by reflecting on what they do, and by their behaviour, beliefs and values.

First, the data on the frequency with which the pedagogical workers carry out self-evaluation are presented.

Table 1: Pre-School Teachers' Answers about their Self-Evaluation frequency

	How often do you carry out self-evaluation?								Total	
	Very often		Often		Sometimes		Rarely			
	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %
Pre-school teachers	72	18.2	241	60.9	75	18.9	8	2.0	396	100.0

Almost four-fifths of the pre-school teachers (79.1%) answered that they carried out self-evaluation very often or often, slightly less than a fifth (18.9%) of the respondents answered that they sometimes carried out self-evaluation, whereas only 2% of the respondents attested to rarely carrying out self-evaluation. None of the respondents replied that they did not carry out self-evaluation.

Further, we were interested in how often the pre-school teachers carried out self-evaluation in individual areas of work with children. The respondents evaluated the frequency of self-evaluation in individual areas, whereby grade 5 indicated that they carried out self-evaluation in the respective field very often, whereas grade 1 indicated that they did not carry out self-evaluation in the respective area.

Table 2: Pre-School Teachers' Self-Evaluation Frequency in Individual Areas

	Average rate	Standard deviation	Rank
Child's social and emotional response	4.24	0.746	5
Speech competence of children	4.10	0.716	7
Cognitive development	3.82	0.803	10
Social inclusion of the child in the group	4.38	0.723	2
Child's health and the quality of life	3.75	0.957	11
Child's welfare	4.35	0.791	3.5
Child's learning disposition; academic achievements and knowledge	3.22	0.988	12
Child's self-esteem and respect for others	3.92	0.930	9
Compliance with the rules by children	4.40	0.744	1
Implementation of the curriculum	4.35	0.759	3.5
Social relations in a group (the group connectedness as a whole, position of an individual child in the group)	4.09	0.835	8
Collaboration with parents	4.23	0.725	6

The pre-school teachers most often check how children comply with the rules ($\overline{x} = 4.40$), how the child is socially included in the group ($\overline{x} = 4.38$), what the child's welfare is ($\overline{x} = 4.35$) and how the curriculum is being implemented ($\overline{x} = 4.35$). The pre-school teachers least often determine the child's dispositions for learning, their academic achievements and knowledge ($\overline{x} = 3.22$), the child's health and the quality of his life ($\overline{x} = 3.75$), as well as his cognitive development ($\overline{x} = 3.82$).

In order to successfully conduct self-evaluation research, pre-school teachers should also be trained. The opinions on their qualifications for carrying out self--evaluation are presented below.

Self-Evaluation of Pre-School Teachers on their Qualifications to Carry out Self-Evaluation

In order for pedagogical workers to be able to explore their practice and to su-bject their work to the reviews and discussions of their colleagues or even the wider professional public (by reporting and publishing the results of their research), they need to be qualified to conduct research and reflect on their own practice. Niemi and Jakku-Sihvonen (2006) report that in Finnland the education programmes for

pedagogical workers have focused on the development of professionalism based on the culture of research for several decades. The education of pre-school teachers and teachers is based on the belief that educators should be familiar with the latest research into education, teaching and learning, that they need to be able to apply the research results in practice in a meaningful way, and that they should be appropriately academically and professionally trained to conduct research.

Almost half of the surveyed pre-school teachers (45.6%) evaluates their knowledge of how to perform self-evaluation as medium good. Less than a quarter of pre-school teachers (23.8%) evaluates their knowledge thereof as very poor or poor. Almost one third of the pre-school teachers (30.7%) evaluates their knowledge in this field as good or very good. On average, the pre-school teachers rate their knowledge of performing self-evaluation very high, even though less than a third (29.7%) of the respondents answered that in the scope of their undergraduate studies the self-evaluation content had been addressed in one subject. Knowledge of self-evaluation was further acquired in the framework of continuous professional training, as almost half of the surveyed pre-school teachers (43.6%) responded that they had attended additional education programmes (seminars, workshops, lectures) on self-evaluation. However, the Slovenian pre-school teachers had more opportunities to acquire additional knowledge of how to carry out self-evaluation in the past. For example, the aforementioned model of establishing and ensuring the quality of pre-school education in kindergarten was tested in the framework of the research project Self-Evaluation of Pre-school Education in Kindergartens: Quality Assurance (Marjanovič Umek et al., 2005), in which 18 kindergartens, assisted by researchers who participated as external associates, carried out self-evaluation in accordance with the concept and the model described. Each kindergarten identified the problem and areas of self-evaluation, selected the measuring tools, forwarded them to various participants, collected, analysed and interpreted the data, as well as drafted a quality assurance plan. The surveyed pre-school teachers are also well informed of the project Identifying and Assuring the Quality of Pre-School Education in Kindergarten. Almost a quarter of pre-school teachers (23.6%) reported to know the project Identifying and Assuring the Quality of Pre-School Education in Kindergarten very well or well, one third of the pre-school teachers (34.9%) are reportedly familiar with the project to a medium degree, while a quarter of the pre-school teachers (25.2%) are poorly acquainted with the project. Less than a fifth of the pre-school teachers (16.3%) answered not to know of the project Identifying and Assuring the Quality of Pre--School Education in Kindergarten at all.

The pre-school teachers assessed the extent to which they were trained to carry out individual stages of planning and conducting the self-evaluation research.

Their qualifications for carrying out individual activities were assessed on a five-
-point rating scale, whereby a rate 5 denoted that they were very well trained for
an individual activity.

Table 3: Qualification of Pre-School Teachers to Carry out Individual Stages of Self-Evaluation Research

	Pre-school teachers		
	Average grade	Standard deviation	Rank
Setting self-evaluation goals (content planning, what to evaluate)	3.38	0.778	1
Methodological self-evaluation planning (research plan, sample, data collection process ...)	3.04	0.879	6
Preparation of the data collection instruments	2.86	0.865	8
Data processing	3.02	0.945	7
Interpretation of results	3.07	0.910	5
Writing a report	3.25	0.897	2
Informing the public (other pre-school teachers, parents ...) of the findings	3.18	0.916	4
Planning improvements for practical work based on the findings	3.19	0.897	3

On average, the pre-school teachers highly evaluate their qualifications for ca-
rrying out individual activities or stages of the self-evaluation research. Their qua-
lifications for carrying out all stages of the self-evaluation research were assessed
with a total average grade of 3.12. The pre-school teachers on average estimate that
they are most qualified to set the self-evaluation goals (content planning, what to
evaluate, etc.), they also highly evaluate their qualifications to write a report, to
plan practical work improvements based on the findings, and to inform the pu-
blic (other pre-school teachers, parents, etc. .) thereof. Writing a research report
that requires an in-depth reflection of the research problem, and informing the
general public of the research results are the factors that are not so closely related
to the teacher's everyday professional role; nevertheless, significantly influence the
professional development of pre-school teachers. The phase of writing the report
and presenting the results to the general public should, in addition to formulating
the research questions and systematically collecting data for them, attest to the
fundamental division between the pre-school teacher - the reflective practitio-
ner and the pre-school teacher - the researcher (see Ebbutt 1985). The pre-school

teacher-researcher is expected to carry out the whole research process, i.e. to be able to formulate a research problem, break it down to research questions, set up hypotheses, create a plan for collecting and processing data in order to be able to interpret the collected data and write a report on the research process. On average, the pedagogical workers rate the lowest their qualification for the preparation of instruments for data collection and data processing. In addition to knowledge, the attitude of the pre-school teachers and their opinion on the importance of carrying out self-evaluation also contribute to its frequency.

Attitude of the Pre-School Teachers towards Self-Evaluation

The attitude of the pre-school teachers towards carrying out self-evaluation was identified with the questions "How significant do you think self-evaluation is for your profession?" and "Who should evaluate educational work?" and with some statements about the benefit of self-evaluation (a systematic insight into the events/situation in the group, and greater effectiveness of educational work motivate employees to introduce improvement, and for effective future work planning).

Table4: *Pre-school Teachers' Answers about the Importance of Carrying out Self-Evaluation for their Profession*

| | How significant do you think self-evaluation is for your profession? | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
| | Very significant | | Significant | | Of moderate significance | | Less significant | | Irrelevant | | | |
	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %	f	f %
Pre-school teachers	113	30.0	210	55.7	49	13.0	5	1.3	0	0.0	377	100.0

More than four-fifths of the pre-school teachers (85.7%) believe that carrying out self-evaluation is very significant or significant for their profession. A good one-tenth of the pre-school teachers (13.0%) believe that carrying out self-evaluation is of medium significance for their profession. Only 1.3% of the surveyed pre-school teachers assessed carrying out self-evaluation to be less significant or irrelevant for their profession.

When asked who should evaluate educational work, the vast majority of the pre-school teachers (90.5%) answered that each pre-school teacher should check for himself whether he had achieved the set goals. 4.6% of the surveyed pre-school teachers believe that the work of the pre-school teacher should be evaluated by

the Head of the kindergarten in which the pre-school teacher is employed. Ten pre-school teachers (2.6%) think that an external expert for evaluation (e.g. from the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Education) should evaluate the work of the pre-school teacher, while nine surveyed pre-school teachers (2.3%) answered that another pre-school teacher. i.e. his colleague from the same kindergarten should evaluate the work of the pre-school teacher.

Table 5: Pre-school Teachers' Answers about the Effects of Self-Evaluation

	I totally agree	I agree	I cannot decide	I do not agree	I totally disagree
Self-evaluation provides a systematic insight into the group events/ situation	109 28.0 %	223 57.3 %	53 13.6 %	4 1.0 %	0 0.0 %
Self-evaluation provides for greater effectiveness of educational work	100 25.5 %	226 57.7 %	57 14.5 %	9 2.3 %	0 0.0 %
Self-evaluation motivates employees to introduce improvements	85 21.7 %	214 54.6 %	79 20.2 %	14 3.6 %	0 0.0 %
Self-evaluation results are indispensable for the effective future work planning.	91 23.3 %	221 56.7 %	60 15.4 %	17 4.4 %	1 0.3 %

More than four fifths of the surveyed pre-school teachers (85.3%) totally agree or agree that self-evaluation provides a systematic insight into the group events/ situations. More than four-fifths of the pre-school teachers (83.2%) totally agree or agree with the assertion that self-evaluation provides for greater effectiveness of educational work. Four-fifths of educators (80.0%) agree or totally agree that the results of self-evaluation are indispensable for the effective future work planning. Three- quarters of the pre-school teachers (76.3%) totally agree or agree that self--evaluation motivates employees to introduce improvements.

The surveyed pre-school teachers are clearly aware of the importance of carrying out self-evaluation for the quality implementation of educational work. Many researchers (e.g. Wilson 2000, Berger et al. 2005, Smith and Villages 2005, Vogrinc and Valenčič Zuljan 2009) established that the research work of pedagogical workers, which included self-evaluation, was an important factor of the professional development and of the achievement of the quality educational work. The researchers reported that by self-evaluation or the research work, they better understood the children, the institution and themselves as pre-school teachers, they changed their teaching practice drawing on the research findings, they felt to be greater experts, they developed professionally, they could better organize their contemplations about working in the department, they got a deeper insight into the process of teaching and educating, and, based on the research, they more

easily transferred theoretical knowledge into practice, etc.

And what qualities are attributed to the self-evaluation by the pre-school teachers? For this purpose we used a semantic differential in which we asked the respondents to award scores on a scale of two characteristics: a score of 5 was awarded in the case of total agreement with the characteristic on the left side, a score of 4 in the case of overall agreement with the characteristic on the left side, a score 3 was awarded in the case of disagreement with the characteristics on the left and right sides, a score of 2 was awarded in the case of overall agreement with the characteristic on the right side, whereas a score of 1 in the case of total agreement with the characteristic on the right side.

Table 6: *Characteristics Attributed to the Self-Evaluation by the Pre-school Teachers*

	Pre-school teachers	
	Average grade	**Standard deviation**
Interesting – Uninteresting	3.81	0.874
Demanding – Simple	4.25	0.816
Time-consuming – Does not take up much time	4.05	0.916
Creative–Non-creative	3.63	1.004
Necessary – Unnecessary	4.14	0.753
Effective tool for pedagogical work – ineffective tool for pedagogical work	4.20	0.709
Precise- Superficial	3.95	0.827

The pre-school teachers believe that self-evaluation is a demanding job that is effective and necessary for pedagogical work. They also think that carrying out self-evaluation is time-consuming, precise and interesting. The pre-school teachers awarded the lowest average score to creativity in self-evaluation.

Ways of Assistance to Pre-School Teachers in Carrying out More Effective Self-Evaluation

The pre-school teachers answered the question about the ways in which they could be assisted in conducting self-evaluation research more effectively. The various aid modalities were assessed on a five-point rating scale: A score of 5 was awarded in the case that the method significantly contributed to the more effective self-evaluation, whereas a score of 1 indicated total irrelevance of the particular factor for the effectiveness of self-evaluation.

Table 7: *Opinions of the Pre-School Teachers on the Measures Contributing to Conducting more Effective Self-Evaluation Research*

	Pre-school teachers		
	Average grade	Standard deviation	Rank
Establishment of the partnership between pedagogical workers in kindergartens and researchers, in which researchers would provide content and methodological support in carrying out self-evaluation	4.04	0.838	7
Creation of online databases, in which the core articles addressing self-evaluation would be collected	4.05	0.769	6
Different organization of work in kindergarten, which would facilitate conducting self-evaluation	3.82	0.967	12
Establishing a network of kindergartens/institutions socially or similarly related to the research issues that could be dealt with in cooperation	3.64	0.864	16
In each kindergarten, a "pre-school teacher-evaluator" should be employed who would assist in self-evaluation	3.24	1.181	17
Kindergarten's climate with regard to self-evaluation (support of principals and pre-school teachers, creating a self-evaluation culture) should be improved	3.93	0.803	10
Self-evaluation should be financially and professionally better evaluated	3.77	0.992	13
Relieving pedagogical workers in kindergartens who would exercise self-evaluation	3.74	1.079	14
Organization of seminars for continuous professional development, in which the latest self-evaluation findings would be regularly presented	4.14	0.739	3
Organization of the educational programmes for pedagogical workers in kindergartens within which they would gain knowledge of creating the self-evaluation research plan	4.14	0.783	3
Organization of the educational programmes for pedagogical workers in which they would gain knowledge of data processing and interpretation	4.08	0.773	5
Creation of the websites on which data collection tools would be published	4.03	0.826	8.5
Establishing the quality criteria (at the national level)	4.03	0.831	8.5
Assistance of external experts in integrating the results of evaluation into the work plan of the kindergarten	3.65	0.866	15
Increased funding for conducting self-evaluation in kindergartens	3.91	0.918	11
In the scope of their undergraduate studies, pedagogical workers should acquire more knowledge for independent research	4,18	0,774	1
Kindergarten counsellors should better manage the problem of self-evaluation and should offer professional assistance thereto to pre-school teachers	4,14	0,777	3

From the data presented, it can be seen that all the aforementioned methods of assistance can, in the opinion of the pre-school teachers significantly contribute to more effective carrying out of self-evaluation. The overall average score which the pre-school teachers awarded for the mentioned measures of assistance is 3.91.

According to the pre-school teachers, better knowledge of independent research, which pedagogical workers should acquire in the scope of their undergraduate studies, would contribute to more effective self-evaluation in kindergarten. Seminars for continuous professional development should also significantly contribute to more effective self-evaluation, in which the latest self-evaluation research findings and education programmes would be regularly presented; thus, pedagogical workers would gain knowledge about the creation of a self-evaluation research plan. Among the offered modes of assistance the pre-school teachers, on average, awarded the lowest, but still a relatively high average score to the following ones: "In each kindergarten, a "pre-school teacher-evaluator" should be employed who would assist in self-evaluation", "Establishing a network of kindergartens/institutions socially or similarly related to the research issues that could be dealt with in cooperation ", and "Assistance of external experts in integrating the results of evaluation into the work plan of the kindergarten".

Conclusion

In the empirical research, it was established that the pre-school teachers generally assessed the self-evaluation to be very important or important for their profession; further, that the pre-school teachers often carried out self-evaluation and evaluated their knowledge of self-evaluation as relatively good. The pre-school teachers most often checked the children's compliance with the rules and their group social inclusion.

Self-evaluation is important for determining and ensuring the quality of educational activities. In carrying out self-evaluation, not only the final result, but also the process is important, whereby a pedagogical worker can improve his professional way of thinking and work, and also acquire research knowledge. The exercise of self-evaluation also motivates and trains pedagogical workers for reading and critically assessing other studies that deal with similar topics. The pedagogical workers who have had experience with their own research work are usually better qualified to transfer the findings of other research into their own practice (Vogrinc et al., 2007). If we want pedagogical workers to carry out self-evaluation, it is important that they should develop a positive attitude towards researching and carrying out self-evaluation as early as during their study years, and, that they should consider research as an important factor in their professional behaviour

and development. It is essential that students should acquire the necessary kno-
wledge to carry out self-evaluation (at least common methodological knowledge
and the knowledge of the core data processing operations), and obtain the first
concrete experience with the research work. Niemi (2008) mentions the so called
research literacy. He believes that pedagogical workers should be able to monitor
and analyse their own practice. Without this competence, pedagogical workers
are only fulfillers of the requirements laid down outside of their direct pedagogi-
cal practice. Pre-school teachers need research literacy to be able to analyse their
own pedagogical work and the theory of education, as well as to understand the
basis on which to build on their further pedagogical work. Knowledge of teaching
and learning is traditionally divided into theoretical knowledge (written and
published by researchers) and practical knowledge ("intuitively" understood by
pedagogical workers). Due to this division pedagogical workers have often been
excluded from research work, including from examining their own pedagogical
practice (more on this topic in Smith and Sela 2005). Conducting self-evaluation
research can overcome this gap by encouraging pedagogical workers to conduct
and participate in the useful research.

In order to carry out self-evaluation, education professionals need time,
appropriate instruments for analysing the situation and other necessary means
and tools; the exercise of self-evaluation should also be adequately professionally
evaluated.Seminars for continuous professional development dedicated to the re-
gular presentations of the latest self-evaluation findings, should also significantly
contribute to the more effective self-evaluation;to this end, also the educational
programmes within which pedagogical workers would gain knowledge about
the development of a self-evaluation research plan should be provided. Quality
self-evaluation focuses on identifying the current situation, the previous achie-
vements, and future opportunities. It provides for an action plan to develop and
further promote the strengths of the institution, and to eliminate the flaws and
improve weaknesses. Therefore, self-evaluation can rightly be considered as an
important factor in the provision and securing the education work quality.

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Participatory Contexts: The Voice of The Child and Pedagogical Intentionality

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Abstract

This article aims to reflect on the importance of participatory contexts in the education of children. Firstly, the origin and the grounds of participatory pedagogies are discussed, evidencing the contributions that emerged from the constructivist and social constructivist theories and the contextual perspectives, in the ecological or sociocultural scope. These pedagogies are also transmitted by approaches that are concerned with the rights of children, considering their agencyin the learning process. Secondly, supported by some curricular approaches such as the HighScope model and Pedagogy-in-Participation, the characteristics of these contexts, in order to respect children and professionals, thus enhancing their personal and social development, will be discussed. The idea of participation as a right, which is assumed in this reflection, recognizes as necessary the intentionality of a praxis that values not only the child's agency, but also that of the adults who work with her, recognizing the importance of (i) building interactive environments, where dialogue, questioning, negotiation and support are the bases of adult-child interactions; and (ii) collaborative environments, which involve parents, families and the community in the development of a democratic, inclusive and respectful of diversity education.

Keywords: *participatory pedagogies; enabling environments; early childhood education*

Participatory Pedagogies: Origins and Foundations

Participatory pedagogies have emerged from the constructivist and social constructivist theories that receive the contributions of Piaget (1983; 1986), Vygotsky (1991, 2007), Bruner (1997, 2000, 2010), Malaguzi (2008) and Dewey's progressive philosophy (1971, 2002). Examples of this pedagogical line are: the HighScope model (Homahnn & Weikart, 2007; Schweinhart & Weikart, 2010), the Kamii-DeVries constructivist approach (DeVries & Kamii, 2001, 2011), the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2008), the Portuguese Modern School Movement (Niza, 2007; Folque, 2008) and the Pedagogy-in-Participation of the *Associação Criança* (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2001; Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2001, 2002, 2011; Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2008). They also receive the contributions of contextual theories[1] that, in the context of early childhood education, recognize the interdependence and interactivity between children and their contexts of life (Bruner, 2000; Rogoff, 2005). These theories highlight the importance of building complex, physically and socially thoughtful learning environments to respond to the plurality of actors, the diversity of learning experiences and the multiplicity of forms of expression. In these contexts, the construction of knowledge must be seen as a collaborative and participatory action (Malaguzzi, 2008).

This conceptualization has implications for the action of the educators, since "a *práxis* pedagógica tem que se construir nessa ligação indissociável *pessoa-contexto*" [pedagogical praxis has to be built through an inseparable *person-context* connection] (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007c, p. 29). In this sense, it does not only matter to renew the context or to transform the practices of the educators, but rather to "rebuild the activity in context" (p. 29).

Participatory pedagogies also relate with the conceptual lines that are concerned with children's participation rights, particularly as a constructor of knowledge and agent in their learning process (MacNaughton, 2003; MacNaughton, Smith & Lawrence, 2003; Mason, 2005; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2010), recognizing the value of their perspectives and the need to integrate them into both educational and research contexts (Christensen & James, 2000; Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000).

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1   There are two lines of contextual theories: the ecological, made explicit in the theory of Bronfenbrenner (1996), and the sociocultural, whose reference authors are Vygostky (1991, 2007), Bruner, (2000); Rogoff, (2005) and Valsiner (1997).

In this perspective, the aim is to guarantee the rights of participation expressed in articles 12 and 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Mason, 2005; Blanchet-Cohen et al., 2010), by developing a pedagogy that considers the principles of universal moral respect and equity, sensitive to the voice of the child and available to recognize it as an equal being within difference.

However, it should be noted that the mere advocacy of children's rights does not transform educators' practices, nor does it guarantee pedagogical quality (Formosinho, 2001; Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2001, 2002, 2011; Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2008). To invoke the rights of children to participate in their development and learning processes implies considering them „as social actors in their own rights in contexts where, traditionally, they have been denied those rights of participation and their voices remained unheard" (Christensen & James, 2000, p. 1)

The balance between respect for the child's competence and the recognition that she must be supported in the achievement of her rights is crucial for the implementation of the participatory principles. Decisions on the best way to support the expression of children as social actors place new responsibilities on the community of educators „to structure the children's environments, guide their behaviour and enable their social participation in ways consistent with their understanding, interests and ways of communication, especially on the issues that most directly affect their lives'" (Woodhead & Faulkner, 2000, p. 31).

The recognition of the interdependencies between children and adults is a new challenge, because for the context in which the action takes place, participation must be constituted as an area of freedom. It should be a space that accepts the participation of all, which favours dialogue, negotiation and listening (Freire, 1997a Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007b, 2007c), and that stimulates the reflexive action and the construction of the critical thinking of the professionals to act with ethical intentionality (Freire, 1996; Ponte & Ax, 2010).

In this sense, in participatory approaches, there is no place for didacticism, since it is considered that the child learns by experiencing the world, reflecting on it and creating meanings from these experiences. Intentionality then refers to the way adults interact with children and establish authentic relationships based on the construction of shared thinking (Epstein, 2007a).

As such, the children and the adults who work with them are conceptualized as people with agency. According to Barnes (2000), to possess agency "means to have "internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make her an *active* entity constantly intervening in the course of the events ongoing around her" (p. 25). Children's agency is recognized when they are seen as active members of the community, with rights and ability to express their opinion, to make decisions and participate, and when they are seen as active constructors of their

learning, as creators of knowledge (Philips, 2010). Educators have agency when they develop the need to reflect on their own practice, investigating their work in order to improve it, thus building praxiological knowledge (Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2008).

The participatory pedagogical line brings out the integrative vision of *pedagogical praxis*, invoking the complexity of contexts, where beliefs, knowledge, theory and practice take place in multiple combinations. This way of doing pedagogy values the activity and competence of the child, focusing the goals on the involvement that stems from meaningful experiences. The construction of learning takes place through continuous and interactive experiences, in a collaborative action between the children and the educator, by thinking of the spaces and the times in order to allow this interaction (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2007a).

In this sense, the interconnections between thought, experience and action are recognized (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004), considering the physical, personal, emotional and social well-being of the children, as well as the cognitive aspects of their learning. The links between children, their families and communities are valued, recognizing learning as a social, collaborative and participatory activity. In this approach, the curriculum refers to all the interactions, experiences, activities and routines (planned or not) that take place in the educational environment designed to favour the learning and the development of the children (MacNaughton & Williams, 2008).

Characteristics Of Participatory Contexts

In compliance with the previous topic a necessary condition for constructing a participatory practice is to form an active mode of resisting the causal link of knowledge-power, assuming the socially constructed character of knowledge, based on a dialogic and reflective activity in which children and the organization are understood as developing agents (Pires, 2013). So, based on the analysis of some pedagogical approaches, we intend to reflect on the characteristics of participatory contexts, in which practices that respect children and educators are developed, enhancing their personal and social development. As such, the educational contexts must be assumed as learning environments, considering all its dimensions and all its actors, as described in the following points.

Promoters of learning environments: the contextual dimensions

In the context of early childhood education, a learning promoting environment is defined as one that considers, in an interrelated way, (i) the political conditions (regulatory norms, curricular options); (ii) organizational conditions

(human resources and organizational dynamics, training); (iii) physical conditions (spaces, furniture and materials); and (iv) emotional conditions; social and cultural factors that affect the actions of the different actors (children, educators and auxiliaries, parents and community. In this sense, the learning promoting environments are complex environments where the different contextual dimensions intersect and are taken into account.

According to Silva, Marques, Mata and Rosa (2016), the educational environment should facilitate the "processo de desenvolvimento e aprendizagem de todas e cada uma das crianças, de desenvolvimento profissional e de relações entre os diferentes intervenientes" [development and learning process of all and each one of the children, the professional development and the relations between the different actors] (p. 5).

We also consider that favouring environments are those where the children's experiences respond to their individual needs and interests, configured in a responsive interaction between educators, parents and the organization. In this regard, Bruner (2000) emphasizes that the development of children must take place in *environments of opportunity*, where the interaction between agents and *self-initiation* are promoted. For Bruner (2000, p. 114), *self-initiation* means enabling the child to control what she intends to do. In this sense, it will be important to promote an enabling culture that favours a „participative, proactive, communitarian, collaborative learning that is more focused on the construction of meanings than on its reception" ["aprendizagem participativa, proactiva, comunitária, colaborativa e mais votada à construção de significados do que à sua recepção"] (p. 118). This means that educators, as expressed in the HighScope approach, should consider the following aspects:

–   the organization of spaces and materials, taking into account their abundance, suitability for age and the possibility of having several uses. The appreciation of this aspect is related to the Piagetian idea that learning takes place through the direct action of the children with the materials (Piaget, 1983);
–   the active manipulation of objects, taking into account that when the child experiences the materials, the child has the opportunity to explore them with all the senses, combining and transforming their original utility;
–   the choice, allowing the child to decide what to do, because learning results from the attempts that the child makes to defend their interests and pursue their goals;
–   the value of communication, language and thought of the child. Children communicate their ideas, needs, feelings and discoveries through their emotions, facial expression, sounds, gestures and words. Adults, by valuing and encouraging these forms of expression, establish relationships of closeness and security with children;

– the adult as a scaffold, recognizes and encourages children's intentions, actions, interactions, communication, exploration, problem-solving, and creativity (Lockhart, 2011).

It can thus be said that participatory environments play a fundamental role in supporting the development and learning of children, also encouraging them to play. In these environments play is understood as the natural activity of the child's initiative that reveals its holistic way of learning, as a rich and stimulating activity that promotes development and learning and is characterized by the high involvement shown through signs such as pleasure, concentration, persistence and commitment (Silva et. al. pp. 10–11).

It is important to highlight that the intentional action of educators requires sustained knowledge about how children grow and develop. As Epstein (2007a) points out, educators must have in-depth scientific, technical and pedagogical knowledge that allows them to know which and when to use a particular strategy, taking into account the diversity of children and respect for their specificities when they learn. According to the author, research has shown that sometimes or for some knowledge children seem to learn better through self-initiated activities (child-guided experience). This means that they construct knowledge through the exploration that they perform autonomously on the materials and in the experiences and interactions that they develop with their peers. But in another type of learning, children seem to learn best when they are guided by the educator (adult--guided experience), that is, when adults introduce information, materials, and experiences. In this regard, Epstein (2007a) refers that

> "an effective early childhood program combines both child-guided and adult-guided educational experiences. The terms "child-guided experience" and "adult-guided experience" do not refer to extremes (that is, they are not highly child-controlled or adult-controlled). Rather, adults play intentional roles in child-guided experience; and children have significant, active roles in adult-guided experience. Each takes advantage of planned or spontaneous, unexpected learning opportunities (p. 3)".

Taking as a reference the Pedagogy-in-Participation (Formosinho & Oliveira--Formosinho, 2008) developed within the *Associação Criança*, a participatory context is a complex pedagogical approach based on democracy, understood simultaneously as a means – expressed in the great educational purposes, and as an end – brought to life in the participatory daily life by its actors. This pedagogical line incorporates, in its mission, the promotion of equal opportunities for all and the respect and inclusion of all diversities (Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2008).

As Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho (2011) point out, participatory contexts support "o envolvimento da criança no *continuum experiencial* e a construção da aprendizagem interativa e contínua dispondo a criança tanto do direito à participação como do direito ao apoio sensível, autonomizante e estimulante por parte da educadora" [the involvement of the child in the *experiential continuum* and the construction of interactive and continuous learning, providing the child with both the right to participate and the right to sensitive, autonomous and stimulating support on the part of the educator] (p. 18).

Participation, as a right, appeals to the intentionality of a pedagogical praxis that values the child's agency, but also that of the adults who interact with them In this perspective, competent educators will be those who understand the competence of the children, because they see them as people with rights that must be respected; which construct experiential, interactive and collaborative learning environments, involving parents, families and the community in the development of a democratic, inclusive and diversity respectful education. (Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2008).

It is therefore of particular relevance to build a daily life that analyses praxis in the light of the principles that should support both children and adult learning, and also to envisage the development of organizations and research (Formosinho & Oliveira-Formosinho, 2008). As Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho (2011) argue, this approach implies an isomorphic dynamism as an ethical proposal (p. 17), which is based on the respect for all those involved in the educational process.

Both in the HighScope approach and in Pedagogy-in-participation, the pedagogical dimensions are essential elements that can influence the quality of the daily life and structure the organization of work, which needs, therefore, to be intentioned so that they can support the construction of a pedagogy that listens and value the action and thinking of the child.

Space and materials

The pedagogical space should be thought of in order to provide children the co-construction of their learning. In this sense, it is defined by Oliveira-Formosinho e Andrade (2011a) as

> um lugar de bem-estar, alegria e prazer; um espaço aberto às vivências e interesses plurais das crianças e comunidades. Um espaço pedagógico que se caracteriza pelo poder comunicativo da estética, pelo poder ético do respeito por cada identidade pessoal e social, tornado porto seguro e amigável, abrindo-se ao lúdico e ao cultural (p. 11). [a place of well-being, joy and pleasure; a space open to the experiences and plural interests of children and communities. A pedagogical space that is characterized by the

communicative power of aesthetics, by the ethical power of respect for each personal and social identity, made safe and friendly, opening to the playful and cultural].

The pedagogical space needs to be organized in a coherent way, in order to be a reflection of an intentional and complex pedagogical action. As Formosinho and Oliveira-Formosinho (2008) point out, the space must be open and responsive to personal, social and cultural identities in order to integrate and respect diversity; to have a flexible organization that the child knows in order to develop their autonomy and collaboration; to foster experiential learning and the different forms of expression of children.

The pedagogical materials represent, in the words of Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho (2011), the *textbooks* that allow the child to learn in a state of well--being. In this sense, the choice of materials is not neutral and must be carried out in accordance with the principles of respect for the plurality of gender, race, ethnicity, culture and social status. But they also represent a central element in educator/child pedagogical mediation through which diverse learning experiences are constructed, where the outlooks and the collaborative processes respect the rhythms and the choices of each and every one.

Time

In early childhood education, the pedagogical time is the dimension that explains the daily routine. In participatory contexts, the temporal organization is based on the respect for rhythms and the diversity of interactions that favour children's well-being. The daily routine is designed to value individual work times, in pairs, in small or large groups. It must be a daily and weekly routine that favours diversified learning experiences and multiple languages and where the interactions are intentional. In this perspective it is recognized that "espaço e o tempo vividos são relacionais, isto é, a organização, a diversidade, a beleza e riqueza do espaço, dos materiais e do tempo ganham significado através das relações e interações que humanizam o espaço de vida e de aprendizagem" ["lived space and time are relational, that is, the organization, diversity, beauty and richness of the space, materials and time take on meaning through the relations and interactions that humanize the space of life and learning] (Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2011, p. 30).

As stated by Hohmann and Weikart (2007), "the daily routine provides a common framework to support children as they pursue their interests and engage in various problem-solving activities" (p. 224). Adhering to a routine provides the child with the necessary security and control to develop her sense of responsibility and to appreciate the opportunity to be independent (Schweinhart & Weikart, 2010).

The consistency of the daily routine is particularly important as it functions as an operational framework that defines and supports everyday events. It is configured as a supportive educational and social organisation, alternative to rigid structures or to random activities. The regular sequence defines in a flexible manner the use of spaces and how children and adults interact while they are together. In this sequential environment, content and process are also valued, reflecting the educational philosophy that frames both active and participatory learning (Epstein, 2007b).

Relationships and interactions

Studies on adult-child interactions (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2002b, 2005; Novo, 2009) have revealed the importance of mediation as a condition to provide agency to the child. In this sense, participatory environments support the professional development of educators so that they can transform their experiences into thoughts and reflections that lead to the interpretation of the actions they perform. Participatory pedagogy requires the in-depth professional knowledge about children and the understanding that both they and the adults are co-constructors of knowledge. It is configured, as the experiential co-presence of the self, expressed in Dewey's *togetherness*, which translates the intimacy and complicity of this relationship (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2009; Gambôa, 2011).

Observation, planning and evaluation

The conceptualisation of the child as a person with agency, who reads the world to act on it, gives meaning to the partnership in the planning of the educational action. According to Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho (2011), the processes that promote participation are observation, listening and negotiation.

Observation and listening should be carried out by educators on an ongoing basis, in everyday life, so that they can construct understandings about the children, their actions, their interests and motivations. These processes are based on the idea that the child has a voice and must be listened to in order to seriously consider their meanings about the world. By engaging them in dialogues and conversations and in democratic decision-making, negotiation processes and consensus are established, founders of a participation that respect the aspirations of each one and the sense of group. In this proposal, the planning is the creation of ways to respond to documented listening (Oliveira-Formosinho, 2009e).

Activities and projects

In participatory contexts, activities and projects are developed in an experiential dynamics (Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2011). These experiences,

supported by a social climate, allow children and adults to share knowledge. The pleasure of research and the co-responsibility for the choice decentralize the action of the educator's authority, participating it in a group in a reconstruction of personal and social meanings, in a humanistic and socializing interaction (Gambôa, 2011, p. 63). Activities and projects, in a shared action of choices and decisions, negotiated and participated, are the authentic way to participatory democracy (Gambôa, 2011).

Documentation

Documentation is understood, in participatory perspectives, as an essential instrument for the construction of a reflexive and democratic practice, because it allows the interpretation of meanings, leading educators to make intentional and responsible pedagogical decisions, taking into account: i)the values and beliefs that are based on respect for the rights of children, educators and their families; ii)the sensitivity towards differentiated contexts and cultures and their interfaces and interactions;iii) the focus on learning and monitoring the learning of children and educators (Azevedo, 2009).

Therefore, it is understood that in these contexts the process of documenting in collaboration is seen as a constituting task of the the professionalism of educators (Oliveira-Formosinho & Formosinho, 2011, p. 35). The reflection motivated by the use of documentation "enraíza e estabiliza as aprendizagens, descobre erros, motiva para os ultrapassar, identifica conquistas e celebra-as, identifica dificuldades e compreende-as, motiva para uma dinâmica de resolução de problemas, promove relações e promove a metacognição". [roots and stabilizes learning, discovers errors, motivates them to overcome them, identifies achievements and celebrates them, identifies difficulties and understands them, motivates a problem-solving dynamic, promotes relationships and promotes metacognition] (p. 35). As stated by Azevedo (2009)

a documentação das ações e das interações favorece a narrativa individual e a narrativa colaborada e permite criar mais formas de olhar para a experiência reconhecendo as suas idiossincrasias e assumindo que essas idiossincrasias são formas de viabilizar a experiência e de alargar a nossa consciência. Alargar a consciência requer que se tenha em consideração a natureza relacional dos indivíduos que colaboram na transformação da experiência. [the documentation of actions and interactions favours individual and cooperative narrative and allows us to create more ways of looking at an experience by recognizing their idiosyncrasies and assuming that these idiosyncrasies are ways of making the experience possible and of widening our awareness. Extending consciousness requires taking into account the relational nature of individuals who collaborate in the transformation of the experience] (p. 205).

In this sense, the documentation appears as a complex and transversal process, because it integrates several alternatives and multiple understandings. In this shared diversity the possibilities for thinking and acting differently extend the choices of both children and educators.

Final Considerations

From this reflection results the consideration that the participatory contexts are constituted as complex environments that must be thought both physically and socially, to respond to the plurality of actors, the diversity of learning experiences and the multiplicity of forms of expression.

It is also important to develop a pedagogy that considers the principles of universal moral respect and equity, sensitive to the voice of the child and available to recognize it as an equal being in difference and, in this sense, environments must recognize these principles, assuming them in all contextual dimensions and educational practices.

Contrarily, the balance between respect for the competence of the child and the recognition that it should be supported in the accomplishment of her rights is essential for the implementation of the participatory principles. Decisions on the best way to support the expression of children as social actors place new responsibilities on the community of educators, in order to structure the environment that guides the child and allows its participation.

Participatory environments take into account the different contextual dimensions, being concerned with the organization of spaces and materials, considering the direct action of children with materials, the opportunity to explore them with all the senses, combining and transforming their initial utility; the choice, that values children's choices and decision-making, the support to communication and development of the children's thinking through the establishment of close and secure relationships; the scaffolding role of the adult recognizes and encourages children's intentions, actions, interactions, communication, exploration, problem-solving and creativity.

As mentioned, a participatory context is a complex pedagogical approach that must be based on the principles of democratic living, as a means of instituting action and at the same time as an end that is embodied in the daily life of the group.

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Towards Comparison of Numbers Through Problem-Solving in Kindergarten: An Analysis of Pre-School Teachers' and Children's Performance

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Abstract

Mathematics as a teaching subject starts in the early years. It is part of the pre--school curriculum in Slovenia with the content from almost all mathematical areas (arithmetic, geometry, measuring, and probability), and has general and operational aims. It is important to mention that mathematics activities should be interdisciplinary connected with other areas, e.g. language, art, sport, science... The idea of problem-solving is also expressed, but more in general than in terms of specific areas. The main purpose of the research was to establish the manner in which the pre-school teachers and children address a particular mathematical problem of number comparison. The pre-school teachers were presented with a number problem (using the weighting scale) and a list of questions for guiding their preparation and refection of the problem-solving with children aged from 5 to 6 years. We used descriptive non-experimental pedagogical research based on qualitative analyses of the pre-school teachers' reports on problem-solving activities in kindergartens. We grouped the pre-school teachers' notes from their reports according to the following categories: preparation for problem-solving, extending the problem, posing the problem, children's problem-solving strategies, the pre--school teachers' attitudes towards their and the children's new knowledge. The sample consisted of 43 pre-school teachers' reports and included 172 pre-school

children. The general findings were as follows: pre-school teachers mainly availed themselves of the organizational preparation to solve the problem, the extended problems diverted from the initial number problem in many cases, the children used a variety of strategies for solving the problem. The pre-school teachers concluded that they were surprised by the children's knowledge, motivation and problem-solving abilities. From their reports, it can be also concluded that they lacked mathematical knowledge which we believe is crucial for addressing mathematical problem-solving in kindergarten. We see the value of our research in engaging pre-school teachers in the thinking processes, whereby they dvelve into certain mathematical ideas, which might, based on their own findings, change their didactical and mathematical knowledge about the necessity of learning mathematics in the scope of the pre-school education.

Key words: *Pre-school teacher, problem-solving, number concept, strategy, pre--school child*

Theoretical Background

Development of Number Concept in Children

The fact that young children can accurately represent the number only when the numbers involved are small has led to the conclusions that the young child's concept of the number is intuitive (Piaget,1952) or perceptual (Gast, 1957; Pufall, Shaw and Syrdal-Larsky, 1973), which means that young children obtain representation of the number of items by a direct perceptual-apprehension mechanism (Jensen, Reese and Reese, 1950; Klahr in Wallace, 1973; Neisser, 1966; Schaeffer, Eggleston and Scott, 1974), and they have yet to develop the ability to reason about the number. Some theorists consider perceptual processes to be low-level processes to some degree (Dantzig, 1967; Menninger, 1969), as they are based on the pattern recognition and not on reasoning abilities. Many researchers objected to these conclusions (Gelman and Gallistel, 1978; Schaeffer, Eggleston and Scott, 1974). The authors claim that the ability to recognize a number pattern is closely linked to the child's ability to form sets with a small number of items, and to apply the cardinal principle to these sets.

When addressing counting, the components of the counting operation should be precisely defined. Counting should be subjected to some principles, which define the procedure: One-to-one principle, the stable–order principle, the cardinal principle, the abstraction principle and the order-irrelevance principle. The first

three principles define »how to count«, whereas the abstraction principle defines that the first three principles can be used for any collection of entities (Gelman and Gallistel, 1978). Klahr and Wallace (1973) claim that the child's conception of what constitutes a countable numerosity is first limited to objects with common perceptual properties (color, shape, size…). Only later the ability to count is transferred also to heterogeneous sets and to more abstract criteria.

More recent research has focused on the role of representations for learning about mathematical concepts, among them also about the numbers. Powel and Nurnberger-Haag (2015) claim that learning about numbers demands relating different representations of numbers. We represent numbers with concrete objects, pictures, symbols, together by using language. Learning mathematics whereby the focus is on examining different representations of a mathematical concept, and on encouraging children to relate to these representations, is more effective and enables children better understanding of mathematical concepts (e. g. Bieda, Nathan, 2009; Heinze et al., 2009). Recent research has also supported the idea that relating different representations of a certain concept is more effective in terms of learning in comparison to the theory of learning, which considers the sequence of presenting a mathematical idea to young children as most important, starting from concrete through graphical to final symbolic representations (Chapman, 2010). Finding relations among different representations of a mathematical concept is the key element in the process of learning mathematics with understanding (Ding, Li, 2014). When applying these ideas to early learning about numbers, we all agree that the concept of number is acquired by manipulating with concrete objects. The number becomes an abstract concept when children come to understand that the object of counting is irrelevant. In order to be able to achieve that, children should manipulate various representations, and gradually become aware that numbers do not depend on the physical, or graphical elements being counted. The process in which children realize that three pencils and three marbles represent the same abstract concept of the number three is not trivial for children.

Comparison of Sets

The comparison of sets is based on the crucial attribution of the number elements in the sets, and that number is an abstract concept, which is independent of the type of elements in each set.

If the compared sets contain a small number of elements, a child may visually recognize the set with more objects. The visual method may also be acceptable if the difference between the numbers of elements is big and one is only interested in establishing which set has more elements. If one cannot spot immediately which set is bigger or if one is not even interested in determining which set is bigger, but

also in the number of the elements in a set, then one needs a more precise verification method thereto. Children usually use the method of counting objects, but the question is whether counting is always preferred. Instead of counting both sets and then comparing the numbers, another, more efficient method can be used: a one-to-one correspondence. If, for instance, one set is a proper subset of another set, another preferable method of comparison can be introduced: a subset method. The pre-school teacher as well as children should be aware that not every method is appropriate for every situation. Thus, when comparing the number of elements in different sets, the attributes of the elements are irrelevant to the result, but when deciding on the method to be used for the comparison, the attributes of the elements involved become important, because they determine the most efficient method for the comparison of the sets. In the situation when two homogeneous sets of objects with identical weight are to be compared, another method can be introduced, i.e. comparison by using a weighing scale. This device becomes very useful for the problems of mathematical equivalence.

Mathematical Equivalence

Mathematical equivalence is one of the most important concepts for developing young children's algebraic thinking (e.g. McNeil and Alibali, 2006). Children's difficulties with mathematical equivalence have been proven to be long term, persisting among some secondary school, high school, and even college students (Knuth at al., 2006, McNeil and Alibali, 2006). Several researchers now argue that difficulties are due, at least in part, to children's early experience with mathematics (McNeil et al., 2011). This experience is narrow as claimed by McNeil et al. (2011) in a way that arithmetic problems are always presented with operations to the left of the equal sign, and the 'answer' to the right of it. As a result, children extract operational patterns which are derived from experience with arithmetic operations and reflect operational rather than relational thinking (e.g. Jacobs et al., 2007, Cross et al., 2009). The authors also concluded that even differences in relatively specific, micro level factors, such as the amount of mathematically relevant speech used in pre-school classrooms or the frequency of young children playing number board games can exert large effects on children's cognitive development (e. g. Ramani and Siegler, 2008).

Problem-Solving

Many countries have strongly endorsed the inclusion of problem-solving as an integral part of all mathematics learning. They did so for several reasons: (1) To build new mathematical knowledge, (2) To solve problems that arise in mathematics and in other contexts, (3) To apply and adapt a variety of problem-solving strategies, and (4) To monitor and reflect on the mathematical problem-solving processes. Moreover, engaging students in problem-solving can foster the development of habits of mind (Cuoco, Goldenberg and Mark, 1996). Habits of mind are the ways of thinking that allow students to develop a myriad of approaches and strategies that can be applicable in situations varying from school challenges to life challenges. Some of the habits of mind (Cuoco et al. 1996) include but are not limited to looking for patterns, exploring, communicating, reasoning, conjecturing and generalizing. The habits are there to enlighten learners about the creation of mathematics, and most importantly, to help them learn the way mathematicians think about mathematics.

There is consensus among mathematics education researchers that problem-solving is fundamental not only for solving mathematical tasks, but also for teaching and learning mathematics (e.g. Schoen, 2003). Schoen (2003) especially focuses on the instructional approach to teaching through problem-solving. Teaching through problem-solving is an instructional approach in which teachers use problem-solving as a primary means to help learners grow in their mathematical understanding and knowledge, develop mathematical habits of mind, and become adept at mathematical problem-solving. In other words, the learning is seen as the formation of learning goals and the learner's understanding of which things they need to acquire through learning activities. This view of learning through problem-solving is supported by the insights from (learning) psychology, and the constructivist learning theories (cf. Edelmann and Wittmann, 2012).

Problem-solving offers the opportunities for learners to apply content knowledge in different mathematical areas, and provides a window into children's mathematical thinking, and, thus, is a major vehicle also for assessment (Charlesworth, Leali, 2011). Teachers need to be keen observers of mathematics related activities so that intervention can be done at opportune times as needed when children create their own problem situations (Seo, 2003). Observation is a major assessment approach at all ages, but especially during the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten years, and can be done when children are engaged in naturalistic, informal, and adult-guided activities (Charlesworth, Leali, 2011). The teacher has in mind the concepts the children might be using. When a concept or skill is reflected in a child's activity, the teacher writes down what he has observed.

Empirical Part

Problem Definition and Methodology

The empirical study was based on the descriptive, casual and non-experimental method of pedagogical research. The method allowed us to explore the problem--solving competencies of pre-school teachers and children. The pre-school teachers were given the problem and asked to plan the problem-solving activity with an individual child (each pre-school teacher worked with 4 children) considering the following issues: Preparation for the problem-solving activity and extending the problem-solving situation (each teacher was asked to create at least three extended problems considering the initial problem). Children, on the other hand, were presented with the problem and asked to solve it. The pre-school teachers made notes of their steps of problem-solving and about the dialogue they had with each child. Children did not see each other's the solutions of the problem. The pre-school teachers were required to make observations on problem-solving activities of children, including all the mentioned issues. They were given the template of reports with all the relevant questions which guided them through their adult-guided learning.

The aim of the research was to gain a deeper insight into the manner in which the pre-school teachers dealt with a particular problem-solving situation, which referred to comparison of numbers, and how pre-school children were able to solve it. Children's levels of mathematics concept development are identified by observing which mathematics tasks they are able to perform independently and which they can perform with support or scaffolding.

Research Questions

The aim of the study was to answer the following two groups of the research questions:
1. How do the pre-school teachers deal with a given problem-solving situation:
   a. What kind of preparation do they make prior to posing the problem?
   b. How do they present the problem to a child?
   c. How do they extend the given problem situation?
   d. What are their expectations about the problem-solving competencies of pre-school children?

2. How do pre-school children solve a particular problem:
   a. What strategies do they use?
   b. How many solutions do they find?

The study was conducted at the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia in 2013. It encompassed 43 reports, written by 43 pre--school teachers (42 females and 1 male). The total number of children involved was 172 (85 girls and 87 boys), aged from 5 to 6 years.

Table 1: *Sample of Children*

	Frequency f	Percentage f%
Boy	87	51
Girl	85	49
Total	172	100

Table 2: *Sample of the Pre-School Teachers in Relation to their Working Experience*

Years of the students' working experience	Frequency f	Percentage f%
0-1 year	7	16
2-4 years	22	51
5-10 years	8	19
More than 10 years	5	12
Total	42	98
Missing	1	2
Total	43	100

Data Processing

The pre-school teachers were presented with a problem which provided for the use of different strategies and different ways of reasoning in order to reach a solution. They were then asked to plan the problem-solving activity with the children (each pre-school teacher with 4 children individually) and carry out the problem-solving activity with each child.

The problem was, as follows:

There are 4 marbles on one side of the weighting scale and 6 on the other side. The marbles are of the same size. There are also some other marbles which can be used, but do not advise to children to use them.

The question for the child is: What can you do to establish balance on the weighing scale?
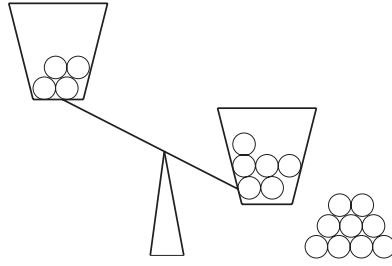
Figure 1: *Problem situation (the children experienced a concrete situation)*

The children were solving the problem individually, the pre-school teachers were noting down individual steps of the children's problem-solving strategies, and the dialogue they conducted with them. The pre-school teachers were asked to graphically present the children's problem-solving steps and to note the children's questions, comments and other observations of children' problem- solving activities.

The data gathered from the pre-school teachers' reports were statistically processed by employing the programme SPSS 20 for descriptive and inference statistics with the calculation of frequencies, percentage and the chi-square test for the examination of correlations between some of the variables.

In continuation the analysed results according to the various observation aspects are presented.

Results and Interpretation

1. How do pre-school teachers deal with a particular problem-solving situation?
    a. Preparation before posing the problem to the children

The pre-school teachers were asked to study the problem themselves before introducing it to the children and to reflect on their preparations in written form. From their paper notes we were able to assign their preparations to the categories listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Pre-school Teachers' Problem-Solving Preparation

Types of the students' preparation before introducing the problem to the child	Frequency f	Percentage f%
Organizational preparation	39	91
Consideration of presenting the problem to the child	12	28
Consideration of motivating the child	6	14
Solving problem themselves	9	21
Preparation considering the study of literature	2	5

It is obvious that the main concern of the pre-school teachers was organizational preparation explained as preparation of the material (weighing scale, marbles) and of the the room setting. Only 9 pre-school teachers (21 %) explored the problem situation themselves and wrote about different strategies used. None of them thought that there were many possibilities to equilibrate the weighing scale (if we do not think of concrete material there are infinite possibilities to balance the 'number' weighing scale'.

b. Posing the problem to the child

The pre-school teachers had to plan posing the problem to the child. From the table below it is possible to conclude there some pre-school teachers used the explanation of a weighing scale, whereas some did not.

Table 4: Prerequisites for Solving the Problem by Using Weighing Scale

Posing the problem to the child	Frequency f	Percentage f%
Verbally, considering mass	8	19
Explanation of the weighing scale, balance	14	33
No specific explanation	13	30
Focusing on the number of marbles	8	19
Total	43	100

Table 5: *Prerequisites for Solving the Problem (Introducing the Tool) in Relation to the Years of Experience*

		Considering prerequisites for solving the problem (introducing weighting scale)				Total
		Verbally, considering mass	Explanation of the weighing scale, balance	No specific explanation	Focusing on the number of marbles	
Years of experience	Up to 5 years	6	7	11	5	29
		21%	24%	38%	17%	100%
	More than 5 years	2	6	2	3	13
		15%	46%	15%	23%	100%
Total		8	13	13	8	42
		19%	31%	31%	19%	100%

We established a statistically significant difference among pre-school teachers (P = 0,005) in posing the problem to the child in relation to the working years' experience (Table 5). The pre-school teachers with less working years' experience more frequently posed the problem to the children without the explanation of balance in comparison to those with more working years' experience, who explained or demonstrated the concept of balance on the weighing scale more often. In other words, the more experienced pre-school teachers were more aware of the importance of considering prerequisite knowledge for solving a particular problem.

c. Extension of the given problem-solving situation

The pre-school teachers were then asked to plan at least three extensions of the problem. We were able to categorize their extensions into two groups: Extensions called 'Mass problem' and the extensions named 'Number problem' (Table 6). If the pre-school teacher wrote an extension considering different size of objects and balancing them on the weighing scale, we named this extension 'Mass problem'. If there was an extension at which the children were asked to 'balance' the numbers, for example, having an odd number of marbles on one side and an even number of marbles on the other side of the weighing scale, we named such extension 'Number problem'. From Table 6 it can be inferred that pre-school teachers used both extensions in almost the same proportion. We would expect that more teachers would recognize the potential of the problem for exploring the idea of

further comparing numbers, but we also have to be aware of the fact that a shift towards dealing with mass was quite tempting and obvious (also much easier).

Table 6: *Context-Related Extention Problems*

Comparison and equality in extended problems	Frequency f	Percentage f%
Number problem	45	35
Mass problem	48	37
Irrelevant	34	26
Total	127	98
Missing	2	2
Total	129	100

We analyzed the pre-school teachers' extensions considering the openness of the extended problems and we got quite a similar percent of close and open extended problem situations created by the teachers. We considered the extended problem situation as open if it was obvious that the children would need to explore the situation, and were in many cases allowed and encouraged to get more than one solution (e.g.: balancing marbles with different material; balancing marbles when there are no marbles on one side of the weighing scale; identifying the mass of an apple...). We considered the situation as closed if this was not the case (e.g.: increasing/decreasing the number of marbles considering the initial problem situation; balancing small and big marbles...). We received 91 responses and, approximately half of them were close problem situations. We left out irrelevant examples, e.g.: children walk with a weightng scale; one has to find out where there are more marbles without touching, looking, counting... and those that were repetitions of the previous extension(s), and did not differ in the idea. The pre-school teachers used both extensions in almost the same proportion (36 % of them proposed close problems, 35 % proposed open problems, and 27 % proposed irrelevant problems).

d. Expectation of children's problem-solving competencies in relation to children's problem-solving

The pre-school teachers were then asked to analyse the problem-solving activity with the children and to consider the following issues: Were they surprised by the children's problem-solving strategies, by their approach, and solutions, or did the activity proceed according to the students' expectations? We were then interested if there

is a correlation between the pre-school teachers' years of working experience and their expectations. The results are presented in the Table 7. There is a significant correlation between the years of teaching experience and the expectations. The pre-school teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience were not surprised by the children's solutions, strategies and approaches to the problem-solving (P=0.004).

Table 7: *Pre-school Teachers' Expectations of the Children' Performance in Relation to their Working Years*

	Years of working experience		Total
	Up to 5 years	More than 5 years	
According to expectations	96	52	148
	65%	35%	100%
Different expectations, surprise	16	0	16
	100%	0%	100%
Count	112	52	164
Total	68%	32%	100%

The results relating to the pre-school teachers' expectations were envisaged; the pre-school teachers with more experience know the children's mathematical competencies better.

The Analysis of the Children's Performance in a Given Problem.

2. How do pre-school children solve a particular problem?
    a. Children's strategies
    b. Number of solutions

The children were presented with the problem and asked to solve it. From the pre-teachers' research reports it can be concluded that:
1. The children either solved the problem in one step (the insight strategy) or in more than one step;
2. The children used different strategies based on addition, subtraction or both operations.
3. The children were fully engaged, and very motivated for solving the problem.

Let us present these conclusions in details.
    a. Children's strategies

The child's strategy was defined as the insight strategy if a child did something of the following: moving 1 marble from one side to another side of the weighing scale (Figure 2), adding 2 marbles (Figure 3), or taking away 2 marbles (Figure 4), and if he did it in one step. The children who needed more steps did something of the following: Using a trial and error approach (Figure 5a), translating the problem to the situation with no marbles on one side of the weighing scale and then gradually adding the marbles (Figure 5b), or gradually taking away/adding one marble until reaching the balance (Figure 6).

Figure 2: *A one-step strategy: 6 − 1 = 4 + 1*
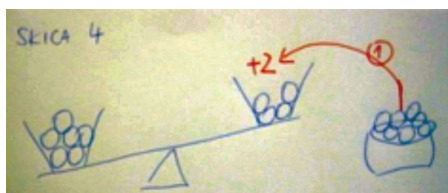
Figure 3: *A one-step strategy: 6 = 4 + 2*
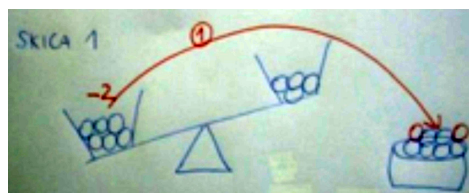
Figure 4: *A one-step strategy: 6 − 2 = 4*
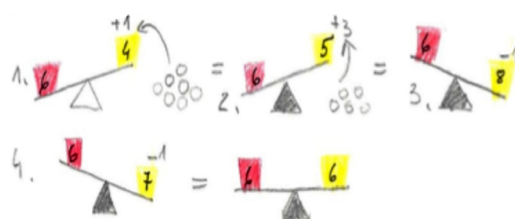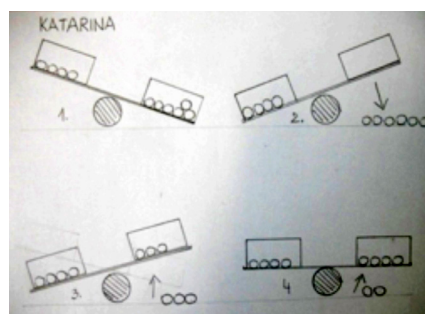
a) 6 > 4 + 1; 6 < 5 + 3; 6 < 8 − 1; 6 = 7 − 1   *b) 4 > 6 − 6; 4 > 0 + 3; 4 = 3 + 1*

Figure 5: *Strategies of more steps*
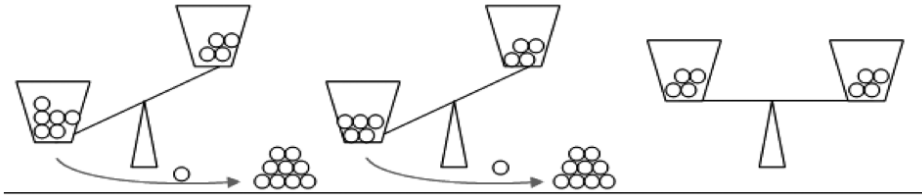
Figure 6: *Strategy of more steps: 6 − 1 > 4; 5 − 1 = 4*

Considering the one-step strategy or strategies of more steps it can be concluded that more children found the solution to the problem by insight (55%, see Table 8), so they made only one step. It is obvious that these children have a good sense of numbers and also of equality. We consider the weighing scale to be a good device for comparing numbers, and for establishing the concept of equality, but there is a difference in its usage for children with either a well or less developed number concept: if a child takes away, for example, two marbles using only a one-step strategy, it is obvious he knew how many marbles he was supposed to take away to balance the weighing scale. On the other hand, a child who does not see the solution at first sight, can make use of the weighing scale for immediate feedback on what he should do or how close he is to the solution.

Table 8: *Strategy and Steps*

Number of steps	Frequency [f]	Percentage [f%]
Solving with more than one step	72	42
Solution with insight	95	55
Other	4	2
No answer	1	1
Total	172	100

Considering the arithmetic operations (Table 9) that the children used, it can be concluded that most of the children (44 %) used both arithmetic operations (a combination of addition and subtraction of marbles, which includes also the operation of moving a marble from one side to the other one), 33% of them used addition (adding marbles), and the minority of them (22%) used subtraction (taking marbles away).

Table 9: *Strategy and Applied Arithmetic Operations*

Arithmetic operations	Frequency [f]	Percentage [f%]
Addition and subtraction	76	44
Addition	56	33
Subtraction	37	21
None of them	2	1
No answer	1	1
Total	172	100

We wanted to establish the proportion of children who used a particular strategy of one or more steps. We named the strategy when both operations were used and the problem was solved by insight as 'Insight, + and –', whereas the strategy where only addition was used and the problem was solved by insight as 'Insight, +', etc. The similar naming was used for the strategies using more than one step, e.g. the strategy where the child used both arithmetic operations was named 'More steps, + and –'. From Table 10 it is possible to conclude that most of the children solved the problem by using both operations and by insight. This means that a child noticed the situation on the weighing scale and moved one marble from the side with 6 marbles to the side with 4 marbles.

We considered this strategy as the most advanced one from the mathematical point of view, because children were able to see the relation between the numbers 6 and 4: although the difference is 2, there is only one marble needed to be moved to achieve equality. Almost 17 % of the children used the insight strategy by adding two marbles to the side with 4 marbles on the weighing scale. They were able to establish the difference between the numbers 4 and 6 and took 2 marbles from the box beside the scale and put them to the side with 4 marbles. 14 % of children used subtraction and insight, so that they took 2 marbles from the side with 6 marbles on the scale.

Table 10: *Strategy: Steps and Arithmetic Operations*

Strategy	Frequency [f]	Percentage [f%]
Insight, + and −	42	24
Insight, +	29	17
Insight, −	24	14
Steps, + and −	34	20
Steps, +	27	16
Steps, −	11	6
Other	4	2
No answer	1	1
Total	172	100,0

b. Number of solutions

As regards this criteria, we can conclude that the children either found only one solution or proposed more solutions.

Table 11: *Number of Solutions*

Number of solutions	Frequency [f]	Percentage [f%]
One solution	141	82
More solutions	27	16
No solution	3	2
No answer	1	1
Total	172	100

From Table 11 it can be inferred that most children (82 %) were happy with only one solution of the problem, and only 16 % of them indicated that there were many solutions. For example, a child first added two marbles to the side with 4 marbles, then established a balance, and proceeded with one marble to one side, one to the other one, two to one side, two to the other one, etc... until he used all the marbles from the table.

Discussion

Let us begin the discussion with the pre-school teachers' performance on problem-solving. We are going to consider two aspects: the pre-school teacher's role in problem-solving and the pre-school teacher's professional development. According to Kilpatrick (1985) there are five processes which play an important role in developing problem-solving instruction: Students solving the problems themselves, teaching heuristics, simulating problem-solving situations, working in small groups, reflecting on the problem-solving progress. In the case of our group of the pre-school teachers we can conclude that there was only a small percentage of pre-school teachers who solved the problem themselves (21 %), they mainly availed themselves of organisational considerations. They presented the children's strategies very well graphically, but they were not as successful in presenting the dialogues between them and the children. They lack competencies for the problem-solving preparation and for guiding the children through the problem, for encouraging them to think about the problem and to find more than one solution, to explain and weigh their solutions.

We know that problem-solving is not a linear process, it is rather dynamic, involving going back and forth, devising different plans, failing and trying again. The problem-solving process is also very subjective (each learner approaches the given problem in his own way), therefore our plan to work individually with the children was very much appreciated by the pre-school teachers in our sample. There are at least four factors contributing to the problem-solving success or failure (Schoenfeld, 1985): Resources (the learner's conceptual and procedural knowledge), heuristics, metacognition (checking the results, application of heuristics, monitoring the process), and beliefs. In our case the pre-school teachers' beliefs in the children's capabilities for problem-solving were greater by the pre-school teaachers who had more teaching experience in kindergarten. The pre-school teachers with more than 5 years of working experience were expecting the children's performance on problem-solving as well as considered prerequisite knowledge as important for problem-solving in comparison to the pre-school teacher with less than 5 years of working experience (the difference between these two groups proved significant in both cases). Our findings of the pre-school teachers' performance can be reflected also in the light of the pre-school teachers' professional development and of various factors which influence it. The pre-school teachers with more than 5 years of experience can be placed in the final stage of their teaching post, and are driven by their experience and professional orientations (Vogrinc, Valenčič Zuljan, 2009) and the teachers' classroom actions are significantly determined by their own experience as learners, their beliefs, conceptions of

instructions, knowledge and the role of a teacher (Calderhead and Robson 1991, Vogrinc, Valenčič Zuljan 2009). Problem-solving in kindergarten as well as carefully planned mathematical activity where focus is on the observation of children's strategies and on thinking process are not the activities the pre-school teachers would experience themselves. On the other hand, the research showed that all the pre-school teachers, irrespective of the years of their working experience, are keen on tackling problem-solving in kindergarten and on observing the children's performance.

Considering the children's performance, it was proven that the children participating in the research were able to solve the problem by comparing numbers, they also used different strategies, of which some were highly very advanced. The fact is that successful problem-solving will not happen by itself, but it should be carefully planned in order to guarantee success for the pre-school teachers and for the learners. From the research point of view it is obvious that only half of the pre-school teachers governed the problem extension so that they stuck with the idea of numbers. We claim that pre-school teachers should understand the processes which take place when children are involved in problem-solving as well as in the case of problem being mathematical. As we already mentioned, moving away from mathematics to measuring in this problem-solving situation, which is of course important, but develops skills rather than problem-solving knowledge, was a choice of half of the respondent pre-school teachers.

Considering the study results according to the strategies used for problem-solving, we can conclude that 55 % of all the children solved the problem by insight, and only 3 % of the children did not find the solution. Most of the children (44 %) used both arithmetic operations; 33 % used only addition, wheras (21 %) of the children used only subtraction. From the point of view of the operation 'Solution by insight' and 'Solution in more than one step' we come to the similar conclusion: in both cases the use of both operations prevails, followed by addition and subtraction in the same order. We considered the strategy 'Insight, + and –', used by 24 % of children who solved the problem, as the most advanced solution from the mathematical point of view, because children were able to see the relation between the numbers 6 and 4: although the difference is 2, there is only one marble needed to be moved in order to reach the balance. This is a very surprising result, but only at first sight. The results of the study conducted by Tsamir et al. (2010) also show that shifting from one set to the other is the most preferred method for achieving the equal volume of objects. According to the authors, this is not so surprising, because this method is most similar to the everyday principle of fairness, familiar to kindergarten children. If one child has more of something than the other ones, it makes sense for such a child to give some of it to a child who has

less. Thus shifting one marble from the set of six to the set of four may have linked the children's everyday knowledge to the mathematical situation of the problem.

On the other hand, a strategy of taking away two marbles is linked to subtraction, whereas adding two marbles is linked to addition ('Insight, +', 'Insight, -'). We can say that this problem had the potential to link children's knowledge both within the area of mathematics and with their everyday experiences. We might discuss the results also in terms of the numerical counting schemes developed by Steffe (2002). The author defined the initial number sequence, the tacitly nested number sequence, the explicitly nested number sequence, and the generalized number sequence. If we apply these schemes to the relations between the two numbers and the strategies that the children used to achieve the balance, we believe that the children who used the strategy named ‚Insight, + and –' explicitly possessed the nested number sequence, i.e. the child sees the inclusion relation between the two numbers (in our case between 4 and 6) or, in other words, sees the set of 4 marbles as a subset of the set of 6 marbles. The strategies called ‚Insight, +' and ‚Insight –' were used by the children who developed the tacitly nested number sequence, i.e. those children are able to make the decisions whether to subtract or add, and they can justify their operations (Steffe, 1994). They see the set of 4 and the set of 6 marbles as disjunctive sets. The children who used other three strategies (‚Steps, + and –', Steps, +' Steps, -') were at the stage of the initial number sequence with little or no awareness of why they add or take away and why this works (Steffe, 1994). We understand that this categorization is possible only for that particular problem, and we cannot claim that children have developed particular numerical counting schemes in general. Further research is needed to assess our proposal of relating the Steffe's numerical counting schemes to the children's understanding of relations between numbers.

Considering the number of solutions, it is even more interesting that 16 % of the children were able to find more solutions despite the fact that most of the children, as mentioned before, were not encouraged to find more than one solution. Our results, similarly as the results of the research conducted by Tsamir et al. (2010), suggest that problems characterized by multiple solution methods and by multiple outcomes may be promoted already in kindergarten. Their research (Tsamir et al., 2010) showed that kindergarten children are willing to search for more than one outcome and are flexible enough to employ more than one method. However, the children in their study were prompted to search for additional outcomes, whereas in our our research children were not especially encouraged to do this, but there were still 16 % of them who searched for more solutions on their own. Clements and Sarama (2007) also stated that young children are able of logical reasoning, which is needed for problem-solving (reasoning forwards,

assessing the current situation, and looking ahead towards some goal, as well as reasoning backwards from the goal to set sub goals).

If we finally match these two general findings as regards the pre-school teachers' and the children's performance on solving a particular problem, we can conclude that the children performed better than the pre-school teachers to some extent. This finding is rather challenging and poses further questions: How far can children go in their mathematical thinking process if they are guided by the thoughtful pre-school teacher who possesses problem-solving knowledge? We believe that there is an area which has a great potential in kindergarten, bearing in mind the fact that both, the pre-school teachers and the children, were highly motivated for solving the problem as expressed by the pre-school teachers in their reports.

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Science Education in the Early Years – Guidelines and Perspectives

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Abstract

In Portugal, the guidelines for early childhood education point out that the sciences, included in the world knowledge area, should be dealt with in the early childhood centres with children from 3 to 6 years. In addition, there is a growing need to implement a research driven education based on active and participatory methodologies in order to initiate the construction of scientific content to develop reasoning. This aims to contribute to the understanding of the world, to reflect on what will happen if one dares to experiment to find out and innovate, to be autonomous, to cooperate with others and to fully exercise citizenship. In this context, the approach to sciences, from a science-technology-society perspective, has been gaining importance and assuming an integral and integrating role in children's learning, by promoting the development of competence and contributing to the construction of scientific literacy of the citizens.

Keywords: *Early childhood education; science education; science-technology-society perspective*

Introduction

There is wide consensus regarding the idea that all children should have the opportunity to learn about science in the early years, in order to raise their level of scientific and technological literacy. In this perspective, education in general and science education in particular should allow children to understand the world through the construction of increasingly vast and complex knowledge that allows them to interpret and understand the environment surrounding them. A quality science education from a very young age avoids the construction and stabilization of knowledge that deviates from scientific conceptions and favours future learning, as well as the development of competences in children.

In Portugal, according to the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education, the sciences must begin in the early years. In early childhood education, sciences are integrated into the world knowledge area. This area should be seen as science awareness, and provides for the approach of scientific aspects, thus contributing to the scientific literacy of children and encouraging their democratic participation in informed decision-making. That is, from an early age, children must learn to view the world in a scientific way and should be encouraged to ask questions about nature and to seek answers; to collect data; to count and measure; to observe; to organize the collected data; to talk and communicate with others and to reflect on everything they observe. Hence, educators must stimulate children's curiosity and investigative spirit by providing them with situations and resources that motivate them to more concrete and informed learning, which should be based on a more humanistic perspective of science teaching that interconnects and promotes the Science-Technology-Society dimension.

With regard to science education in the early years, many ideas and approaches could be addressed. However, for this paper in particular we will look at the guidelines and goals for science education in early childhood education in Portugal. Then we will point out one of the main perspectives of science education that relates to Science-Technology-Society (STS).

Curricular Guidelines and Goals for Science Education

Government policies of the Ministry of Education have shown a concern to respond to the demands of the educational process and, consequently, to science education. In this context, several normative documents have been published, such as the Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (CGPSE) published in 1997 and revised in 2016 (Silva, et al., 2016); the booklet *Despertar para a Ciência – atividades dos 3 aos 6* [Awakening to Science - activities from 3 to 6]

(Martins, et al., 2009) and the learning goals for early childhood education (Ministry of Education, 2010).

According to the CGPSE (Silva, et al., 2016), natural sciences are included in the world knowledge area, stating that

> "a sensibilização às diversas ciências é abordada de modo articulado, num processo de questionamento e de procura organizada do saber, que permite à criança uma melhor compreensão do mundo que a rodeia" (p. 6) [awareness of the various sciences is approached in an articulated way, in a process of questioning and organized search of knowledge, which allows the child a better understanding of the world around] So, the main objective is to awaken children's interest in science and not the mere teaching of scientific concepts. In this context, the main intention is to create the foundations of scientific thought, which will be further developed and extended. It is important that there is always a rigorous concern, both in the processes developed and in the concepts presented, whatever the aspects to approach and their level of depth. It is essential to build a research attitude, centred on the ability to observe, on the desire to experience, on the curiosity to discover in a critical and knowledge sharing perspective (Silva, et al., 2016, p. 86).

In the same way, the learning goals aim at the holistic development of the child and the articulated construction of knowledge, in an integrated and globalizing approach of the different areas. This document aims to clarify and guide the educators in the planning of processes and. The sciences encompass three areas: location in space and time; knowledge of the natural and social environment; dynamics of natural and social interrelations. The goals to be achieved in each of these areas are specified in order to privilege an increasingly elaborated scientific thinking, allowing the child to understand, interpret, orient and integrate herself in the world that surrounds her. For example, at the end of early childhood education the child is able to identify the origin of a given customary use material; to classify materials by large groups relating their properties with the function of objects made from them; to compare the germination process of distinct seeds and the growth of plants, among others.

In the booklet *Awakening to Science – activities from 3 to 6* a wide range of activities on diverse topics to work on with children are also included, in order to contribute to the development of their scientific literacy: Initially the child is structuring their curiosity and the desire to know more about the world around them. This will create the conditions to take the first steps in small investigations, which are intended progressively more complex. This is how children begin to build scientific literacy, especially through the exploration of the world with the

guidance of the pre-school teachers. This type of documents will also enable educators to implement science education in their work contexts more regularly and more effectively (Rodrigues & Vieira, 2014).

According to Gomes (2008), the development of the sciences with young children must be implemented with some caution. Firstly, activities must be scientifically structured and grounded, and presented in a language adapted to the children's ages. Secondly, they should allow the increase of children's curiosity of knowing the world around them through practices that foster their experiences in different ways. The most appropriate methodologies seem to be observation, practical/experimental and investigative work, fieldwork and project work.

According to Fialho (2006), scientific activities offer children the possibility to get to know the world in a more rigorous and detailed way, "through the use of various procedures and capacities (observe, record, measure, compare, describe, interpret) that are not exclusive of science. Thus, there is a strong connection between the sciences and other curricular areas, namely mathematics and communication and expressions" (p. 3).

Harlen (2007) states that the most recent research has focused on how children develop their ideas about the scientific aspects of the world around them and has also drawn attention to the consequences of the type of activities that promote learning. The author emphasizes that understanding and conceptual development requires close interaction between children's ideas, content and processes.

As such, initial ideas can be modified, eliminated or strengthened in the light of evidence. The result depends on how the ideas relate to the evidence, as well as on the evidence in question, so the development of selection techniques, application and proof of ideas is fundamental for their evolution (Harlen, 2007, p. 12).

In this same perspective, Rosa (2005) states that science should help children "make sense of what goes on around them and realize how things work. Helping children to understand the way things take and to develop the conceptual understanding of connections helps them to find relationships between phenomena" (p. 31). This seems to be the path to pursue in early childhood education.

According to Harlen (2007), in science education several areas of knowledge can be worked on with children. The choice of these areas should take into account the following criteria: (i) to help children understand everyday events and the world around them; (ii) to be available to all children, taking into account their mental maturity; (iii) to be accessible and verifiable through the use of techniques and procedures carried out by children and (iv) to provide a solid foundation for further scientific education. In the process of reconstruction and development of better ideas, science education should: (i) help children become aware of their own ideas and have access to the ideas of others, in order to be able to compare

them; (ii) help children to apply ideas (their own or others') to a problem or situation and to prove their usefulness in particular situations; (iii) help children to think critically about how ideas should be used and proven, and looking for more effective ways of doing things.

In addition to the development of scientific capacities, science education, when contextualized within a social and affective feature, also contributes to the development of values, social behaviours and scientific attitudes. In this context a more cognitive dimension (openness of mind, curiosity, creativity, objectivity, intellectual honesty, respect for evidence, critical thinking, persistence, flexibility of thinking) is highlighted, as well as an affective dimension (respect, tolerance, cooperation, love of truth, self-confidence).

Many of these attitudes are necessary to the competences in scientific literacy, such as the questioning of the reality observed for decision-making and the resolution of problems; the use of intuition in the investigative process; creativity, curiosity and critical spirit in the search for alternative solutions and ways (Fialho, 2009).

In short and sharing the opinion of Hidalgo, Risueño, Montijano & Perales, (2009) science education, in the early years, develops skills such as predicting, observing and explaining, which may include a competition of knowledge and interaction with the physical world. In turn, these are linked to other competences related to capacity, communication, language, learning to learn, autonomy and personal initiative.

Perspectives on Science Education

As a result of a growing research and innovation effort in the field of science education, a learning-centred perspective in solving problems relevant for children and guided by the investigative practice is envisaged. This teaching perspective is in line with the teaching of science-technology-society (STS). It aims to provide a holistic vision of science and technology with a view to promoting citizens' literacy by enabling them to participate democratically in informed decision-making (Rodrigues & Vieira, 2014).

According to Yager & Blunck (1995), the concept of STS was defined by the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) as the teaching and learning of science and technology in the context of human experience. The authors stress that learning concepts and processes without a real-world context may be impossible. The major potential of STS is its broader view of science and its identification in a real context as fundamental for learning to actually occur.

The research carried out by Kaya, Yager e Dogan (2009) concludes that the main goal of STS-guided science education is to provide all students with science

and technology literacy, regardless of their individual variability and characteristics. STS education contributes to working and developing awareness of important topics/issues. For instance, most social problems, such as peace in the world, preservation of the environment, etc., imply science and technology. In addition, it is not possible to separate the moral dimension of science from the disciplinary content when it comes to addressing science education for all, and there is indeed an absolute need to protect the planet and its inhabitants (Blanco, Brero, Jiménez & Prieto, 2006).

According to researchers such as Aikenhead (2002); Gordillo (2005); Acevedo-Díaz (2008); and Akcay & Yager (2010), to include the relations between science, technology and society in student-centred curricula will not only provide basic scientific training, with more appropriated views of science and the work of scientists themselves, but will also decisively contribute to the training of citizens who can freely express their opinions on various ussies and topics of their daily life, with underlying fundaments and knowledge of the cause.

For Aikenhead (2009), STS curricula present common objectives, namely: (i) to focus the curriculum on children and their interests; (ii) to promote the use of the internet and other media; (iii) to increase the scientific literacy of citizens; (iv) to arise an interest in science and technology in all children; (v) to stimulate interest in the interactions between science, technology and society; and (vi) to develop in children critical thinking skills, logical reasoning, creative problem--solving, and especially decision-making.

For Galvão e Reis (2008), in an STS science curriculum, scientific contents are integrated into the world of children according to their interests and needs, in order to help them to understand the objects and events they face in their daily routine. "In this way, the aim is to increase children's interest in science and scientific activity and their level of scientific literacy and involvement in processes of discussion and evaluation of social and scientific issues" (p. 131).

Regarding the themes to be addressed, STS subjects are those who seek to relate science, technology and society, comprising a social, historical and epistemological context, taking into account that "conceptual knowledge depends on the context in which you learn and use" (Jiménez, 2003, p. 16).

According to Pedrosa e Henriques (2003), the use of transversal themes, such as rocks, light, living beings, among others, are relevant to curricular content approaches integrating STS interrelations and can contribute to the emergence and consolidation of critical attitudes on development. These critical attitudes are essential to inform and develop civically responsible and coherent behaviour.

The development of STS subjects presupposes the educational articulation of public controversies related to the progress of science and technology and with

social and/or environmental implications. Following these considerations, it should be pointed out that the content for STS teaching should include: (i) explanatory aspects of the relationship between science, technology and society in a perspective of education for democratic action; (ii) the assumption of a multicultural dimension; (iii) study of the global environmental impact and quality of life; (iv) economic and industrial aspects of technology; (v) the need to understand the limited nature of scientific knowledge; and (vi) the discussion of personal values in an active perspective (Pereira, 2002).

Vieira (2003) lists some STS contents, namely population growth, hunger, use of additives in food, water management, distribution and quality, energy and soil use, acid rain, the decrease of tropical forests, pollution and contamination of the environment, waste management and human health. This author considers that combining all the presented criteria with studies and perspectives on STS education it is possible to isolate about ten principles for the identification and selection of the contents to be worked on. Thus, these contents must (i) be relevant to the child's daily situations (social significance), that is, they really pose a question or problem in which everyone can, somehow, disagree with as to their statute or resolution; (ii) have long-term relevance (especially for the next decade), being an important topic that will probably remain as such for a significant proportion of them in adult life; (iii) be likely to help citizens to participate in a scientifically intelligent manner towards social and political decisions on issues involving science and technology; (iv) are associated with thinking capacities; (v) demonstrate adequacy at the level of cognitive development and social evolution of students; (vi) are applicable in contexts other than school; (vii) relate to subjects for which children show interest and enthusiasm; (viii) will contribute to people's ability to ponder questions concerning the meaning of humanity, such as life and death, of perception and reality, of individual good versus collective well-being, certainty and doubt (philosophical value); (ix) will enrich the childhood (a period of life that is important in its own right and not only because of its future outcome); and (x) can be studied adequately and safely with the resources available.

Other relevant aspects to address are the resources and strategies used, which should allow the child to give meaning to topics and problems and to resource to them in their daily lives and in the interpretation of the world around them. In this sense and according to Membleia (2002), the STS approach implies the diversification of strategies, resorting to research activities and cooperative learning with active involvement of the children in the resolution and decision-making on close and relevant problems. When worked on in context, the STS approach can consistently promote child-centred strategies and applications of science as a way to develop understanding of scientific ideas (Santos & Braund, 2009).

STS science education requires some methodological approaches that, according to Blanco, Brero, Jiménez e Prieto (2006), should take into account issues such as: integrated treatment in which the scientific knowledge, values and processes associated with society, science and technology are combined in a creative way through democratic principles and processes; to value concrete, real, relevant, specific, and social-based problem contexts; situations in which specific knowledge, skills and attitudes are achieved; the development of social skills: knowledge on hearing and listening; to understand others; to be supportive and tolerant, to reach agreements, to debate; to provide opportunities for children to investigate, to evaluate and decide on real problems of science and society in which they are involved; to emphasize actions consistent with the decisions made; to approach contents in a multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspective; to promote values of respect, solidarity and cooperation; to use active and diversified methodologies adapted to the contexts and topics to be dealt with.

On one hand, Membleia (2002) explains that STS pedagogical resources should: (i) enhance accountability and promote students' understanding of their role in the community and in nature; (ii) contemplate the mutual influences among science, technology and society; (iii) ensure balanced opinions; (iv) train children in decision-making and solving concrete problems of the present; (v) promote responsible action; seek the integration of ethical issues and values; and (vii) encourage trust in science.

On the other hand, Caamaño (2009) considers that the resources and activities on materials that come from STS projects can be very useful for science education in the contemporary world, since the field of experimentation of new methods and activities is expected to revert to new forms of understanding and acting within curricula, as well as in the updating of many contents.

In the line of the previously mentioned considerations, the STS approach, as a whole and taking into account the topics to be addressed, as well as the strategies and resources to be used, favours science education and should start from an early stage in the most diverse contexts, including early childhood education.

Final Considerations

Science Education has been gaining ground in the early childhood education centre and a need has been felt to implement an education full of research activities based on active and participatory methodologies. The objective is to initiate the construction of scientific content to develop reasoning, to contribute to the understanding of the world, to reflect on what will happen if one dares to experiment to know and innovate, to be autonomous, to cooperate with others and to fully exercise citizenship.

The current guidelines point towards the need for scientific literacy for everyone, aiming at the exercise of global citizenship, where social issues can be debated and children can build their capacity to become active and participatory citizens. In this context, the STS approach allows better preparation of children for life. To this end, it is necessary to provide educators with adequate and innovative continuous training, leading to changes in their didactic-pedagogical practices in a collaborative environment among all stakeholders. In short, we consider that the (re)conceptualization of research and cooperative activity in problem-solving, following the STS interface, suggests changes in the organization of educational environments and the roles of educational actors themselves. This teaching approach raises children's interest in science learning and provides the adoption of more positive attitudes towards learning science. It should start at an early age and involve children's ideas, imagination and activity, with the educator's involvement and effort in recognizing this teaching approach. Reflections should focus on how to develop the ability to think in children, to experiment and to re-formulate ideas and competencies, trying to respond positively to the needs of today's society and to themselves as a person.

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Language Support to Immigrant Children

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Abstract

Although immigrants' trajectories may have changed, immigration is still a big issue for Europe and the rest of the world. It is expected for this migration trend to continue or even increasein the light of world events. One of the key factors for the successful integration of young generations of migrants in the society is education. The survey (MIPEX, 2015) shows that few education systems in Europe are adapting to the realities of immigration. Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Canada, Portugal are the most engaged countries, whereas Slovenia is among the least committed (it ranks 26 among 38 selected countries). Language has a major role in supporting the children's process of identity formation and in helping them understand where they fit in the new environment they are entering. The present paper presents the mother tongue-based education and language support to immigrant children, especially in two of above mentioned countries, i.e. Sweden and Slovenia. The data show the need to acknowledge the mother tongue acquisition, rather than the acquisition of a dominant national or international language, as the main priority in evaluating children's achievement in pre-school and throughout primary school.

Key words: *Children, immigrants, mother tongue-based education, second language*

Introduction

Progress towards Education for All is one of the defining development challenges of the 21st century. The right to education is a basic human right and, as such, it should always be protected as the right per se. However, education is also a means to achieve wider social, economic and political goals. In the current economic crisis and competition of various interests, the critical role of education should be promoted. Only educated citizens can achieve economic growth and this requires equal access to highquality education, now more than ever. No country or society today can afford to exclude anyone from education on the grounds of poverty, ethnicity, religion or gender. (EFA, 2015, p. 7).

Language is at the very core of education. Furthermore, language has a major role in supporting children's process of identity formation and in helping them understand where they fit in the new environment they are entering. The acquisition of language is essential not only to children's cognitive development, but also to their social development and wellbeing (Clarke, 2009).

The question of the mother tongue of migrants' children has become an important issue. In fact, it is not clear if and how the new country will be able to guarantee them the same status as that given to national language minorities, and, at the same time, safeguard them from becoming merely the heritage language representatives. The teaching of a national language and the importance given to that language is often linked to the need of one/more social groups to preserve their power (Council of Europe, 2007). Globally, there are 50-75 million of 'marginalized' children who are not enrolled in school. Children whose primary language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out of school or fail in the early grades. Research has shown that the children's first language is the optimal language for literacy and learning throughout elementary school (UNESCO, 2008a). In spite of growing evidence and parent demand, many educational systems around the world insist on exclusive use of one or sometimes several privileged languages. This means excluding other languages and, consequently, the children who speak them (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, and Merali, 2006). For this reason, language issues need to be discussed and addressed since the early years of schooling, which should include all citizens, born in the country or migrants. The exclusion of the needs of some ethnic groups may cause problems in the entire acquisition process over time, not only in connection with the language, but also with the child performance in any subject (Council of Europe, 2007).

Mother Tongue-Based Education

Many linguistic groups are becoming vocal about the need to ensure that the youngest members of their communities should preserve their linguistic heritage. Some governments, such as in the Philippines, have recently established language-in-education policies that embrace children's first languages. A compendium of examples produced by UNESCO (2008b) attests to the growing interest in promoting mother tongue-based education, and to the wide variety of models, tools, and resources now being developed and piloted to promote the learning programmes in the mother tongue.

UNESCO has been encouraging mother tongue instruction in primary education since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953). Furthermore, UNESCO highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start: Children are more likely to enroll and succeed in school (Kosonen, 2005); parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning (Benson, 2002); girls and rural children with less exposure to a dominant language stay in school longer and repeat grades less often (Hovens, 2002; UNESCO Bangkok, 2005); and children in multilingual education tend to develop better thinking skills compared to their monolingual peers (e.g., Bialystok, 2001; Cummins, 2000; King & Mackey, 2007). Some educators argue that only those countries in which the student's first language is the language of instruction are likely to achieve the goals of Education for All. Research also suggests that engaging marginalized children in school through mother-tongue based, multilingual education (MTB-MLE) is a successful model (Benson & Kosonen, 2013).

Cummins (2000, 25) argues that, "the first language must not be abandoned before it is fully developed, whether the second language is introduced simultaneously or successively, early or late, in that process." Children, who acquire a second language at the expense of their first language, most likely have a reduced possibility of developing the second language appropriately, since these learners are unable to use their first language in making sense of new linguistic and cognitive situations (Garcia, 2008).

"It is increasingly obvious that the language of instruction at the beginning of one's education at such a crucial moment for future learning should be the mother tongue." (UNESCO, 2001a, p. 11)

As the founder of modern linguistics, Saussure (1916) pointed out that in all languages both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies may be found. The need to communicate creates the centripetal force of linguistic homogenisation, which is balanced by a centrifugal force of differentiation, driven by an impetus for local identity, by the need to exchange information without having the people from the

next village or the other religious community overhear, and by the desire of each new generation to mark itself off from the one before.

A platform of international declarations and conventions supports the learning of at least two languages in education: a mother tongue and a language of the larger community, as well as access to international languages. In its paper, Education in a Multilingual World, UNESCO (2003a) espouses:

(1) Mother tongue instruction as a means of improving educational quality by building on the knowledge and experience of the learners and teachers.
(2) Bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education as a means of promoting both social and gender equality and as a key element of linguistically diverse societies.
(3) Language as an essential component of inter-cultural education to encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights.

Developing the intercultural dimension in language teaching involves recognising the aims as follows: To give learners intercultural competence as well as linguistic competence; to prepare them for the interaction with people of other cultures; to enable them to understand and accept people from other cultures as individuals with other distinctive views, values and behaviours; and to help them see that such interaction is an enriching experience (Byram, Gribkova, Starkey, 2002, p. 9).

What matters most for the outcomes of immigrant and non-immigrant children is whether the school and education system fights or reproduces inequality. Although targeted immigrant education policies adopted at the national level do not display consistent results across countries in terms of pupils' tests scores, most studies conclude that inclusive schools and education systems are more successful when they also target the specific needs of immigrant pupils (MIPEX, 2015).

Language Support for Children with a Migrant Background

Proficiency in the language of instruction is a critical factor for immigrant students to participate and perform well in school. Language competencies are essential for students to grasp subject content and interact with their teachers and peers. Those who do not master the language of instruction will face significant academic challenges (Schnepf, 2004; Christensen and Stanat, 2007). Therefore, language support should be a priority in migrant education policy (OECD Reviews of Migrant Education, 2010, p. 46).

Some features of successful examples include: Offering sustained language support across grade levels; centrally developed curriculum documents; teachers

specially trained in second language teaching; assessment of individual student needs and progress with adequate diagnostic materials; early language interventions and parental involvement in language stimulation; a focus on academic language and learning; and valuing of different mother tongues (ibid.).

Valuing the mother tongue of immigrant students is an essential part of developing a positive and appreciative approach to diversity and identity. It means seeing students' language capacities as part of their personal, social and cultural identity and welcoming it as a tool for learning and understanding (Holmen, 2008). It can also help students bridge the gap between home and school, build their confidence and raise motivation (Driessen et al., 2005; Brind et al., 2008). Researchers indicate that competencies acquired in one language can be relatively easily transferred to another language (Cummins, 1979; 1980; 2000).

Language Support for Children with a Migrant Background in Sweden

Multilingualism characterises multicultural societies all over the world, and Sweden is no exception. The linguistic ecology of present-day Sweden is characterised by the interaction of Swedish, the majority language, English, the global *lingua franca,* five officially recognised indigenous minority languages, and almost 200 'immigrant' minority languages with no official status. The status of the Swedish language has never really been contested, and Swedish has had a strong position as the national language of the country since the 16th century. Opposite to other European countries, such as France, the status of the national language has not been confirmed by law. In the European Union, the status of Swedish is nevertheless legally confirmed as one of the 20 official languages. The status of the indigenous minority languages in Sweden is, however, officially recognised by law (Lindberg, 2007, p. 71–72). In 1999, Sweden ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe, 1995) and the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages (Council of Europe, 1992), by which Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli (Tornedal – Finnish), the variety of Finnish spoken at the border with Finland in the north of Sweden, are ensured the status as minority languages. In addition, Romany Chib and Yiddish were given the status of official minority languages in Sweden within the same minority-language convention. As for the first three languages, Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli, two Acts of Parliament have also guaranteed minority-language citizens the right to use their languages in their contacts with the administrative authorities and the courts in some of the northern communities of Sweden. Apart from the officially recognised indigenous minority languages, there are almost 200 'immigrant' minority languages spoken among the Swedish

population. Except for Finnish – the largest minority language, with approximately 250,000 speakers –these languages are not officially recognised as minority languages. Some widely spoken 'immigrant' languages with more than 100,000 speakers in Sweden are Arabic, Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, Farsi and Turkish, all of which far outnumber the indigenous minority languages (except Finnish) in terms of numbers of speakers (ibid.).

Migrant children (first-generation) constitute approximately 4%[1] of the under-15 EU population (excluding Germany), but the situation varies considerably between Member States. Sweden is among the countries where the highest shares of migrant children under 15 years of age (as a proportion of all children under 15 years of age) are found: Luxembourg (19.5%), Ireland (9.8%), Cyprus (9.1%), Sweden (7.3%), Belgium (7.2%), Austria (6.6%), the UK (5.5%), Spain (5%) and Slovenia (3.5%) (Eurostat, 2015).

In international comparisons, early childhood education in Sweden often receives top ranking (e.g., Lynn, 2012; UNICEF, 2008), as do the other Nordic countries.

Sweden democracy is the foundation on which early childhood education should rest. Swedish pre-school is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), and inclusion, equality, and solidarity are emphasized (Karlsson Lohmander, 2010). According to the curriculum, pre-school should provide a safe, rich, and enjoyable environment for children. The Education Act (2010, 800) stipulates that pre-school education aims at children acquiring and developing knowledge and values. It should promote all children's development and learning, and a lifelong desire to learn. An important task of pre-school is to impart and establish respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which the Swedish society is based. Each and every person working in the pre-school should promote respect for the intrinsic values of each person as well as respect for our shared environment. One of the goals (Curriculum for the Pre-school Lpfö 98, 2010, p. 10) is that "the pre-school should strive to ensure that each child with a mother tongue other than Swedish should develop his cultural identity and the ability to communicate in both Swedish and their mother tongue".

Sweden developed curricula for "Swedish as a Second Language[2]" for immigrant children and "Swedish for Immigrants" for adult immigrants. The curriculum for early childhood education and care institutions stresses the right of multilingual children to be supported in their all-round language development, both in Swedish

and their mother language (OECD Reviews of Migrant Education, 2010, p. 51).

In Sweden, immigrant children in early childhood education and care institutions are entitled to mother language support. Immigrant students in compulsory education and in upper secondary education are entitled to mother tongue tuition as a school subject if certain other criteria are met (e.g. that there are more than five children in the school who would like to apply for tuition in that language, and a teacher is available). The syllabus covers the literature, history and culture of the country of origin. The grades in this subject are considered equivalent to those in other subjects. It is in most cases an extracurricular activity outside regular scheduled lessons, but students may be able to study the subject as an alternative to the second foreign language as a school option. Sweden has also developed a web-based teaching aid, Tema Modersmål (modersmal.skolverket.se), to address logistical and cost-related challenges in offering mother language support. The website hosts different mother tongue rooms and provides tools for communicating in different languages. These rooms are run by mother tongue teachers at both, early childhood education and care and school level (ibid, p. 54, 55).

Language Support for Children with a Migrant Background in Slovenia

Equal rights and opportunities in education for all, regardless of gender, nationality, social and cultural origin, religion, political or other convictions, education, social status, disabilities or any other personal circumstances, are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991), The White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (1995 in Slovenian, 1996 in English) included "equal opportunities and nondiscrimination" as well, according to the principles on which the public education system is based; and the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (2011) contains "equity", which includes the provision of equal education opportunities. Since then, several provisions regarding education, healthcare, alleviation of barriers and obstacles in the environment, financial social assistance, employment and social integration have been adopted. Important solutions for ensuring equal opportunities have been integrated into many national and development programmes of various fields (EFA, 2015, p. 5).

Slovenia has a wealth of experience with bilingual education, but this is only provided for the Italian and Hungarian national minorities in the ethnically mixed territories (Novak Lukanovič, 2000, 2010; Novak Lukanovič and Limon, 2012). Other ethnic groups, some of them much larger than these two minorities, do not have the possibility of bilingual education or education in their mother tongue. This difference is due to historical reasons – the Italian and Hungarian minorities coming into being as the result of borders changing after World War 1 and World

War 2 (Bešter, Medvešek, 2015, p. 119).

Teaching immigrant children their mother tongue is encouraged by the Strategy of the Inclusion of Immigrant Children, Pupils and Students in the Education System in the Republic of Slovenia, adopted in 2007. Two years later, measures for encouraging the learning of the mother tongue were envisaged in the Guidelines for the Education of Immigrant Children in Nurseries and Schools (2009) and in 2012 in the Guidelines for the Inclusion of Immigrant Children in Nurseries and Schools. The White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (2011) also supported the idea of pupils and students whose mother tongue is not Slovene to learn their mother tongue. Schools should offer the learning of immigrant languages in the form of elective subjects within a specific curriculum (White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 2011, p. 34). In addition, language lessons in Slovene schools should include (along with intercultural and multilingual awareness), in a suitable fashion, the languages that are not a part of the curriculum but are present in the pupils' environment, e.g. their mother tongue (White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia, 2011, p. 34–35). The need to encourage the learning of immigrant mother tongues and other languages of minorities is also recognized in the Resolution on the National Programme for Language Policy 2014–2018 (2013), according to which, with regard to the languages of minorities and immigrants, Slovene policy is based on the assumption that a well-developed linguistic proficiency in the first language is one of the fundamental conditions for the development of language proficiency in Slovene (Bešter, Medvešek, 2015, p. 122, 123).[3]

Slovenian pre-school education is regulated by two key acts, the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (in Slovenian, 1996) and the Kindergarten Act (in Slovenian, 1996). In the area where members of the Italian minority reside, pre-school education is conducted in two manners: education is carried out in the Slovenian language and children learn about the Italian language, or the education is carried out in the Italian language and children learn about the Slovenian language. Pre-school education programmes are carried out in bilingual kindergartens also in areas where the Hungarian minority resides. Educational work is performed both in the Slovenian and Hungarian languages. Playgroups are attended by two pre-school teachers concurrently at least 6 hours per day.

Based on the Strategy for integration of immigrant children, pupils and students in the system of education in the Republic of Slovenia (in Slovenian),

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3   In Slovenia, Centre for Slovene as a Second and Foreign Language was founded. It operates under the auspices of the Department of Slovene Studies at the Faculty of Arts ofthe University of Ljubljana; it is recognised in Slovenia and abroad, in both academic circles and by the wider public, as it is the central organisation in the field of Slovene language as a second and foreign language. Through its programmes,the Centre meets all the needs of the field and of Slovene language, literature and culture, as well as promoting Slovene Studies internationally.

adopted in 2007, on the Guidelines for the integration of immigrant children in kindergartens and schools (adopted in 2009 and amended in 2012) strategies, adjustments and methods of cooperation and integration of migrant children and their parents are defined, and kindergartens and schools are assisted in planning the education work with foreign children. Pre-school teachers carry out activities according to the relevant curriculum to improve language and communication competences of children whose mother tongue is not Slovenian. In pre-school, basic, uppersecondary and higher education, refugees have equal status to Slovenian citizens.

All public kindergartens and kindergartens with a concession are required to operate according to the Kindergarten Curriculum (1999) and the supplementary documents: Guidelines to the *Kindergarten Curriculum* in programmes with adapted implementation and additional expert care for children with special needs (2003; in Slovenian); Annex to the *Kindergarten Curriculum* in ethnically mixed areas (2002; in Slovenian); Annex to the *Kindergarten Curriculum* for work with Roma children (2002; in Slovenian); The K*indergarten Curriculum* and adapted programmes for pre-school children (2006; in Slovenian).

Kindergarten Curriculum is based on the developmental process approach, which includes high-quality planning, implementation and evaluation of the learning process that takes into account individual traits and development of each child as a more important goal than achieving prescribed results (EFA, 2015, p. 10). 16 principles to achieve the curriculum goals are stated in Kindergarten Curriculum, among them "the principle of equal opportunities, respect for diversity of children and multiculturalism" (Kindergarten Curriculum, 1999, p. 6). One of the language goals is "awareness of the existence of individual's own language and other languages, and individual's own culture and other cultures" (EFA, 2015, p. 16).

Education of Roma children is specified by the *Strategy of Roma Education in the Republic of Slovenia*, adopted in 2004, and amended in 2011. The appendix to the *Kindergarten Curriculum* on how to work with Roma children was adopted. Roma children are integrated in kindergartens in three ways: the majority is placed in regular classes; kindergartens may organise a group of Roma children only or "Roma" education units may be arranged in Roma settlements. The child/adult ratio in playgroups with Roma children is more favourable. Based on the *Strategy* several projects are taking place introducing the Roma assistant in kindergarten, who helps Roma children to overcome the cultural and linguistic barriers and represents a kind of bridge between the kindergarten and the Roma community. Based on the Strategy for integration of immigrant children, pupils and students in the system of education in the Republic of Slovenia (in Slovenian), adopted in 2007, the Guidelines for the integration of immigrant children in kindergartens

and schools (adopted in 2009 and amended in 2012) define strategies, adjustments and methods of cooperation and integration of migrant children and their parents, and help kindergartens and schools with planning the education work with foreign children. Pre-school teachers carry out activities according to the relevant curriculum to improve the language and communication competences of children whose mother tongue is not Slovenian. In pre-school, basic, upper secondary and higher education, refugees have equal status to Slovenian citizens (EFA, 2015, p. 10). In addition, the National Programme of Measures for the Roma 2010/2015 was drafted in 2010. Its implementation is being funded by national resources and the ESF, e.g.: Increased quality of education for Roma children. The Ministry allocates additional funds and has set favourable norms for classes with the Roma. Moreover, it has financed development and research studies related to the issue of successful integration of Roma pupils and to the standardisation of the Roma language as a basis for teaching the Roma; early inclusion of children in the educational process – the government finances pre-school programmes; the development of language skills (the Roma and Slovenian languages) and socialisation within educational institutions (EFA, 2015, p. 21).

In spite of all the aforementioned measures, MIPEX 2015 (Slovenia) states that there are 3 targeting needs: weak support for Slovenian schools to address immigrant pupils' specific needs, much weaker than in most countries in MIPEX (34th out of 38) or in Central Europe (see instead Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy, Romania); new teachers are supposed to be trained to work with immigrant pupils and help them learn basic Slovene, the quality standards are low, and schools receive little guidance or other financial and technical support (stronger support in 12 other countries). MIPEX 2015 also states as one of many opportunities that all pupils can learn immigrants' languages as one of their foreign languages, but depending on agreements with the countries of origin (see other practices in 21 MIPEX countries).

Conclusion

Language learning is an important part of education policies. According to the OECD, the integration of immigrant students can be facilitated by their academic inclusion and language support (OECD, 2015). This refers to both, to host country language learning as well as to the opportunities to maintain migrant languages. Multilingualism should enhance intercultural skills and employment prospects in the globalised world (Szalai, 2011). From the migrants' perspective, gaining skills in the host country languages is an essential step towards integration.

Nusche's review (2009) shows that language support for migrant students is most important and effective in early childhood, as an early start in language

learning improves school readiness. Provision of special language and literacy support before entering primary school helps to compensate migrant children for language disadvantages and allows them to achieve similar reading and writing skills as native children. Nusche (2009) concludes that the available evidence points to some generic characteristics of the successful programmes contributing to language learning. These are as follows: Course programmes are developed based on the national curriculum for second language courses; language support is provided by the teachers trained in the second-language acquisition, offering high quality support to pupils; and the continuity of language learning throughout primary and secondary school.

Brind et al. (2008) and Nusche (2009) argue that proficiency in their mother or migrant heritage language is important for migrant pupils. Mother tongue language support can help migrant children 'Cement their sense of identity,' according to Eurydice (2004, 51). In addition, some work has shown that bilingualism brings numerous benefits to individuals, including the development of cognitive skills and flexibility of thinking (De Paola and Brunello, 2016). Migrant pupils' perception that their mother language and culture are valued can be beneficial to intercultural education and can assist in the integration of migrants with the host society by bridging the gap between school and home (Nusche, 2009). In many European countries, migrant children are provided with opportunities to learn and maintain their mother language. In a small number of European countries, schools are encouraged to offer the home languages of migrant populations within their foreign languages curriculum. Nevertheless, Eurydice reports that in the majority of countries in Europe the priority for school children is to learn the language of instruction.

To summarize, the elements needed for effective language support to migrant children are as follows (Siarova, Essomba, 2014, 2–3): Adequate initial assessment, effective language support, continuous language support, training of all teachers – including those of mainstream subjects – to address the particular needs of children who are second language learners, and valuing students' mother tongue. In addition, Ball (2011, 50) highlighted some recommendations for policy guidelines: To promote clear, sustained political commitments to bi- or multilingual education within policy frameworks and in administrative contexts at national and local levels; to encourage mother tongue development to the level of cognitive academic language proficiency to scaffold additional language learning; and to recognize mother tongue acquisition, rather than acquisition of a dominant national or international language, as the main priority in assessing children's achievement in pre-school and throughout primary school.

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Curricular Notes

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