

CHALLENGES OF CHILD-ORIENTED EDUCATION TO TEACHER'S COMPETENCE

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In a big number of countries pre-school education systems have already faced or are undergoing a transition from pedagogy of children's academic education to construction of children's education from child's perspective. Child-oriented education requires new competences from teachers: different value attitudes, establishment of education goals considering child's perspective, pedagogical technologies based on child-oriented education paradigm. The goal of the article is to identify what teachers (in terms of their educational background and working experience) understand and accept challenges of child-oriented educational paradigm best. A number of challenges of child-oriented education have been chosen for analysis: setting up of education goals from child's perspective; organisation of life in children's group considering their needs, opinion and individual rhythm of life; practicing forms of individual, project and experiential self-education of children; consultation with children and their parents regarding content and process of education.

Keywords: Child, pre-school education, child's perspective, teacher's educational background, teacher's working experience.

Organisation of institutional pre-school education from child's perspective has been a challenge to teachers and education institutions. The value system, education goals, forms and methods as well as teachers' interaction with children and their parents have to change in the education systems, which undergo a shift from academic authoritarian pedagogy to child-oriented education. It is important to identify the education background, qualification and pedagogical experience of teachers who most successfully implement the goals of child-oriented education.

Organisation of child-oriented education is based on a varied attitude to a child and his/her self-education. The essential statements that define the new concept may be identified:

- a child is a unique individuality with own needs, interests and style of self-education;
- a child has a natural power to self-develop in a rich environment communicating and interacting with adults and peers;
- a child possesses own vision of the world, its evaluation and culture different from that of adults;
- a child himself/herself creates own values, emotional world, language, cognition, individual style of creative expression, behaviour; s/he discovers a joy of motion. (Piaget, 2003; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2001; Blandford & Knowles, 2009; Sommer, Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010; Brock, Dodds, Jarvis & Olusoga, 2009; Juodaitytė, 2006).

A change in attitude to a child and his/her self-education results in a change in teacher's role:

- a teacher firstly strives for assurance of child's well-being, his/her good relations with group friends and teachers;
- a teacher respects child's opinion, listens to it, ensures satisfaction of child's needs, creates conditions for a child to participate in making of decisions that are related to a child and is/her self-education;
- a teacher establishes conditions for realisation of child's natural need to play;
- a teacher creates environment which stimulates child's self-education; chooses and applies methods of education that meet child's individual style of learning and logic of a young child's learning;
- a teacher supports and encourages child's experiential learning ensuring its success;
- a teacher assists a child in seeing his/her outcomes encouraging self-evaluation of developing abilities and involving a child into the process evaluation;
- a teacher together with parents ensures sustainability of child's (self)-education in an institution and family. (Blandford & Knowles, 2009; Sommer, Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010; VanderVen, 2008; Doherty & Hughes, 2009; Monkevičienė & Stankevičienė, 2011).

Teachers have to practice the following theoretically and practically crystallised approaches of child-oriented pedagogy:

- Humanistic-democratic pedagogy. The approach of pedagogy developed under influence of humanistic psychology ideas, perceiving a child as a unique individual with own nature and power of self-development. It formed as a response to community's attempt to develop child for democracy and interpreting a group of children as a democratic community.
- Pedagogy of dialogue. This approach of pedagogy emphasises the interaction between a child and an adult, space for establishment of children's sub-culture and its educational and socio-cultural contexts, coexistence of adults' and children's subcultures, i.e., a

constructive dialogue as an essential condition not only for child's well-being but also for his/her self-education.

- Pedagogy of listening to a child. It embraces adults' penetration into child's conception and vision of the surrounding world and expression of child's needs. A teacher, who "hears child's voices", is able to perceive self-education from child's perspective.
- Interpretative-stimulating creativity pedagogy. Since vitality of any community is conditioned by activities of personalities that discover and develop own power of creation, evocation and nurturance of child's creativity is of utmost value. Contemporary education models, which open up space for child's creation and self-expression are created.
- Pedagogy of play. Practicing pedagogy of play, a child's need to play is acknowledged rather than learning applying formal techniques and play is perceived as a way of child's life and self-development (Monkevičienė, 2011).

Organising education from a child's perspective it is important to practice non-academic pedagogical technologies such as establishment of resourceful educational environment, initiation and management of spontaneous situations of children's self-education, practicing creative constructive interaction of child-teacher, moderation of child's self-education, application of supervising education principles and others (Monkevičienė, 2005).

Documents regulating education in the European Union and Lithuania as well as scientific researches highlight the following factors of child's (self-)education quality: optimal financing of education institutions; ratio of children to one adult; number of children in a group; professional attestation of heads of institutions; however, teachers' educational background, his/her practical experience, i.e. teacher's competences, are seen as a key factor (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2003; Early et al., 2006; Lambert & Capizzano, 2005; *Preschool Education*, 2006).

A big number of the researchers argue that quality of children education may be achieved if specialists with higher education (graduates of university Bachelor and Master study programmes) are employed in education establishments, if teachers of high performance help specialists with less extensive experience (i.e., mentoring is developed) and if teachers are very well aware of child's development and self-education (Blandford & Knowles, 2009:227).

The goal of the research. To identify what teachers (in terms of educational background and working experience) understand and meet challenges of child-oriented education paradigm best.

The research methodology

The internet questionnaire survey for teachers was applied in the research. The accidental and representative probability sampling of teachers was applied in the research. Pre-school and pre-primary education institutions of different type from all the regions of Lithuania were selected according to the data of the register in the first stage of the research. After the approval of the authorities of the institutions, an electronic version of the questionnaire survey was sent to the institutions. Dynamics of the process of the survey was observed, the institutions participating in the survey were contacted additionally and the data were collected directly in the institutions located in rural areas with insufficient access to internet. Six hundred questionnaire forms were sent or distributed and 501 of them returned. Thus, the sample of the research is 501 teachers.

The questionnaire form consisted of an instructional-motivational part as well as of demographic and diagnostic blocks. The diagnostic block was developed to evaluate teachers' attitudes related to challenges of child-oriented education paradigm. *The characteristics of the respondents* are presented in Table 1. An attempt was made to identify if a teacher understands and is disposed:

- to strive for child's well-being and care, satisfaction of child's needs, acquisition of new experiences and good outcomes of children while organising education process;
- to establish child's daily routine together with a child and to change it according to educational situations that occur spontaneously;
- to apply forms of child-oriented individual, project and experiential self-education;
- to discuss content and process of education with children's parents and children themselves developing decentralised programmes of pre-school education and involving parents and children into this process.

The teachers of different educational background participated in the questionnaire survey. The majority of the respondents had university education (57.29%), about one third of them were graduates of post-secondary institutions (26.15%), more than one tenth of teachers in the survey had acquired higher non-university education (12.97%). The research sample embraced teachers with various experience in pedagogical work but the majority of them had been working in education institutions from 11 to 20 years (28.34%) and from 21 to 30 years (37.72%). The respondents worked in various establishments of education: kindergartens, kindergartens-schools, day-centres, schools and others.

Table 1. *The characteristics of the respondents*

Educational background	Number	%
Vocational	2	0.40%
Post secondary	131	26.15%
Incomplete higher education	8	1.60%
Higher non-university	65	12.97%
Higher university	287	57.29%
No response	8	1.60%
Pedagogical working experience		
1-3 years	38	7.58%
4-10 years	51	10.18%
11-20 years	142	28.34%
21-30 years	189	37.72%
Over 31 years	70	13.97%
No response	11	2.20%
Pre-school education institution		
Kindergarten	29	5.79%
Nursery/kindergarten	377	75.25%
Kindergarten/school	48	9.58%
Spec. kindergarten	10	2.00%
Group in school	26	5.19%
Separate group in day centre	1	0.20%
No response	10	2.00%

The Research Results

1. *Relation of the goals of children's education established by teachers, their educational background and working experience.* One of the challenges of contemporary education to teacher's competence is establishment of education goals from child's perspective. The conducted research aimed to identify what teachers (in terms of educational background and working experience) are able to set up education goals that ensure child's well-being, proper care, satisfaction of child's needs and acquisition of new experience. The research data are presented in Table 2.

The research data show that about half of the respondents with higher university and higher non-university education set up education goals that ensure child's well-being and proper care (from 36.92% to 52.31%), about two thirds of them guarantee satisfaction of child's needs and acquisition of new experiences (from 60.00% to 69.23%). A strange phenomenon is observed: a number of educators do not relate satisfaction of child's needs with assurance of child's well-being. It can be concluded that perception of establishment of education goals from child's perspective is not sufficient. Teachers of lower educational background (only with post secondary education) have lowest perception of setting up of child-oriented education goals: only one third of them (from 34.35% to 35.88%) think that it is necessary to ensure child's well-being and good care. Moreover, teachers with university and non-university education possess better understanding of children's experiential education and practice it more frequently compared to those with post-secondary educational background. A correlation was identified between teacher's ability to set up educational goals from child's perspective and teacher's education ($r= 0.114$, $p<0.05$).

Table 2. *Relation of teacher's educational background, working experience and child's education goals established by a teacher*

Teacher's competence	Education goals established from child's perspective				
	Child's well-being	Good care of child	Satisfaction of child's needs	Child's acquisition of new experiences	High outcomes of children
Educational background					
Post-secondary <i>n=131</i>	35.88	34.35	66.41	54.96	7.63
Higher non-university <i>n=65</i>	36.92	52.31	69.23	60.00	13.85
Higher university <i>n=287</i>	40.42	47.04	62.72	61.32	14.29
Working experience					
Up to 3 years <i>n=38</i>	31.58	55.26	60.53	65.79	10.53
From 4 to 10 years <i>n=51</i>	58.82	70.59	49.02	60.78	19.61
From 11 to 20 years <i>n=142</i>	44.37	45.07	68.31	64.08	19.01
From 21 to 35 years <i>n=258</i>	32.05	37.07	65.25	54.44	7.72

According to the research data, teachers in the beginning of their career concentrate on organisation of meaningful process of children's self-education (65.79% teachers) but their focus on child's outcomes (10.53%) and child's well-being (31.58%) is insufficient. Teachers, who have acquired sufficient working experience (4-20 years) are best at setting up of child-oriented education goals (from 49.02% to 70.59% of such teachers), but few of them focus on child's outcomes (19.61%). Specialists with extensive pedagogical experience (21-35 years) are less concerned about children's well-being (32.05%), their care (37.07%) and child's outcomes (7.72%).

The research highlighted a general tendency that teachers hardly ever establish goals oriented to child's outcomes. Educators do not relate child's experiential self-education with child's outcomes. The correlation was identified between teacher's working experience and peculiarities of establishment of self-education goals from child's perspectives ($r=0.118$, $p<0.05$).

2. *Relation of teacher's attitudes to organise life in children's groups from child's perspective, teacher's education and working experience.* Organisation of life in children's group considering child's needs, opinion, individual rhythm of life is also one of the challenges of child-oriented contemporary education to a teacher. An attempt was made to identify educational background and working experience of teachers, who find it necessary to establish daily routine in a group together with children and change it according to the occurring situation and seasonal phenomena. The research data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Relation of teacher's educational background, his/her working experience with teacher's attitude to organise life in children's group from child's perspective*

Teacher's competence	Teacher's attitude to organise life in children's group from child's perspective			
	According to the daily routine set up together with children every day	According to the set up daily routine, which is changed according to occurring situation	According to the daily routine, which is changed according to seasons of the year	According to the established daily routine, which does not change
Educational background				
Post-secondary <i>n=131</i>	9.92	83.97	41.22	15.27
Higher non-university <i>n=65</i>	3.03	76.92	23.08	13.85
Higher university <i>n=287</i>	9.41	74.22	27.87	12.20
Working experience				
Up to 3 years <i>n=38</i>	7.89	81.58	36.84	10.53
From 4 to 10 years <i>n=51</i>	5.88	84.31	23.53	5.88
From 11 to 20 years <i>n=142</i>	6.34	78.87	33.80	11.97
From 21 to 35 years <i>n=258</i>	12.74	82.63	32.82	15.83

Following the research data, establishment of children's daily routine in a group together with a child, still remains a challenge to teachers of any educational background and working experience. The research results reveal that neither higher education, nor more extensive practical professional experience encourages teachers to consult children planning a day in children's group. Only from 3.03% to 12.74% of the respondents tend to set up daily routine together with children. On the other hand, more than two thirds of educators (from 74.22% to 84.31%) change the established daily routine according to the occurring situation and child's needs.

A slight tendency is observed that teachers with very extensive professional experience (from 21 to 35 years) tend to certain extremes: they either apply the established daily routine (15.83% of the teachers) or consult with children regarding their daily routine (12.74%). A correlation was established between teacher's working experience and his/her attitude to setting up daily routine together with children ($r=0.111$, $p<0.01$).

3. *Relation of forms of child oriented education, teacher's education and working experience.* After the formation of the child-oriented education paradigm, there occurred a change in the conception of young children's education forms. The forms that promote child's individual and experiential self-education activity (child's individual activity, children's project activity, educational events outside kindergarten and others) started to occur in educational practice. The link of teachers' educational background and working experience with practicing of education forms based on child-oriented education paradigm. The research data are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Relation of teacher's educational background and working experience with his/her attitude to practice forms of child-oriented education*

Teacher's competences	Forms of child-oriented education practiced by teachers			
	Individual children's education	Project organisation of children's activity	Excursions, trips	Educational events outside kindergarten
Educational background				
Post-secondary <i>n=131</i>	72.52	41.98	45.80	20.61
Higher non-university <i>n=65</i>	61.54	40.00	40.00	16.92
Higher university <i>n=287</i>	61.32	49.48	48.43	27.18
Working experience				
Up to 3 years <i>n=38</i>	57.89	28.95	26.32	10.53
From 4 to 10 years <i>n=51</i>	56.86	47.06	49.02	19.61
From 11 to 20 years <i>n=142</i>	64.79	49.30	47.89	26.06
From 21 to 35 years <i>n=258</i>	72.20	52.12	55.21	28.57

Following the research data, teachers with higher university education most frequently practice various forms of children's project and experiential education. Project education forms are applied by 49.48% of the teachers; excursions and trips are organised by 48.43% of the respondents and 27.18% of educators offer educational events outside kindergartens.

The penetration of teachers with very long professional experience (21-35 years) into individual children's education and various forms of children's experiential education is deepest and they apply them most frequently. More than two thirds of them acknowledge importance of children's individual education (72.20%), more than half of them implement project of children's education (52.12%) and organise excursions and trips (55.21%). Teachers in the beginning their career (up to 3 years of working experience) have worse skills to organise children's project activity (28.95%), to use trips and educational events outside education institutions for children's education (from 10.53% to 26.32%).

The research showed that teachers of any educational background and working experience practice educational events outside education institutions too rarely (from 10.53% to 28.57%) though they provide children with a more varied possibilities for experiential self-education.

The correlation was established between teacher's educational background, working experience and his/her principles to practice child-oriented education forms ($r=0.153$, $p<0.001$; $r=0.133$, $p<0.005$).

4. *Relation of teachers' attitudes to consult parents and children regarding children education with teacher's educational background and working experience.* Child-oriented paradigm is successfully oriented only when parents and children are consulted regarding children self-education.

Table 5. *Relation of teacher's educational background, his/her working experience with teacher's attitude to consulting of parents and children regarding children's education*

Teachers' competences	Teachers' attitude to consulting of parents and children regarding issues of children's education					
	With children's parents	With children	Con-sultations regarding imple-mentation of education content	Consultations regarding parents' involvement into education process	Consultations regarding establishment of group environment	Consultations regarding support for children and family
Educational background						
Post-secondary <i>n=131</i>	77.86	40.46	50.38	49.62	54.96	32.06
Higher non-university <i>n=65</i>	78.46	15.38	52.31	41.54	40.00	20.00
Higher university <i>n=287</i>	81.18	39.02	57.84	44.60	58.89	39.02
Working experience						
Up to 3 years <i>n=38</i>	65.79	18.42	47.37	31.58	42.11	28.95
From 4 to 10 years <i>n=51</i>	72.55	31.37	52.94	35.29	56.86	27.45
From 11 to 20 years <i>n=142</i>	83.80	32.39	56.34	38.73	50.70	33.80
From 21 to 35 years <i>n=258</i>	79.54	41.31	56.37	52.51	57.14	42.47

Purposeful discussions regarding content of children's self-education, process of its implementation, creation of educational environment, support to a child and his/her family ensures quality of young child's education. The research revealed dependence of peculiarities of this discussion on teacher's educational background and working experience. The research data are presented in Table 5.

According to the research data, teachers with higher university consult parents (81.18% of such teachers) and children (39.02%) more frequently regarding various issues related to education. Teachers of lower educational background discuss these issues with parents and children less frequently and consultations with children are particularly rare (e.g., only 15.38% of teachers with higher non-university education consult children). On the other hand, a general tendency that consultation with children regarding various education related issues remains a challenge to teachers with any educational background.

Teachers with more extensive working experience more frequently discuss content of children self-education, participation of parents in the process of self-education and financial support to financial support with parents (79.54%) and children (as many as 41.31% of the respondents). Due to insufficient experience, beginning teachers consult parents (65.79%) and children (only 18.42%) much less frequently.

A correlation was established between teacher's educational background and his/her attitude to consulting parents and children ($r=0.099$, $p<0.05$). The correlation between teacher's working experience and his/her attitudes to consulting children ($r=0.149$, $p<0.001$) was also observed.

Conclusions

1. The research results reveal that teachers face biggest challenge to perceive a child as an equal member of the society with own opinion, interests and style of self-education. A general tendency is observed that consulting with children about various education related issues remains a challenge to teachers of various educational backgrounds and working experience.

2. Child-oriented education paradigm, which particularly highlights the importance of experiential self-education of a child, has not been fully adopted. According to the research data, experiential child's self-education is a more considerable challenge to teachers with lower educational background. Teachers with higher university education have best perception of this challenge. Such teachers better understand children's experiential education, more frequently practice it, apply various forms of children's experiential education and more frequently consult with parents and children.

3. A general tendency is observed that educators do not link practice of child-oriented education with expediency of education. Even organising meaningful education, they do not reflect on children's outcomes. The research results show that outcomes of child-oriented education are best perceived by teachers with sufficient pedagogical experience (4-20 years). In the beginning of their professional activity (1-3 years), teachers fail to perceive importance of outcomes of child-oriented education due to insufficient experience in such education. Applying various forms of children education, teachers with extensive pedagogical experience (21-35 years) pay little attention to children's well-being, acquisition of new experiences and outcomes.

Discussion

The researches conducted in the country revealed regularities that are characteristic of a big number of education systems that undergo a shift from authoritarian academic to child-oriented education.

Pre-school education practice may be based on child-oriented paradigm only when teacher's values and attitude to a child and childhood change as well. Therefore, while training teachers a particular attention should be paid to development of educators' values. Values should become the core of teacher training (Lunenbergh, Korthagen & Willemse, 2007). It is necessary to encourage changes in value system of a student teacher because s/he bring authoritarian conceptions about young child's education from own childhood.

The paradoxical phenomenon when teachers set up goals to satisfy child's needs but do not link them with child's well-being and care, is conditioned by insufficient perception of the phenomenon of education from child's perspective. While changing autocratic tendencies of young children's education to humanistic-democratic ones, teachers tend to assume the role of expert identifying child's need; however, they do not hear children's opinion and are hardly interested in child's feelings. Students teachers have to be assisted perceiving such approaches of pedagogy as "pedagogy of listening to a child" (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2001:64-65), "pedagogy of dialogue" (Sommer, Samuelsson & Hundeide, 2010) and others.

The problem that teachers do not link process of child's self-education with his/her outcomes occurs when standards of children's achievements are not available at national level. Since guidelines for outcomes to be achieved are missing, the process of education loses its expedience. Then teachers acquire an opinion that child's outcomes are not important. Student teachers have to be provided with precise descriptors of child's competences and they have to learn to organise education that ensures achievement of these standards. Such standards for pre-school children have been established in a big number of countries, e.g. Iowa State (USA) applies not only standards of pre-primary education but also those of pre-school and even early education. (Iowa Early Learning Standards, 2006). Standards for pre-school children have not been set in Lithuania yet.

The research in the opinion of teachers with extensive working experience revealed a necessity for continuous learning because such teachers, who graduated from university study programmes long time ago, face serious problems establishing goals from child's perspectives and fail to consider child's outcomes, etc. Hoban Garry F. (2002) states the importance of "conceptual inputs" changing conceptions of young children's education. Long practical experience without lifelong learning does not contribute to teachers' fast perception of children's self-education conceptions and theories that undergo fast changes.

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