A Child in the World of Education – Education in the World of a Child

Editors

Jacek Z. Górnikiewicz, Elżbieta Jaszczyszyn

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Spis treści

Preface

While referring to the title of this book, it may be worthwhile to specify the meaning and content of the title phrase: „child in the world of education." On the other hand, it is also worthwhile to establish the meaning and theoretical assumptions encompassing the second phrase: „education in the world of a child". We associate the notion of „a child in the world of education" with a small child's perspective on the surrounding reality as organized by adults according to their traditions and needs. We refer here to the world imposed by adults, as seen by small children. The world of formal levels of education established by adults, the world arbitrarily imposed on children's expectations bound by rules and regulations leading to success, but also to difficulty and failure. The world of school demands similar to those of traffic regulations, the world of hierarchy of a reality surrounding them yet, strange to the children. On the other hand, because of the necessity of submission to the system of formal education, We take learning as a conventional function imposed on children, with little spontaneity, requiring effort, more often punishing than rewarding, and organized by adults according to certain forms and norms. The child in the world of education, may be described as a „stranger" in the world of formal education, which is forced out by the social dissidents and complexities of our civilization, institutionalized, organized by adults in the name of their interests and wishes of other adults in power. At the same time, We have in mind a populated reality, also in educational institutions, by adults who know children very well, respec their needs, make learning not only effective but enjoyable, and construct the world of adults more familiar and friendly.

At the same time, the term „education in the world of a child" would encompass only a part of the child's world, not necessarily attractive or engaging, referring to the natural need of a child to learn about the world and oneself, but in a form and time often disconnected from the child's nature. Education in the world of a child, would encompass the sphere of responsibilities, which normally is not very attractive to children, but instead is often associated with getting tired, waiting, monotony, boredom, danger or uncertainty, as well as the lack of children's perceptions as worthy of good thoughts the feeling of the whole, leading to characteristics unimportant for the child. The world of adults, explored by the child, with his or her specific sensitivity, naïveté, curiosity, etc. We take learning, then as a natural and every day function rooted in the inborn curiosity of the surroundings and oneself, practiced to the extent limited by one's abilities and curiosity for knowing, which normally is realized at formal school to a very limited degree. Organized by adults education, is often placed in the child's world among difficult spheres that are, hostile and incomprehensible, menacing with negative emotions. On the other hand, the mentioned education may be connoted by the child positively, if it is organized by adults in an innovative, engaging, and emotionally rewarding fashion, not necessarily in the brick and mortar setting of the traditional school bound and governed by educational rules and regulations imposed from above.

A question may be asked: how could the two areas of importance for education – as a system and child's learning activity be described? In an attempt to answer this, two groups could be identified for the purposes of this discussion. One, the adults' perspective, addresses the world of the formal education as designed and systematically administered by adults with an area specifically designated for entering this world by children. The second group, associated with the child's visualization of education as a system, refers to education as a carved

out part in the rich realm of varied activities, which takes up a lot of his or her time and is engaging in the process of tasks designed by adult caretakers and teachers. The review of the literature presented in this volume allows to observe that all its authors contributed to at least one of the areas discussed above, often to them both.

The reader of this volume has a unique opportunity, within this same publication, to get acquainted with education of a child in faraway China, and such European countries as Croatia, Greece, Poland and Russia differently understood and described in each place. Elżbieta Jaszczyszyn shares her thoughts on the problem of the state of reading education in Poland, important from the inquiry and social points of view, crucially important in the foreseen 'death of Gutenberg' epoch. Natalia Ryshova considers the problems dealing with education of children in a context of varied physical and cultural surroundings. Efthymia Gorgotiou provides a description of alternate methods of teaching in culturally and linguistically varied Greek preschools. Next, Xiaoping Yang and Shanan Qing describes a multicultural plan for teaching among the Tujia minority. A very inspiring contribution to this volume is by Anna Klim-Klimaszewska and Ewa Jagieło, who describes how child development could be supported with fairy tales and legends. Iwona Zwierzchowska and Małgorzata Center-Guz compressively consider possibilities of child's reading and writing abilities on the basis of Maria Montessori's theories. These authors show the acquisition of these skills in practical and social contexts. Edita Rogulj describes development of information and communication skills among children in their preschool and early primary years based on innovations of advanced information technologies. Małgorzata Suświłło presents a very interesting consideration of child's competency development in the area of language acquisition in a context of selected psychological and social conditions. The team of authors: Beata Bednarek, Krystyna Kusiak i Renata Stawinoga

discuss the multi facets of respect necessary for children. At the end of the book, a text by Jolanta-Szady-Borzykowska deals with a very important discussion topic on the realization of lowering of the school age reform in Poland. The volume should be recommended to teachers of young children, to families and educational caretakers, therapists, social workers, and early childhood education faculty. The book may inspire representatives of the above mentioned social and vocational categories to attempt to implement the ideas in their native countries as these notions have already prove to be effective models abroad. On the other hand, reading of the individual texts, may motivate readers to get acquainted with the described educational settings as sources worthy of a personal visit.

The compilation of materials from authors belonging to a variety of countries with varied educational realities who use different languages in their everyday practice is this book's special value. The uniqueness of perspectives conditioned by antecedents complicated descriptions of relations between a child and education, effectively gives this volume a very specific structure and multi-threaded content. On the other hand, it could be agreed that such richness makes the book even more valuable. Comparisons of different descriptions from different countries ensured a very interesting enrichment to the discussed topics, thanks to a profound close up of the description of child's education: the world of everyday realities. Moreover, a variety of authors from different countries and cultures whose texts are used in this book, on one hand resulted in a multilevel presentation of individual descriptions of relations between children and education, while on the other hand, made it a whole on a higher level: common theoretical underpinnings and assumptions.

Considering what has been said about relationships between children and education in this particular selection of texts, it may be a good idea to ask what else is there that may be worthy of inquiry

and documentation. Considering the works included in this book, what are the assumptions reflecting consensus among the authors and what seems to be uncertain and controversial? Also, in the epoch of dramatically changing reality of the 21st century, because of the demand of keeping the presented ideas current, there emerges the need to consistently go back to reexamine problems surrounding child's education. The value of inquiry, social, and moral content of this volume cannot be overstated. Everyday experiences, with references to numerous theoretical assumptions and concepts are the reasons why this book may inspire practitioners and theorists in the field of child education.

Jacek Z. Górnikiewicz, Elżbieta Jaszczyszyn

Elżbieta Jaszczyszyn

University of Bialystok, Poland

Acquiring Literacy – How Children Learn Reading Skills[1]

ABSTRACT

This text is devoted to the discussion of problems of children entering preschool and literacy. Literacy is treated in this paper as a cultural achievement, essential for the development of intellectual and social functioning. The text describes how illiterate people (children) learn the letters and the literate thinking characteristic of this kind of intellectual activity. Understanding of the term "initiation" is presented, as well as the characteristics of communities, having a relationship with a human literacy (family, preschool, outside family environment and preschool).

Key words: readership education, literacy, readership initiation.

1. Introduction

Acquisition of literacy and understanding of its importance for human culture is treated as a process during which students learn literacy and the literate type of thinking characteristic of this kind of intellectual activity. According to A. Skudrzyk (2005, p. 78-79) pre-literate cognitive style is characterized by:

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[1]   A revised version of a section from the book *Modele edukacji czytelniczej w przedszkolu, a gotowość do czytania i umiejętność czytania dzieci sześcioletnich*, by E. Jaszczyszyn (2010), Bialystok.

- concreteness – this means the immediacy of two types of data: sensory data (mainly) and data coming from a person's own experience,
- specific way in which context relations are perceived – relations are built on associations resulting from direct experience (contact in time and space and instrumental relation rather than logical analysis of phenomena),
- inability to generalize direct data (inability to disassociate from its context).

The features listed above are closely linked with "here and now" situations (the present) even when the speaker recalls "there and then" situations (the past) from their memory.

The discovery of writing is valuable as it enables people to preserve speech by recording statements and what is most important writing makes it possible to separate speech from the act of its creation (de-contextualization). This entails certain consequences for communication between people to which attention is drawn by Mirosława Marody (1987, p. 53-54):

- it creates distance between the sender and his or her text,
- it separates words away from acts,
- words are subject to certain acts (correction, pronunciation),
- the flowing stream of speech becomes static and immobilized, which enables one to carry out objective analysis and "frees the mind from having to store speech, directing all its energy at the act of examining the text".

The latter phenomenon helps one to intensify critical activities such as logic, rationality, or skepticism. These cognitive skills are characterized by so-called modern and literate thinking (Skudrzyk 2005, p. 78). The long-term and systematic impact of "people of literate culture" naturally stimulates the gradual process of separating speech from the circumstances of its utterance. What has large importance is the attitude of the recipient who comes into contact with literacy and

the attitude of the author of a written text. In this situation the factor that differentiates people is the degree and quality of immersion in pre-literate or literate style of thinking.

An advantage of a written text is that it allows people to learn about something in an indirect way, without having to come into contact with the described phenomena. When we get access to texts created by competent authors, specialists, we acquire knowledge that is accurate, current at the time, proven, structured or publicly discussed and assessed. The factual descriptions are usually of scientific nature. Paper or electronic copies of a text allow people to repeatedly go back to its unchanged informational content, check the sources on which any particular claim is based and carry out factual analysis which is free of emotions, which inevitably arise when we listen to a lecture or watch a television program (Król 1982, p. 19-20). The ability to read also enables people to examine the experience of past generations. Finally, one's imagination is excited when a text is read. It allows one to move in time and space and live the lives of the book's characters.

Current conditions in which civilization exists, confirm the validity of the idea of paying closer attention to the issues of motivating children to have contact with written texts. I will try to describe potential factors that encourage and support the process of acquiring literacy. According to Piotr Andrusiewicz (1995) the source of regularity in their occurrence and the standard course of achieving literacy is the acquisition of literary experience by:

a) children's own reading activities and gaining social experience in terms of literary knowledge by spontaneously participating in literary culture,

b) being subject to the processes of cultural initiation caused by the different elements of the educational environment, especially the literary culture of such environment,

c) the impact of interaction in a structured teaching process.

When referring to the process of literary education as described above, it is important to accept the fact that the training of functions (which can be a potential source of difficulty in reading and writing[2]) and the training of reading are significant but not the only aspects of such education (Cieszyńska 2005).

In this text I will focus on issues relating to children acquiring literacy.

2. What is the purpose of the ability to read?

The abilities to read and write are considered cultural achievements essential to develop intellectually and to live within a society. Consequently, what is crucial here is the cultural context and the purpose of reading. The reader decides to read a particular piece of text for a specific purpose, e.g. shop customers will read information about prices and price reductions in order to make bargain purchases, others may read a newspaper to obtain information on topics interesting to them. Furthermore, each reader will interpret the information contained in a passage in different way because they "read" it through the angle of their own cultural origin and thus, their own life experience. Different cultural groups and individuals have different objectives and understandings of writing and therefore, they respond to them differently.

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[2]   According to J. Cieszynska in the case of children with difficulties an optimal solution would be to identify those who may experience difficulties in reading among children that are as young as 5 or 6 years old. M. Bogdanowicz names them as children with a "risk of dyslexia". In her opinion it is possible to protect them from failures at school, if any partial delays that exist in the preschool period are eliminated or the severity of such problems is reduced through special exercises. An important task (in terms of children with difficulties and others) is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a child so that when working with them consideration is given to the following two aspects of their functioning: instrumental and motivational.

Referring to his own cultural experience Irena Majchrzak cited examples of different approaches to the issue of how to organize the schooling of children in multicultural Mexico. Wha she sees as something "common" to them in the process of acquiring literacy would be "the students' names that can replace the primers and which could be of help in teaching children literacy irrespective of the language that they use at home" (Majchrzak 1995, p. 16). Irena Majchrzak pointed out that in Mexican conditions, acquiring literacy represents the first barrier at school which most of the children coming from illiterate families cannot overcome.

As far as socializing through learning to read and write is concerned, one of the most important issues is the "phenomenon of writing" as noted by Bambi B. Schieffelin and Elinor Ochs. In their opinion, this term defines „any situation in which written text represents an integral part of the nature of interaction between its participants and their processes of interpretation" (1995, p. 148-151). In order to understand the structure and meaning of the aforementioned phenomenon for its participants, it is necessary to specify standards for such interactions. What is expected are such types of interactions that seem to have a particular impact on the development, also in terms of a contact with a written text. They are called Mutual Involvement Episodes (MIE). The establishment of a mutual center of interest is considered to be an important first step in the occurrence of an MIE. It is only when children turn their attention to someone or something (or in other words when they start their "own program") that the adult may add extra items associated with a particular object or activity.

What we have here is a literate person and a child working together. The former provides assistance in the area of specific components of the reading process (overall task analysis, data analysis, creating a network of statements, decoding words, creating macro-structures) (Marzano, Paynter 2004, p. 26), while the latter "pulls back the curtain of encrypted letters (...) to find hidden teddy bears, windows, dolls,

chairs, tables, shelves and balls, apples and pears. The reward is satisfaction of an intellectual nature" (Majchrzak 2007, p. 118). Before/ /after the action, the reactions of both the child and the adult to the content read may be then observed. from the point of view of literary education, an important issue is, therefore, the process of the child's initial contact with a written text.

3. Initiation and its time

The word "initiation" is equivalent in its meaning to receiving knowledge, displaying initiative or starting of something (Kopaliński 1988, p. 231).

Children's initial contact with a written text is not a single act but a series of many, mainly direct, child - adult interactions during situations that are both spontaneous and intentionally organized. There are some types of instructional activities present in them that might be described as behavior of the "how to do it" type. "Meeting" situations are social interactions in which the adult plays a special role. The adult supports, organizes and expands the efforts of the child "to understand the world and therefore he or she will become a partner for the child in the process of shaping their development" (Schaffer 1994, p. 151). During an act of "initiation", an adult member of the community playing the role of a mediator (achieving success is more probable because of his or her presence) helps a child to enter the community of "insiders". The issue of teaching children literacy is discussed in two aspects that complement each other by J. Papuzińska (1988) (aspect: "literary initiations") and I. Majchrzak (1995) (aspect: "act of initiation as a gift of writing").

Joanna Papuzińska transfers the term "literary initiation" into the area of children's contact with books and defines it as "a set of social interactions leading to "dubbing" a child a recipient of literature" (1988, p. 6). The process of child's settling into literacy culture is thought to

begin with the "initial contact" with a written text. J. Papuzińska defines ways (zones) of initiation as "the individual culture systems through which the child comes into contact with literature" (Papuzińska 1988, p. 26). Literary initiation in direct contact with the child occurs within the family and in educational institutions in the child's community. According to the author, the areas where indirect contact occurs include cultural institutions, especially the mass media.

On the other hand, I. Majchrzak drew attention to initiation as an event when an illiterate person steps into the world and culture of literacy (literate thinking). This marks an important event for a child when knowledge about writing is "transferred in the most natural way". A person who is able to read and write shows a child what "it" is all about. According to I. Majchrzak (1995, p. 21-23) by showing the child what his or her name looks like as a string of characters, the adult will generate emotional states in the child and this will mark the beginning of their efforts to acquire written cognitive styles. In Majchrzak's opinion, this act of initiation is a magic gesture whereby a child is introduced into the world of writing and which she calls a „gift of writing".

Irena Majchrzak believes that "pupils' names represent an excellent beginning", they can be used to initiate the process of introducing children into the world of writing in any language with alphabetic writing systems (Zagórski 1998, p. 2-3; Majchrzak 1995, p. 5-20). A child's name written on a card can play an additional role here. It can specify the limits of what is his or her own and what is not, particularly in an institution of group teaching such as schools.

"The specificity of «education directed at the child» results from his or her age at which he or she shows a great curiosity about the world. You can «give a child a boost», develop and encourage him or her to be active but just as easily you can hurt, discourage and weaken" (Kopaczyńska, Nowak-Łojewska 2007, p. 5). The dominant theme in educational discussions on children's development potential and ways

of their accomplishments, is the claim of "an innate promise of genius that almost every baby brings into the world" (Levis 1988, p. 7) and awareness of the need to be supported by adults encouraging children to demonstrate "a constructive, success-oriented attitude to their own skills and abilities" (Levis 1988). G. Doman (1992) recommends that the process of learning to read should be also started as soon as possible. In his opinion, if "your child is five years old, learning to read is easier than if he or she were six. If children are four it is easier to teach them to read than if they were five, and if they are three it is even easier still. Twelve months or less is the best age to start, if you want to put the least time and energy in teaching your child to read. Children love to learn new skills. Up to the age of five all their activity is mainly centered around this" [from: http://nauka.2p.pl/czytanie/teksty.html, (access: 15.07.2007)].

Now, when we understand the nature of reading and writing better, it is assumed that a person's age is not an „arbitrary" border beyond which actions can or cannot be started to initiate the formation of "written speech" as a new form of communication[3]. The period when children are between 4 and 7 years old is of critical importance for developing the ability to read. Children who learn to read earlier are well prepared to learn other things (they acquire knowledge through reading and later read for the pleasure of reading). In turn, children who struggle with reading at the early stages of developing this skill are likely to have deficiencies that can be remedied through specially selected exercises. However, they will tend to go through a lot of difficult periods with lower achievements. It is very likely that because of such difficulties they will suffer the effects of their low self-esteem acquired in childhood. It is said that "it is not children with reading difficulties that fail the system but rather the system that fails them.

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3   According to H. R Schaffer, „the creation of written speech" refers to the realization that written language brings content which is a fact worthy consideration.

With the right instruction and support, all children can learn to read"(*Early Reading Strategy. The Report of the Expert Panel on Early Reading in Ontario*, 2003).

4. Initiation zones

Family as an initiation zone

In many families, parents will act in accordance with a certain initiatory procedure during structured interactions with their children[4]. Elizabeth Goldman and C. Ralph Adler (2006) proposed the following list of areas for parents' activities aimed at starting the process of creating written speech at its very beginning:

- Desire of parents for their child to be able to read: their desire for the child to be a reader, their desire for the child to have bold dreams that come true.
- Helping a child with learning to read – showing the child that reading can be learned, helping him or her find books that he or she will like, exposing the child to situations when an adult is reading, going to libraries together, writing letters to relatives (brothers, sisters), replacing spoken words with written ones and reading before going to bed.
- Spending time together: engaging in long conversations, discussing with the child what we are going to do together, asking the child about what he or she has been doing and encouraging the child to ask questions addressed to adults about what is interesting to him or her in the surrounding world and responding to these questions to the extent allowed by the adult's knowledge.

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4   B. B. Schieffelin and E. Ochs point out that children's first experiences with writing are usually based around interactions with caregivers in which books with stories and pictures are present. However, the impact of early interactions on any subsequent acquisition of reading and writing skills by children is (in the light of the study) debatable.

- Helping the child to hear the sounds of words which are spoken during conversations: stimulating the sense of hearing during babbling and putting words together, also helping in discovering word rhymes, singing songs and reciting rhymes for children.

In addition, E. Goldman and C. R. Adler mention:

- Helping children to learn the letters of the alphabet: starting with the first letter and ending with the last one, associating them with objects familiar to children, looking for letters in the surroundings, naming them, exercises to learn to write all letters of the alphabet.
- Help in understanding the meaning of words: teaching the child that all things have a name, teaching him or her the names of colors and the names of the food that is consumed by the child and adults, teaching them the names of animals and types of weather, teaching them to walk, run, jump, telling them about grammar rules.
- Support in their reading exercises: encouraging the child to read their favorite book out loud, reading it with them, reading sections in turns, reading the book "all the time" (the adult does not pay attention to the child reading the book until the words sound right and then the adult praises the child).
- Helping the child to understand the text that he or she is reading: asking what he or she is reading – What happened? Who did what? Why? How did the story end? Talking about the text they have read, asking questions about what they think about the story and listening to their answers.

All parents (adults) who understand what the ability to read is and its role in the modern world, express a desire for their child to be able to read. Despite constant growth in new communication technologies, reading is still the best way to obtain information. An effective way to show a child the importance of reading is to show

him or her one's own taste for reading. One has to reserve some "free time" and plan situations in which the child will have the opportunity to observe his or her parent reading. Learning by imitation can be implemented by directing a child's attention to the daily activities at home (or school) where one is required to be able to read (and write) such as: preparation of food (reading recipes from a cookbook, saving them as images or writing them down using alphabet) (Jaszczyszyn 1987), shopping (reading shop signs to the child and treating them as information about where products are located), waiting for the bus (reading timetables, bus numbers and routes), signing the child's chair with his or her name (Majchrzak 1995), signing things that belong to family members and teachers with their names (e.g., desk, chairs, briefcase), replacing words (e.g. names of activities) with written texts or taking attendance school (Wiosna 2003).

You should also provide children with the opportunity to come into contact with various types of reading materials. They should be stored in a separate, accessible place, preferably on a low shelf or a small table, which the child can easily catch sight of and reach for.

The role of the adult is also to help the child to find books that they will like. The parent will build up a new family book collection by gathering their own children's books and collecting new ones. This, for the child, is the closest source of written texts to be read. The parents' genuine and real admiration of the books' content and illustrations will surely be shared by their children. Children themselves will also act on their own and ask for books to be read. They ask for a specific book to be read, they recommend their own favorite books to other children and they listen with a positive attitude to what books are recommended by their schoolmates.

A library is a place where actions aimed at increasing children's willingness to read are reinforced. Adult readers should visit the library on a regular basis together with their children. If they encounter difficulties with choosing a book for the child, the librarian will

certainly be able to help. Libraries and bookshops can also be venues for social events of great importance in terms of reading experiences where writers can be met and fairy tales are read to children by adults, for example actors, politicians, and parents. The prospect of such a meeting is a good reason for "expressing appreciation for one's favorite writer" and writing a letter to them or painting a picture (Chapman Weston, Weston 2002, p. 33). Activities such as writing letters and postcards on occasion of holidays and family members' birthdays or name days, create situations conducive to learning to understand the nature of a written text and how it differs from speaking.

One cannot forget about the ritual of bedtime reading. In addition to such obvious benefits as stimulating a child's imagination and his or her interest in reading, developing auditory capacities or expanding vocabulary, reading aloud to a child creates a bond between the reader and the child and reinforces the image of an adult as a person who reads. Bedtime lullabies ensure that a child has contact with a poetic text.

The word "reading" in its ordinary sense can be understood by a child, because it contains information that this activity does not only include reading of written texts, but also reading animal tracks (by a tracker), "reading" a map by a travelling scout or tourist, reading music notes, reading road signs by a driver or pedestrian, reading the facial expressions and gestures of another person or watching the weather forecast (map) (Król 1982, p. 9). Adults' actions to model situations in which children can "read" different kinds of visual signs and symbols in books, which they "read" to adults (Dickinson, Caswell 2007, p. 243) or in life situations, allow to convince them that reading can be learned. Being able to understand what a visual sign or symbol means is also a step towards reading.

In turn, talking to each other fosters the development of speaking and understanding speech and helps expand children's vocabulary. With age, as their vocabulary range expands, children are also more

capable of understanding and formulating verbal messages. This is followed by an expansion of their knowledge, which is acquired both from personal experience and from experiencing reality in an indirect way such as listening to stories, other people's opinions or content read to the child, viewing photos or watching films. Thus, the development of language skills consists of increasing the efficiency of the language system in terms of phonology, morphology and syntax and raising awareness of the process of communication. Ewa Słodownik-Rycaj (1998) suggests that situations should be created in which a child's knowledge about the communication process could be perceived and used by the child during conversations. During conversations, a child will receive information as to whether his or her statement is understandable to the listener and whether the messages are formed correctly. If a child comes to the opposite conclusion, he or she will attempt to reconstruct his or her messages to be understood by the interlocutor.

Preschool as a zone of initiation

Another important factor for a child and his or her further school progress is the child's preschool environment. Because the child has to learn how to function in a group that is new to him or her – a group of peers, the child will "reorient" himself or herself towards a new person – the teacher, who becomes another "significant person" next to his or her parents. The teacher's behavior will model the behavior of the child in the area of reading.

The relationship between a child and a book will also change. J. Papuzińska (1988, p. 60-61) indicates the following factors that trigger this change in the function of a book:

a) it is owned by a group,
b) access to it is regulated within the school life,
c) books are used according to school rules,

d) books are mainly on the subject of the seasons of the year and events that are associated with them,
e) books considered as "valuable" or "teaching aids" are out of the reach of children and
f) the recipient is part of a larger audience, so there is no more intimate contact with a reading adult and with the content of the book with restrictions imposed on how freely a child's reception of it can be expressed.

Contact with written texts occurs primarily as part of collective efforts.

The conditions of collective learning, limit children's activity and spontaneity in learning. Situations when some children show curiosity are contrasted with a lack of interest shown by the others, a new text with the one already known, liking with dislike, willingness to talk and comment – with silence or speaking when permitted to do so by the teacher. The same activities are generally suggested to all children.

One should remember to properly motivate children to get engaged in reading activities. When such an activity is encouraged by the people around, we consider it to be external motivation. For example, a child may reach for a book and discover that, when viewing images, he or she can learn something interesting about the world. Then the child's behavior is internally motivated. Being praised by the teacher for viewing a book is a form of external motivation. In order to follow the aforementioned rule of motivation, the teacher should create the maximum possible number of situations in which children get internal satisfaction from their own conduct. Motivation is also developed by showing how useful reading skills are in everyday life, including pre-school groups.

General rules of effective support for learning to read, which one needs to remember when working with children on this skill are: 1) both the teacher and the child must treat teaching and learning as

a source of joy and great fun. Learning is a reward, not a punishment; 2) it is a good idea to start teaching children to read at a very early stage[5]; 3) the teacher is not to act as an inspector. We are not to monitor pupils while doing activities! Instead of checking, we should provide our pupils with opportunities to solve problems, check themselves and each other; 4) each child is to be allowed to determine the difficulty level of a task by selecting one or as many tasks as the child wants to perform from several suggested by the teacher.

When adapting methods of early learning to read to the conditions of a preschool classroom, there is a need to make some adjustments in teaching methodology. They concern: the place of teaching (home/ preschool), the time of teaching (possible from 3 years old), the teaching person (parent/peer and teacher), the number of children taught (one/as per group size, but individually and in small groups), the adopted model or models of literacy education.

In the case of group education, which is characteristic of preschools, the ability to engage in one-to-one interactions (adult – child) decreases because the teacher has to pay his or her attention to a larger number of children at the same time. Research by H. Rudolph Schaffer and Christine Liddell (1995, p. 178-179) on the effects of having to spread attention among a group of children (four, in this case) has shown that: a) the teacher speaks more to the group of children, but less to individual children, b) the character of the teacher's utterances has changed from a conversation about shared fun activities (in the case of dyads) into directing and dealing with the behavior of the children, and c) the adult's willingness to answer questions asked by a child has also changed – from answering almost every question asked by the child, acknowledging each statement and

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5   G. Doman suggests that the age when learning is to start should be 6 to 36 months as during this period of life the human brain is completely open to all information. In this period the brain is able to acquire information without much effort. Children can learn to read easily and naturally.

commenting on almost all of the child's activities (dyad) into ignoring almost half of the comments coming from the children forming the group. The researchers additionally recorded a shortened duration of Joint Involvement Episodes (JIEs) in the case of groups of children in relation to JIEs with one child. They described the nature of the interaction in a group as a "switch on – switch off" sequence and a child's access to the adult as „not guaranteed".

These considerations in no way negate the possibility of preschoolers being able to create conditions where a dyadic JIE may occur. However, the time and scope of such episodes will be limited due to the size of pre-school groups with all the aforementioned consequences for the quality of adult-child contact. It is definitely a good idea, to consider ways in which JIEs can be sustained in dyadic situations. When activities related to reading take place in preschools, the adult should be ready for contact during which he or she and the child (children) will pay attention to the issue associated with the reading activity and work together in this regard.

Teachers should be encouraged to go beyond the traditional approach to reading and use the results of research in order to learn about the facts concerning the process of understanding a text in reading. The information that they obtain in this way, will allow them to make comprehensible and more goal-oriented decisions in the model of organization of literacy education and teaching to read.

The world outside the family and preschool as an initiation zone

With the emergence of writing, a new cultural quality and a new quality of civilization arouse. Outside the family and preschool, other people and other real and virtual worlds came into existence where many things also "happen" such as promotion of a literacy culture.

The list of various campaigns to promote reading gets extended with newer and more interesting strategies for both adults and

children. Here are some of them as proposed by Stefania M. Stysiak (2002) during the campaign "All Poland Reads to Kids":

a) free access to books and magazines (reading place in each room of the preschool),
b) exploring a variety of literary genres,
c) participating in book events (book fairs/sales) with parents,
d) visiting a library and learning how to behave in it,
e) establishing a partnership with a publishing house specializing in children's literature in order to organize meetings with authors writing for children. A visit by such distinguished guests provides an opportunity to offer other activities to develop "readiness to read" such as: preparing illustrations for books, doing portraits of the main characters and authors of books, singing songs with lyrics written by the guests or creating their own books – about themselves, with a title that contains the child's name,
f) reading books aloud to children by their authors, teachers or parents,
g) conversations with book characters (in the form of a role play),
h) getting library cards from the preschool library.

"Lists of books recommended for individual age groups are discussed and specific choices are subject to reviews and verified on the basis of whether they are loaned or purchased. We have lists of books for infants, preschoolers, school-age children, teenagers, etc." [from: http://www.calapolskaczytadzieciom.pl/nowa/index.php?page=recenzje_kp, (access: 4.05.2009)].

Other campaigns promoting reading observed by children relate to changes in methods of communication in the modern world which lead to changes in how books are distributed. Readers are sought in the supermarket, on the Internet, by mailings and media

campaigns such as „Free your books" [http://www.bookcrossing.pl, (access:15.07.2007)].

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Natalia Ryzhova

Moscow Pedagogical University, Russia

Supporting Diversity of Nature – Supporting Diversity of Culture

ABSTRACT

The problem of multicultural, as well as ecological education in early childhood (under 8 years) is, perhaps, one of the crucial issues in modern education. In my opinion, both of these fields are closely tied to ESD (its ecological, economical and social dimensions), as expressed in the author's educational program "Nature Is Our Home". Every culture develops in a certain geographic, climatic, natural environment. It is reflected in fairytales, folk riddles, traditional crafts, patterns of interaction with nature. Modern environmental problems, such as sparing resource use and biodiversity preservation, are also connected with specific cultural traditions (attitude towards nature, patterns of resources use, prevailing industries). The author has developed a concept of comprehensive multicultural and environmental education, based on the idea of integration. It helps pedagogues to introduce children to culture and nature of different nations, underlining their mutual dependencies. Several conditions are described: a special creative environment in a kindergarten (mini-museums of different countries and of nature; mini-museums of dolls; libraries; folklore rooms), exhibitions of photos from the countries, visited by children; connections between the kindergarten and the local community (families, museums, universities); folk holidays, related to culture and nature (as a Birds' Day); folklore studies (fairy-tales, folk games, proverbs); project work for children and adults; different types of activities for education (games, music, performances, arts and crafts, applied activities, research, theater, collecting, and others).

The report mentions specific projects as examples ('Trees of Different Continents', 'Russia is Our Country', 'Across Countries and Continents'). A crucial element of all the projects is support for children's initiative: the topics are discussed in advance together with children, and grow out of their questions. Children get to know different folk

games, go on virtual journeys, watch videos and cartoons, put on national clothes, draw pictures of nature and architecture of different countries, learn basic words in different languages (such as 'hello', 'thank you'), gather collection sets of various objects, make photo albums about other countries, try national cuisines, learn about natural zones and environmental problems, study geographical maps etc. Much attention is paid to comparison of other cultures with the children's native culture. Together, children and adults create mini-museums, models of Africa, Asia, of the Americas, Australia and Europe.

Children bring souvenirs, pebbles, seashells, dolls in national costumes, info booklets, books and toys brought from their trips. In Russia, there are children of many nationalities in kindergartens, so many families tell about their own native culture. Mothers sing national lullabies and show national dances. Families present pictures from their home places, prepare specialties of their cuisine. International students visit kindergartens, and pedagogues tell about their home countries. This approach helps to encourage tolerance and respect for other cultures, as well as for their own culture. It also helps to understand that nature and culture have close ties, that care should be taken of natural environment, that all the nations of the Earth are mutually dependent, and all the people, independent of their nationality, have their own common home, planet Earth.

Key words: nature diversity, culture diversity.

1. Introduction

Conservation and support of natural and cultural diversity is a vital issue and an integral part of Education for Sustainable Development. Every culture is shaped in its specific natural environment, in its specific climate, and so on. This environment is reflected in fairy tales, visual arts, traditional music and other creative forms. So, I suppose that in preschool age, when children's perception of the world is still mainly holistic, we can help them see nature and culture as interconnected phenomena.

Pedagogues ask children, what countries and nations they would like to learn about, what things they are especially interested in, on what virtual journeys they would like to set out. This is the way for many projects start.

2. Materials and Methods

In this paper I would like to present some examples of how these ideas can be implemented in projects done by children and adults, in the launching and development of which I participated, as a scientific advisor. All of the projects are closely connected to my educational program "Nature Is Our Home".

2.1. Modern children travel a lot in their own countries and around the world. They bring many things from their journeys into kindergartens: souvenirs, flags, maps, natural objects, photos and videos; children are glad to tell their friends about the things they've seen. The task of the pedagogues is to support children's initiative, help them generalize their impressions. All objects brought by the children can be sorted into different containers. For example: one box may hold everything from Spain, the other – from Italy, etc. These collections should necessarily include both: natural objects and things related to culture and traditions of different nations. Some kindergartens use children's collections to create mini-museums of the young travellers or young geographers. Children themselves are guiding tours around the museums, telling their friends about their travels to other countries and answering questions.

2.2. In order to familiarize children with nature and culture of other countries, special creative environment is set up, in which children's attention to the problem in focus is supported. Children are encouraged to ask questions. For instance, children, their parents and teachers become involved in making of mini-museums of different countries and continents, presenting culture and nature of different parts of the world. In the passageways of one of the kindergartens there appeared mini-museums of Asian and African countries, Australia, etc. Anything can be on an exhibit: dolls, national souvenirs,

landscape pictures, seashells, and so on. The kindergarten also has a mini-museum of Russia. And the tours around the museum start with this model of world landscapes.

2.3. Kindergartens make models of natural zones, landscapes, incorporating elements of everyday national culture. Children make the models of continents and landscapes together with the adults, parents and grandparents. For instance, in one of the kindergartens in each group children and parents chose one of the continents and made its model using waste material (models of Africa, Europe, South America and Russia).

The model represented plants, animals, mountains, people in traditional clothes, and their traditional houses etc. Many models show characteristic traditional objects from different cultures. Pedagogues organized an exhibition of the models, at the time of which children and adults told their stories about what they've learned in different countries and nations. The models are used by children for role--playing games, first of all – for virtual journeys.

2.4. The project "Trees from Different Continents" is a branch of the "My Tree" project. Each group in a kindergarten chooses their own continent or country that they are most interested in. Then they find out which tree is known to be the most common for the region. For example they chose baobab for Africa, eucalypt for Australia, birch--tree for Russia, sequoia for the US, oak for Europe.Then children and adults went looking for the information about this tree (conditions in which it grows, what it looks like, what leaves and fruits it has, and so on). Then children made 3-dimensional or flat models of their tree of paper, plastic packages, wires and dry leaves. Children and adults were going through their projects watching videos about trees on different continents. Then, children learned about animals connected to the trees and the ways they use them (as a home, as food etc.).

For example, children were excited to learn that their favorite animals – the koalas – feed on eucalypt leaves, and therefore they disappear because of wood cutting. Squirrels and jays are connected to oaks because they eat acorns.

In order to understand how nature and cultural traditions of different nations are related, children and adults were discovering how these trees are used by the local people, what things are made of them (for instance, wood may be used for housing, making musical instruments; fruits may become decorations for the body etc. Many coats of arms and banners have been emblazoned by trees, and images of their leaves often decorate traditional clothes.

Preschool children listened to fairy tales about the trees. The adults helped children find out whether there were any songs and legends talking about them. Together children and adults studied paintings featuring their trees and made their own images of these trees afterwards. Thus, children started studying just one tree, but gradually advanced to understanding the nature and culture of the whole continent and also the ways in which the nature and the culture are connected.

2.5. The project "I love my planet, I want to learn about all the continents". The project went on for several months. Children, together with the pedagogue, chose some parts of the world that they were curious about. National dolls helped children to travel from continent to continent. Children were watching videos about nature, animals and plants in different countries, reading books, drawing pictures, playing games popular in other countries. Much attention was given to their own culture.

Big and small models appeared in kindergarten. When children were going north, together with their teachers they made large models of the Arctic, with ice packs, Arctic bears and seals. The models were manufactured in such a way that they could be moved to any part of

the school (musical concert hall, pool for traveling to the Arctic ocean etc.). Each kindergarten group had a model of a natural zone of that continent, which they were studying at the time, along with dolls in traditional costumes, models of traditional houses, animals, books, videos and national games. For instance, when children were learning about North America, there appeared a teepee and a figurine of an American Indian. Children made a model of the Andes mountain range (using waste material), a picture of the animals inhabiting the continent; children played North American games and learned a cowboys' dance. The group that was studying Asia had an exhibition assembled by children and their parents: Chinese dishes and lanterns, a fan, pictures of the Japanese sakura, dolls in Indian dresses, photos of famous Asian monuments, toy pandas and many other objects. Children played the same games that are played by children in Asian countries such as tangram. They made the Great Chinese Wall from a toy construction set and a jigsaw puzzle with a picture of Chinese goldfish. They also made small statuettes of snow leopard from soft dough, as well as the models of mountains, where it lives. The children read Asian fairy tales and then staged a performance based on the stories. They also learned Indian dances and some simple moves of Chinese martial arts. During the project, folk singers and dancers also visited the kindergarten classrooms. They taught children to dance and speak about traditions of hospitality. Then came the key event of the project: foreign students from the People's Friendship University of Russia come over to the kindergarten. They taught children to spell phrases in their native languages, play national instruments, prepare traditional dishes, learn folk songs and dances together with them, tell kids about nature and traditions of their home countries. We all live on one planet. So, as a conclusion to the project, all the children, parents, pedagogues, students came together during a celebration and show their national dances.

2.6. The next project to study nature and culture in different countries took a different approach. In each group children chose a country and drew pictures of its famous sites. For example: the Big Ben, the Taj Mahal, the Bolshoi Theater, a Chinese palace, and others. All models were made of different materials: paper, matchsticks, paint, straw, and such. Children studied national costumes and created mini-museums of dolls. They made models of famous buildings. For example, while studying France, children made a model of the Eiffel Tower from Lego blocks.

In the end a big performance was staged. Children presented all of the countries that they had studied. They sang national songs and dance. Every performance was accompanied by a video showing nature and culture of the country. All the nations performed together at the closing of the show.

2.7. Detailed representation of nature can be found in folklore, in traditional arts. For instance, traditional ornaments often show stylized plants and animals. Children try to copy the ornaments and make drafts for national costumes and their elements.

2.8. It is very important that the children learn about nature and culture in other countries nots something theoretical, but actually hear about them from the people of other nations. It's better when children already know these people well. As an example, today there are pedagogues of many nationalities in Russian kindergartens. One of the kindergartens asked them to tell children about their native country – Armenia, Ukraine, etc. – and prepare for them dishes of their national cuisine, taught them songs and dances from their home country. Children were really surprised to discover that their pedagogues come from such different backgrounds. At once many kids decided they wanted to go to these countries and see everything their pedagogues told them about.

Another way of introducing foreign cultures and nature to the kindergarten is to invite families of different nationalities. It is an important issue for the adaptation of these children, who may feel uncomfortable in unknown environment, and some of whom cannot speak Russian or those who are bilingual. These children, together with their parents, present their traditions, tell the other kids what they like most in their home country, bring their national dishes, play games, and sing lullabies. In one of the kindergartens we launched a project "World Lullabies", where children listened to lullaby songs from all over the world.

2.9. From the perspective of sustainable education, indigenous cultures are very interesting, with their age-long traditions of natural resources use. There are many such cultures in Russia. For example, when children were learning about the cultures of the northern indigenous people, they got acquainted with their myths and attitude towards nature. The children learned how these people used and spared natural resources, played their traditional games, studied how they survived in the harsh conditions of the North and how they built tents made of animal skins, why reindeer are so respected and why many northern tales say so much about the Sun.

2.10. It is crucial not only to introduce children to cultural and natural diversity, but to make them understand that all living creatures on Earth are a necessary part of the world (the environmental aspect), and all cultures are part of it too (the social aspect). We try to foster respect towards all cultures, which is vital for tolerance in a modern multicultural kindergarten. It is crucial to teach children to accept cultures of other people who are different from themselves and to

sympathize with them. After the disaster in Japan, pedagogues made presentations and told stories about this wonderful country, its nature and culture. The children learned how to make origami and what it is like when sakura blossoms. But more important is that they offered to do something themselves for Japanese children: they made small national dolls, which were brought to the Japanese Embassy to be given to children in Japan. In another kindergarten, children made postcards with hearts and words of compassion for the Japanese kids.

As a conclusion, I would like to emphasize one issue: it is very important that respect for other cultures and care for nature become a part of everyday life of a child. Any kind of activities can be used in order to achieve that: games, reading, music, arts, modelling etc. And the crucial thing is the example set by us: adults.

Efthymia Gourgiotou

University of Crete, Greece

Cross-cultural Assessment in Kindergarten: With Respect to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Children

ABSTRACT

To ensure the implementation of developmentally and culturally appropriate practice for researchers and educators of preschool education, is a serious issue. International literature has documented many problems associated with the use of inappropriate teaching and assessment procedures and the negative impact of their results on young children and their families, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse children. In many cases, inappropriate actions leading to an incorrect diagnosis of learning needs of these children, are overrepresented in special education.

Key words: Greek kindergartens, differentiated strategies for teaching children, alternative methods of teaching.

1. Introduction

In recent years we have seen a worldwide and increased interest in the improvement of services to preschool children, as it is now widely known that this age is critical and essential period for all-round development. Important aspects of this improvement are children's assessment and evaluation, key indicators of quality of educational work.

Implementation of developmentally and culturally appropriate practices for researchers and educators of preschool education is a serious issue. International literature has documented many problems associated with the use of inappropriate teaching and assessment procedures and the negative impact of their results on young children and their families, especially for culturally and linguistically diverse students. In many cases, inappropriate and incorrect diagnoses of learning needs result in these children's overrepresentation in special education classes. Historically, the practice of evaluation in schools has been associated with the use of psychometric tests, used as the main vehicle for referring CLD children to special and bilingual education programs. This practice has had political, social and educational applications for later school success of these children (Cummins 1984; Ambert 1991). Specifically, evaluation of foreign children abroad is institutionalized, as it takes place outside of the realm of specially trained teams of professionals such as scientists, teachers and interpreters. It also requires collaboration with the family so that observations of children in the family are possible.

Formal evaluation methods often include research tools, clinical techniques and standardized tests. Many studies in the field of bilingual education discuss how to assess learning of CLD children, focusing on the reliability of tests and the problem of translating those tests. One such test is the Scale of Basic Concepts of Braken [Braken Basic Concept Scale (BBCS) (revised – 1984)], which evaluates the development of perception in children, recruited and expressive speech and is used for referring children to bilingual educationprograms. A similar tool is the Psychoeducational Series Woodcock Johnson [Woodcock Johnson Psycho-educational Battery (WJPB) (revised-1989)], used to assess the overall development of children aged 3–16 years. It consists of separate tests for listening, reading, writing, grammar, math, social studies, science, academic knowledge and learning styles and is the most commonly used test for referring children to special education

programs. For the same purpose a test for listening and comprehension of language [Test of Auditory Comprehension of Language (TALL 1985)] with an emphasis on language skills assessment in child recruitment is used for referring children to bilingual and special education programs. Finally, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-1991) was used to evaluate various aspects of speech in foreign language speaking recruited children, enabling them to match words to pictures. The evaluation results were also used to refer children to special education programs.

Despite the widespread use of these tests, there were many specialists who judged them as unsuitable for the evaluation of CLD young children, mainly because of lack of sensitivity to socio-cultural differences and the impact of these differences on the children's learning and development.

2. The Greek context

Over the last years, the population of children in Greek kindergartens has become increasingly diverse. Until the year 2000, there were no exact data about the total amount of foreign immigrant population in our country. Only with the establishment and operation of the Institute of Education and Multicultural Education did the collection and processing of such data start. In 2007, addressed data from this Institute showed that the number of CLD students currently reaches 140.000 students, representing the 9.5% of the total student population. According to the same dataset, 8.374 of these students enrolled in kindergarten, that is a significant number of children missing from the design of educational policy.

According the Unified Interdisciplinary Cross Thematic framework of Studies and Curriculum (D.E.P.P.S.), developed by the Institute of Education (304/13-03-03), children's assessment: a) is a formative function, which evaluates both the process and the total

educational action aimed at its improvement, b) is the feedback of each child, through the progress of the group and c) enhances and promotes learning through holistic and interdisciplinary approach to knowledge (Solomon 1999; Ministry of Education-PI, 2003; Alahiotis, Karatzia-Stavlioti 2005; CIDREE, 2005). One of the basic principles of the Unified Interdisciplinary Cross Thematic framework of Studies and Curriculum (D.E.P.P.S.), is that the kindergarten should "provide opportunities to support the cultural identity and language of children" (p. 4307). "The evaluation of young children as a pedagogical practice is an on-going process, diffused during daily teaching work, formative in the ways and techniques to document and clearly geared primarily to the "feedback learning process to improve education". "The evaluation shall take into account the individual characteristics of each child, the differences in the manner and pace of learning, perceptions, desires, abilities, opportunities they have for learning in the family and social environment, their specifics, such as foreign language speaking children, children with special educational needs and special abilities and inclinations" (p. 4312).

But questions emerged about what the appropriate assessment procedures for preschool children and especially for children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are. Unfortunately it was not possible to work out and evaluate a specific methodology for the assessment of children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Until recently, children's assessment in early childhood education in our country was usually limited to empirical practice, in which kindergarten teachers expressed a value judgment on the child's progress and behaviour.

Respectively, there is no sufficient evidence (quantitative and qualitative) for the performance of foreign and repatriated pupils in Greek schools and the factors affecting them. Greek studies have indicated unsatisfactory school performance of CLD students and teachers' prejudices about them. Because of Greek's Language

insufficient knowledge, CLD students are often enrolled into classes below those which correspond with their age. Educational policy concerning this population, focuses on learning the Greek language (Greek immersion classes). Immersion simply means that students learn everything in Greek. The extreme case of this is called "sink or swim," although teachers using immersion programs generally strive to deliver lessons in simple and understandable language, which allows students to internalize Greek while experiencing the typical educational opportunities in the preschool or kindergarten curricula. The goals of Greek-only classrooms include the development of the Greek language but not the development or maintenance of the child's first language. The cultural and linguistic identity of the students focuses on their lack of knowledge of Greek and is defined as the problem to be solved. The solution, however, is not the one-way process but it involves indigenous students but only to the "problematic" and "weak" students.

The problems lie in the evaluation, due to the lack of awareness and training of teachers in cross-cultural education. The lack of awareness is also associated with the selection and use of materials and assessment tools from teachers who do not take different abilities, previous knowledge and experiences of CLD young children into consideration. Thus, teachers and administrators who work in modern schools need to develop effective approaches for all young children, but most urgently for young children from economically, linguistically, and culturally diverse backgrounds. They need to know (a) about the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children they teach, (b) how to establish relationships with families who may not speak Greek and have diverse cultural traditions, (c), specific strategies that will promote academic achievements, (d) and how to assess the abilities and learning needs of young children from non-Greek speaking and culturally diverse homes.

This paper will synthesize previous research on: (a) the impact of culture and language on early learning and assessment and (b) suggests specific research-based assessment strategies to teachers and school personnel who work with children who are from culturally, or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

3. Learning and assessment as a sociocultural and linguistic phenomenon: cross-cultural assessment

Traditionally, assessment practices for all children are based on the psychometric model, which has created the collection of standardized tools and techniques to diagnose learning and language problems. The tools and techniques which have been recently developed, consider the child as a unit responsible for the learning deficit. This view contrasts with the sociocultural approach which believes that each child is an example of diversity and complexity, and therefore the key to educational evaluation is to understand their differences, unlike their weakness of the deficit (Stefanakis 1993). Generally, the postmodern conception of evaluation (Genishi 1997) wants teachers to understand the child not "as a typical student", but as individuals with different needs, capabilities and experiences.

The purpose of cross-cultural assessment is: a) the harmonious integration of all children in the education system, b) ensuring the acceptance of children from the community, c) monitoring learning development and socialization of children, d) anticipating and addressing specific problems, e) different culture's exchange and communication between children, family and kindergarten, f) confirmation of the multicultural character of the kindergarten, and g) aims to develop skills and behaviours that can improve the conditions of communication, learning and action for all students, natives and foreigners.

The linguistic and cultural backgrounds of children profoundly affect how children learn the same knowledge, vocabulary and skills (Rogoff, Gauvain, Ellis 1984; McAflee, Leong 2002). Thus, the cultural differences which are not taken into account by teachers, can lead to erroneous perception of their development and assessment of their learning progress, and unproper planning for school success. According to Neisworth & Bagnato (1996), most assessment practices are not appropriate for these groups of children. There are key issues to be considered in view of evaluation of children from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, a difficult behaviour can be seen as learning difficulties or delays in the development of these children. It can also be explained by cultural and linguistic explanations. For example: a quiet child who prefers to play alone may indicate that it is in a preparatory phase to conquer the new language. It may also reflect the behaviour of the cultural values of respect, attention or obedience. A child displaying aggressive behaviour may reflect cultural values of autonomy, or misunderstanding of the expectations of the environment. A child who seems disorganized may reflect the lack of familiarity with concepts of space, time, stress adaptation, stress due to some family trauma or changes in family environment. A child who appears to have language learning difficulties have not only conquered the Greek language (Bergeson et al. 1999).

When it ignores the linguistic and cultural background, the impact of young children assessment is very serious. It leads to misinterpretation of their behaviour, low self-esteem of children especially if it discredits language and culture of their family, loss of good communication with parents and finally labelling children "as weak learners" and later school failure (Bergeson et al. 1999).

4. Culturally responsive curriculum

All teachers of young children spend considerable time getting to know their students, their backgrounds, their special skills and needs, and some information about their early learning and socialization environment. This is especially important when the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the teacher and children are different. While collecting information about the specific children in a classroom, it is important that teachers do not make assumptions about their cultural background, racial and ethnic generalizations about ethnic/racial groups, because it may or may not apply to any particular family or child. All proper early childhood teaching begins with finding out who the children are in order to begin communication and instruction with sensitivity and to build on the children's abilities, approaches to learning, and existing knowledge (Sanchez 1999).

By collecting relevant information about the students and families and by spending time talking with parents and other family members, early childhood teachers can better understand the meaning of the mother tongue and culture of the children in their classrooms. It is important to learn as much about the families' culture to more accurately interpret the meaning of the children's behaviour and prevent cultural stereotyping or unrealistic expectations. Culturally responsive teaching, systematically integrates the students' values, beliefs, histories, and experiences and builds curriculum around mutual respect and trust.

Culturally responsive curricula include:
- specific instructional adaptations, such as an increased wait time, explicit cues for participation, incorporation of home experiences,

- knowledge of home culture, family values, parental expectations,
- structuring small-group activities that allow for peer interactions,
- the use of materials that reflect the languages and cultures of the families,
- collaborative partnerships with families that are built on reciprocal trust and focus on the child and family's strengths.

5. Tools and forms of assessment

5.1. Classroom assessment

What kinds of assessment practices are compatible with and necessary in classrooms guided by social-constructivist views of supported learning? How does assessment fit or intrude, when students are engaged in collaborative conversations and tackle extended real-world problems? If we think of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, how might assessment insights help extend a student's current level of learning? (Shepard 2000, p. 30).

The authors of the NAEYC / NAECSD / SDE (2003) position statement, as well as most experts in the early childhood field caution against the overreliance of standardized, norm-referenced tests during the preschool years, particularly for children from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds (Duarte, Gutierrez 2004; Santos 2004; Trister-Dodge, Herman, Charles, Maiorca 2004; McLaughlin 1998;). Most of them recommend the use of alternative assessment approaches that include ongoing assessments that take into account the importance of individual background and history, while respecting the child's first language and home culture. For the purpose of improving and adjusting instruction (arguably the most important purpose of assessment), regular, ongoing assessments, usually done by the teacher within the classroom, are conducted. These, most often

are informal, non standardized procedures that include observational notes, checklists, rating scales, student work samples, and portfolios. This type of assessment information is a necessary component of quality instruction, as it provides valuable information on each child's performance that allows teachers to individualize the curriculum and address each child's unique learning needs (Espinosa 2005).

First, the substance of classroom assessments must be congruent with important learning goals. In contrast to the reductionistic and decontextualized view of subject matter knowledge produced by the scientific measurement paradigm, this means that the content of assessments must match challenging subject matter standards and be connected to contexts of application. As part of this, assessments must mirror important thinking and learning processes, especially modes of inquiry and discourse, as they are valued and practiced in the classroom (Shepard 2000, p. 31).

The purpose of assessment in classrooms must also be changed fundamentally so that it is used to help students learn and to improve instruction rather than being used only to rank students or to certify the end products of learning. By contrast, in classrooms where participation in learning is motivated by its use value, students and teachers would have a shared understanding that finding out what makes sense and what doesn't, is a joint and worthwhile project, essential to taking the next steps in learning. To serve this end, more specific principles of classroom assessment require that expectations and intermediate steps for improvement be made visible to children and that children be actively involved in evaluating their own work (Shepard 2000, p. 31).

It goes without saying, that such a view of assessment is an ideal, rarely observed in practice. In fact, efforts to pursue this vision of assessment practice must contend with the powerful belief system associated with scientific measurement and the dominant paradigm.

To be sure, all of the changes called for by the reform agenda and constructivist theory require new knowledge and profound changes in teaching practices. However, I would argue that changing assessment practices is the most difficult, because of the continued influence of external standardized tests and because most teachers have had little training beyond objective writing and familiarity with traditional item formats to help them know how to assess their students' understandings (Ellwein, Graue 1996).

The assessment in the classroom is a type of informal assessment which is led by the teacher in the classroom. Teachers bear the role of the evaluator, who is asked to choose between different modes of assessment to decide what form of evaluation is appropriate for their students. These modes of assessment involve normal everyday activities and refer to the collection of data through: a) the immediate, systematic but discreet observation of young children and documentation (Forman & Hall 2005; Martin 1996) when they play alone or in groups, b) the interviews of children, c) the collection and analysis of children's work samples (portfolio assessment), and d) the interviews of parents. In all these cases, the assessment made during the interaction between teacher and children and based on the assumption that classes are social systems within which formal teaching is nothing more than a daily activity that occurs within the kindergarten classroom (Airasian 1991). One-to-one interactions provide a more extended opportunity to hear and observe students' strategies and to have them explain their reasoning. Individual interviews also make it possible to conduct "dynamic assessments" that test (and thereby extend) what a student can do with adult support (Shepard 2000, p. 44). The information we get with the help of these tools describe what can make the children and not what they can do.

5.1.1. Observation

Observation is a powerful strategy for information gathering. It is often used for a deeper understanding of all young children. Unconscious values, assumptions and representations of our own cultural backgrounds, however, can affect the way we interpret cultures, which are not familiar to us. The observation proved a useful tool in the educational and language assessment of young children and the overall evaluation of their behaviour because they are flexible, they can record nonverbal behaviours and enable children to see how they behave and act in different environments (Stefanakis 1993; Ντολιοπούλου, Γουργιώτου, 2008).

5.1.2. Documentation

The documentation of information, collected by the teacher in a systematic way, helps to focus attention on the evaluation of the learning progress of each child, and the way in which the original assessment is associated with good teaching. There are also many ways of documentation the information we collect. The teacher is one who will judge and decide what you need to record, when and how frequently. To select the most appropriate procedure, the teacher takes into consideration the purpose of evaluation. Moreover, what they need to assess is the extent of information needed and practical difficulties. Such recording techniques are descriptive narratives and anecdotal records, notes, diagrams, photographs, recordings and video recordings (as it has ensured the parents' permission), frequency tables, rating scales, e.tc. (Ντολιοπούλου, Γουργιώτου 2008).

5.1.3. Interviews

The interviews give us an overview, describe the child's developmental background, previous education, health, family background, language patterns and current school performance. Interviews can also assist in the evaluation of self-concept and feelings

of the child, as well as skills which they have acquired (Ντολιοπούλου, Γουργιώτου 2008).

5.1.4. Portfolios

In recent years, many educators have used the term 'authentic assessment' to determine the practical one in which the same infants are involved in the evaluation of their work and efforts (Doti Ryan 1994). One of the methods of authentic assessment is to organize, analyze and evaluate the dossier (portfolio) of the child (Gronlund 1998; Grace, Shores 1991; Ντολιοπούλου, Γουργιώτου 2008). The portfolio is a depiction of the child's learning process through information which focuses on:

– What the child has learned and in which way?
– How it thinks, asks, analyses, composes, produces, creates;
– How it interacts mentally, emotionally, and socially with others?

When used in classrooms solely for teaching and learning purposes, portfolios can provide an organizing structure for teacher-student critiques and student self-reflections, thereby fostering metacognitive goals that might not be attended to if the various assignments in the portfolio if undertaken separately. Within classrooms, the relevant comparison is not whether portfolio assessments can be made as reliable and rigorously comparable as standardized measures, but whether a portfolio structure can help teachers and students become more systematic in analysing and learning from student work than would ordinarily occur as a part of instructional activities (Shepard 2000, p. 45-46). Through the construction of portfolios students set goals for learning, review their work and develop criteria for selecting particular pieces over others, learn to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their own work, and gain experience in communicating their purposes and judgments to others (Shepard 2000, p. 46).

Portfolio's contents include original works by the infant's file

operations (drawings, paintings, handicrafts, writing samples, constructions) – that make sense-observations – recordings of the teacher, occasional notes, developmental scales, recording narratives of children, pictures, printouts from computer work, etc., and information from parents or other teachers (Cook 2001; Ντολιοπούλου, Γουργιώτου 2008). A child's portfolio must be accompanied by the name, age, address, class, school year, the date of execution of work to the teacher to monitor changes in its development, and the title or a brief description of the work, the reasons why the working sample is an important observation. All entries to the file ought to be arranged by category and in chronological order.

The criteria which are used by the teacher to choose the material to be included in the child's portfolio, ought to be associated with the information it gives to the development of children, the decisions that need to get the teacher to intervene in the educational process and understanding the evolution of the children themselves.

Duschl and Gitomer (1997) sought to create what they call a portfolio culture in classrooms by using portfolio assignments and negotiated criteria to engage in "assessment conversations." Through such conversations teachers find out what students know; students gain experience with processes of scientific explanation, argument, and presentation, and students learn to apply standards of scientific plausibility. Portfolios are a vehicle for conceptualizing and structuring these classroom interactions (Shepard 2000, p. 46).

6. The involvement of parents: the key to a successful evaluation

Modern educational research focuses on the involvement of parents in the learning process and evaluation of their children (Wolfendal 1998; Katz, Swann 1998). An important step in evaluating these children is to understand the family context in which the

family lives. This is because the parents know much more about your child than anyone else, because teachers have only an overview of its development. Several factors affect how a child develops and learns. For example, the child's health, temperament, daily family life, family values, beliefs and traditions affect the way in which the child is playing, moving, eating, talking, listening and growing and how he 'organizes' the experiences. All these elements differ across cultures. These data provide useful information to be shared by parents with the teacher. For this reason, it is important for parents to know their role in learning and assessment of children in advance.

6.1. Before the evaluation

At this stage teachers aimed to:

a) obtain information about a CLD student's language and cultural background as well as the learning and/or behaviour problem,

b) determine if any obvious external contexts (e.g., lack of instruction, socioeconomic, and/or linguistic and cultural differences) explain a student's learning or behaviour difficulties,

c) document student's performance with the use of pre-referral interventions,

d) determine student's needs and the extent to which these needs can be met by existing programs and services.

Before trying to decode and analyse a child's overall profile whose culture and language is unfamiliar, it is necessary to identify the key parameters that determine communication with the family (see table 1).

Table1. Key parameters that determine communication with the family

1. What are formal and informal support sources of the family out of the school?
2. What other services, experts and individuals can help us understand the child and the culture of its family?
3. Do we have sufficient information on the acquisition of language and the progress in knowledge and experience of the child's parents? Do we need an interpreter or do we need to translate documents?
4. Do we determine the level of knowledge and literacy of parents in both languages at home (mother) and the Greek language? Are we confident that the written comments we give to parents and the ways we communicate with them are clearly understood?
5. Does the family understand the developmental concepts for the child's progress? Will a possible reference to special services be an unexpected surprise?
6. What sources do I need? What else should I account to get the best decision about whether to refer this child to a school for special education (Bergeson et al. 1999)?

During the first meeting with parents, teachers ask them to complete a questionnaire or start a sort of discussion concerning the child's interests and personality. Table 2 provides a sample parent interview that may help us gather information about the family background, child-rearing customs, and language usage. It is offered as a suggested tool for beginning a conversation with families about their values and preferences. Through these ongoing dialogues with parents and families, we can begin to appreciate the unique talents, personalities, and potential of the children we educate (Espinosa, 2005).

In each case, working with parents to assess children, should positively reinforce the relationship between parents and their children. In no case should it destabilize their confidence connected with the children and their abilities, nor should it depreciate the language and the culture of the family.

Table 2. Family Interview Questions

1. Who are the members of your family?
2. How old is your child?
3. Who is the primary caregiver of your child?
4. What language did your child learn when he or she first began to talk?
5. What language does your child hear most frequently at home?
6. What language does your child speak most frequently at home?
7. What special talents or interests does your child have?
8. What is your child's strongest language?
9. Who does your child play with most often?
10. What are your aspirations for your child?
11. What are your expectations from your child's school?
12. Do you have any hobbies or interests that you would like to share with your child's class?

6.2. During the evaluation

The teacher must inform parents and children about their purposes and assessment procedures. They should involve the child in their personal development, as well as the cultural and meaningful learning experiences. The teacher should give children culturally appropriate materials and activities (illustrated stories, musical sounds, mobile game, figurative material, etc.). The teacher should inform about the cultural differences related to the ways of communication, which can affect the response of children to instructional strategies. The teacher should also adopt necessary non-verbal teaching strategies, especially when the child has difficulty speaking the Greek language.

6.3. After the evaluation

The teacher must inform parents and children about the purpose and assessment procedures and involve the child in development and culturally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences. They

should give the children culturally appropriate materials and activities (illustrated stories, musical sounds, mobile game, figurative material, etc.). They should inform about the cultural differences related to the ways of communication, which can affect the response of children to instructional strategies. They should also adopt, where appropriate, non-verbal teaching strategies especially when the child has difficulty speaking the Greek language.

Particular attention should be paid to the fact of a possible referral of these children in special schools. The affirmative [Yes] answer to any of the following three questions is the cause for possible referral to special services:

1. Is there a testimony to recognized developmental delay or disability? (for example, cerebral palsy, hydrocephalus syndrome, Down syndrome).
2. Does the child have any difficulty to communicate effectively with the members of its family or the wider cultural community, in relation to their peers?
3. Does the child fail to make progress in learning Greek, although he is given sufficient opportunities to learn than their peers who also learn Greek?

6.4. How commune results in the child's family?

The aim of the meetings organized by the teacher with the child's parents should be informing them about the assessment. The meeting should also be characterized by mutual trust and objectivity in order to target effective communication. The kindergarten teacher must understand the concerns of each family and should focus on solutions to problems which have arisen rather than the causes that have created them.

7. Conclusions-Suggestions

In a multicultural classroom, attended by children from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the teacher must create and implement evaluative procedures that allow students to demonstrate their knowledge through culturally sensitive assessment methods that take into account their cultural origins (Thousand, Villa, Nevin 2007, p. 81). In such a case, the evaluation must involve procedures, techniques and tools, appropriate to assess skills of children under the influence of socio-cultural and linguistic factors, discreetly and without prejudice from the part of teachers (Flores, Lopez, De Leon 2000). Thus, we are talking about the culture of evaluation, seen as a sociocultural phenomenon that recognizes the complexity, scope and diversity in language and culture of each school population.

It makes sense that as educators we cannot know the standards, values and beliefs of all cultures and all languages that we have within our schools. Nonetheless, we can be aware of their existence and treat them with sensitivity and respect. Similarly, we have no special assessments which will cover all the skills of a child. In these cases, integration of cross-cultural education in the overall evaluation process is an imperative. Cross-cultural ratings upgrade their cultures and languages, fighting alongside any type of racism, and enhance the resistance of children to the categorization of people and passive assimilation.

A differentiating and socially less biased evaluation leads to the transformation of the child's perception about the world and their actions in it, the social-constructivist model of teaching and learning and the way of access of various social groups in kindergarten. It changes the status of kindergarten as an institution and ultimately changes the evolution of society.

To support the social-constructivist model of teaching and learning, classroom assessment must change in two fundamentally

important ways. First, its form and content must be changed to better represent important thinking and problem-solving skills in each of the disciplines. This means assessing learning based on observations, oral questioning, significant tasks, projects, demonstrations, collections of student work, and students' self-evaluations, and it means that teachers must engage in systematic analysis of the available evidence. Second, the way that assessment is used in classrooms and how it is perceived by teachers and students must change. This, literally calls for a change in the culture of classrooms so that students and teachers should collaborate in assessing prior knowledge, probing apparent misconceptions, and resolving areas of confusion because it is agreed that such assessments will help students understand better. Students should engage in self assessment not only to take responsibility for their own learning but to develop metacognitive skills by learning to apply the standards that define quality work in a field to their own work (Shepard 2000, p. 66-67). Similarly, teachers should demonstrate their own willingness to learn use assessment: a) free of any cultural influence (culture-free assessment): the teacher evaluates the student's progress in reliance on information not related to culture in general, b) determined by the non-dominant student culture (culture specific assessment): the teacher assesses their knowledge, abilities and skills of the student taking into account the non-dominant culture of the student, c) plural (pluralistic assessment): the teacher in the assessment must take into account the coexistence of two or more cultures in a classroom and enhances diversity, d) characterized by dynamic (dynamic assessment): the teacher uses formative assessment to gather information about teaching design, that the student acquire the necessary skills (Thomas, Correa, Morsink 1995 in Thousand et al., 2007, p. 81). Finally, it is important for teachers of young children to become cross-culturally competent, to develop "the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build upon ethnic, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity" (Lynch,

Hanson 2004, p. 50).

For these reasons, future directions in cross-cultural assessment in accordance with the Suzuki and colleagues (2001) should include: a) introducing courses in intercultural assessment training programs and education psychology, b) continued development of alternative tools and assessment procedures, c) awareness on issues of equity and cultural differences in understanding the psychological and educational structures,, d) cooperation with members of racial and ethnic communities, and e) the attention and awareness on the use of specialized tools for different populations.

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Xiaoping Yang,
Shanan Wang
College of Education, Southwest University, Chong Qing, China

Development of Kindergarten Multicultural Curriculum Resources in Tujia Region Southeast of Chong Qing – Case Study

ABSTRACT

Development of multicultural curriculum is an important aspect of the multicultural education and inevitably a choice for preschool education in the minority areas of our country. Focusing on the development of multicultural curriculum resources in the minority areas, this study examined multicultural curriculum resources utilization of a kindergarten program in Tujia's as a case to investigate and analyse. There were multiple methods of data collection and analysis applied in this project. Those included: documentation, analysis, interviews, observations and others. The research found that: the orientation of the curriculum utilization goals is undefined and that the selection of curriculum utilization contents and approaches of curriculum utilization are unitary. Based on the interpretative understandings in case study and relevant theory, this thesis reflects the condition of kindergarten multicultural curriculum in one of China's minority areas from contents selection and approaches of curriculum utilization, and proposes some suggestions about setting up multicultural ideas. Clarifying goals setting, enriching curriculum utilization contents and expanding approaches of curriculum utilization are also proposed in this thesis.

Key words: the culture of Tujia nationality, multicultural curriculum, development of curriculum resources.

1. Need for the study

Multicultural education has been gaining in popularity in recent years. The concept can be dated as an international movement since 1960s and 1970s, and has developed into an educational idea in the past century in the West (黄政杰.多元课程取向[M].台北：师大书苑出版公司，1998， p.97-125). Multicultural curriculum is an important approach to multicultural education and inevitably a choice for preschool education in the minority areas of our country. Preschool education is a very important part of basic education and multicultural education in kindergarten could help more children know about the diversity of culture more deeply in their early childhood.

In view of these ideas, this research took Kindergarten A in Tujia Region Southeast of Chong Qing as an example. The authors investigated the present condition of development of multicultural curriculum resources for Kindergarten A and proposed some suggestions for multicultural curriculum resources utilization in China.

2. Method

The methodology in this research is the case study. The case study approach is a "detailed examination of a single person, group, institution, social movement, or event"(Thomas and Brubaker 2000, p. 103). Robert Stake reminded that "the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others

but what it is, what it does" (Stake 1995, p. 8). He adds that "good research is not about good methods as it is about good thinking" (Stake 1995, p. 19).

Kindergarten A is the only public kindergarten level in the county, founded in the 1950s in China. 70% of the staff are minorities (Mainly Tujia), and more than 65% of children are minorities (Mainly Tujia). Kindergarten A program has been doing very well in multicultural curriculum resource development compared to other kindergartens in the county. That was the reason why the authors took Kindergarten A as the example for this research.

The particular case study approaches adopted by the authors focus on Kindergarten A are shown below:

2.1.Document analysis

A review of preschool policy documents and pedagogical documentation was done in the beginning of this research.

2.2. Interview

Interviews with teachers and principals in Kindergarten A were conducted to understand the value orientation on multicultural curriculum and impacting factors of making multicultural curriculum resources utilization on objectives, contents, and implementation approaches in the program.

2.3. Observation

The contents of interviews could be verified by observing the multicultural curriculum resource utilization in Kindergarten A.

3. Research results

3.1. The goals of curriculum utilization

3.1.1. Teachers' understanding of the multicultural curriculum resource utilization

The teachers' understanding of the multicultural curriculum resource utilization mainly referred to teachers' understanding of the concept of multicultural curriculum, multicultural education and curriculum resource utilization. The authors found that most of the teachers had heard about those concepts, but they did not understand them. The following interview recordings with teachers could confirm this point:

I think multicultural education is a kind of education that combines many aspects of a cultural and educational (Teacher A3).

For these concepts, I basically understood it. Multicultural education is ... for example ... is a kind of multimedia, audio-visual things, right? (Teacher A4).

3.1.2. Value orientation of the curriculum utilization goals

The value orientation of the curriculum utilization goals means the tendentious awareness of kindergarten teachers on the value and significance of multicultural curriculum in the process of promoting early childhood development. The authors found that most kindergarten teachers had their tendentious awareness of the curriculum utilization goals, although most of them were not very understanding of the knowledge of multicultural education or multicultural curriculum. The survey showed that most teachers tended to think that the main objective of multicultural curriculum utilizationwas to meet the multicultural needs of local ethnic minority children. The following are some interviews with teachers.

I think that there is a great necessity to develop a multicultural curriculum Our government also attaches great importance to maintenance and heritage of the Tujia culture.

As a minority, I think we should be teaching more traditional cultures of their own nation and be considerate of the heritage of the children, so as not to let children be assimilated by Han or Western cultures (Teacher A3).

I think the development of minority cultures has to have its distinguishing features. If a person is too strange to his or her own culture, I always feel that it is not conducive to personal development. So I think it is necessary to utilize the curriculum (Principal B2).

3.2. Contents of the curriculum resources

The contents of the curriculum resources are directly related to the achievement of the goals of multicultural curriculum resource utilization, meanwhile it also restricts the concrete ways of curriculum resources utilization to a large extent.

The survey found: the contents of the multicultural curriculum resource at Kindergarten A was divided into two aspects: one was the textbook, and the other were the regional cultural resources.

3.2.1. Multicultural curriculum resource utilization from the textbook

After interviewing teachers from Kindergarten A, the authors found that the selection of curriculum utilization contents from textbooks was unitary. Most of the teachers turned to thematic activity "Our Home", which is one of the topics in the textbook, when the authors asked them to introduce their example of curriculum utilization.

"Our Home" is a topic in the textbook published by the authors of this text and so, the textbook was used to introduced some customs of Tujia to the participating in the study students through books, pictures and other similar materials (Teacher A6).

3.2.2. Multicultural curriculum resource utilization from regional culture perspective

After interviewing teachers from Kindergarten A, the authors collected and borrowed teachers' lesson plans, activity designs and activities records. The authors found that there were many curriculum contents which reflected the local Tujia culture outside of textbook. Additionally, through the observation of class activities the authors found that Kindergarten A curriculum contained the contents that reflected the ethnic minority culture. The following are some interviews with teachers which can confirm this point:

Tujia Bai Shou Dance is unique dance in here, so we will teach children Bai Shou Dance in art activities. In addition, we let the children enjoy the traditional music of Tujia, such as Tujia folk songs, Tujia children's songs. We also collect many Tujia folk games and we publish them in brochures (Teacher A3).

Kindergarten A curriculum resource utilization from regional cultures was focused on the following aspects:

Table 1. Curriculum resource from regional cultures

Curriculum Fields	Cultural resources of Tujia
Health	Diet; Folk sports; Folk games
Literature	Folk Literature (Poem; Legend; Folk Songs)
Social Study	Traditional festivals; Traditional etiquette
Science	Natural landscape in region of Tujia
Art	Folk art (Folk songs and instrumental music), Craft culture (Embroidery; Picture-weaving in silk; Bamboo weaving)

After interviews and observations, the authors found that the development of regional cultural curriculum resources was more abundant and that it was related to most types of Tujia culture. The regional culture resources also penetrated into the kindergarten curriculum areas but because teachers were allowed a certain degree of arbitrariness in the developing process their efforts resulted in incomplete system.

3.3. Approaches to curriculum utilization

After investigation, the authors found that there were two approaches to curriculum utilization in kindergarten A.

3.3.1. The development of the kindergarten curriculum resources

The development of the kindergarten curriculum resources mainly referred to the development of multicultural curriculum resources from textbook. Textbooks were always the main source of the Kindergarten A multicultural curriculum.

3.3.2. The development of the curriculum resources outside of kindergarten

The development of the curriculum resources outside of kindergarten mainly referred to development of curriculum resources from regional cultures. The following are some excerpts from interviews with participating in the study teachers that could confirmed this point:

There is a folk street in our city where children can learn more traditional Tujia culture. We take children to visit the folk street and participate in the tour, so that the children can experience the Tujia culture. Only by allowing the children personal experience, they can really absorb the traditional Tujia culture (Teacher A3).

Beside spring outing, kindergarten teachers used networks, books and other resources to develop regional cultural curriculum resources.

Through interviews with Principal B2, the authors knew that the most special Tujia characteristics of activities in Kindergarten A were the morning exercises called Baishou Dance. Thanks to the principal's permission, the authors observed the morning exercises which took advantage of the Tujia traditional music. The authors found that the basic movements of the morning exercises were mainly dedicated to the dance choreographed by the county in order to promote Baishou Dance. Some adjustments done to the dance based on the physical and mental development of children's characteristics could also be observed.

4. Discussion

Based on the current situation of multi-cultural curriculum resources of Kindergarten A, the following suggestions have been developed:

4.1. Certifying the aims of multi-cultural curriculum resources

First of all, teachers' understanding on multi-culture, multi--cultural curriculum and multi-cultural curriculum resources should be enhanced. Kindergarten teachers could have trained and lectured on the multicultural themes and they also did many practical studies on these themes during daily work. The authors observed that the teachers' theories and abilities on development multi-cultural curriculum resource could be improved.

After that, the value orientation of multi-cultural curricular resources for development and implementation in Kindergarten should be cleared. It is not only making children know their own national history and national cultural characteristics shape heritage and develop the Tujia culture, but also questioning both children and Tujia culture to develop the multi-cultural curricula as answers to the needs of the community. Therefore, teachers in kindergarten

A have to understand the cultural needs of ethnic minority children and to set aims of kindergarten multi-cultural curriculum resource development which are suitable for local minority children's development.

4.2. Enriching the contents of multi-cultural curriculum resource

Enriching the contents of multi-cultural curriculum resource is a progress of excavating, externalizing and integrating. The authors believe that kindergarten A should be improved in these areas:

4.2.1. Developing community resource

As multi-cultural curriculum resource development is a complicated process, external support is needed. Many kinds of community resources could be used in kindergarten. For example, staffs of local cultural center and folk artists could be invited to give speeches and performances in kindergarten classrooms. In this way, teachers could gain a better understanding of minority culture and local cultural resources, and children could also develop more interests in national culture.

4.2.2. Systematization of the multi-cultural curriculum resources

Systematization of the multi-cultural performance has two aspects: systematization of the subject and systematization of the content. Systematization of the subject means that teachers, researchers and other experts participate in the curriculum development process systematically and conditionally. Systematization of content refers to all contents of multi-cultural curriculum resources constituting an organic whole. The process of multi-cultural curriculum development should be methodical. That is to say, every kind of content is an integral part of multi-cultural curriculum resource which forms a huge network structure of it at the end.

4.3. Increasing the methods of multi-cultural curriculum resource

4.3.1. Developing kindergarten-based multi-cultural curriculum

Developing kindergarten-based Tujia cultural curriculum could help kindergarten A highlight their own characteristics. The premise of kindergarten-based curriculum developmentis that the curriculum decision-making power is owned by kindergarten A itself. After that, during development process, all suggestions from children, parents, teachers, experts and also community should be considered. Then, respecting children's nature is important as well.

4.3.2. Founding multi-cultural curriculum resource database

There are a lot of different ways to develop multi-cultural curriculum. To have a better communication between teachers and kindergarten students, and a better use of all kinds of resources, it is quite necessary to establish a multi-cultural curriculum resource database. Styles of curriculum resources, names of resources, authors, obtaining, advantages and disadvantages of resources, and dynamic development are all published and managed in the database.

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Anna Klim-Klimaszewska,
Ewa Jagiełło

University of Natural Sciences and Humanities in Siedlce, Poland

Assistance in Development of a Child at the Pre-school Age Through Stories and Fairy-tales

ABSTRACT

The text was draws attention on the stimulating character of stories and fairy-tales in the development of a child, evolving and forming his personality. Moreover, it refers to their role as a guide in cognition of the world. It shows stories and fairy-tales as tools in a teacher's hands facilitating passing on knowledge. The article finishes with scripts presenting utilization stories and fairy-tales in children's group.

Key words: fair-tales, development of child, stimulation of development.

The authors of this text highlight the stimulating nature of fairy tales and fables in the development of a small human, as well as developing and shaping the personality of the child. In addition, reference was made to their role as a guide in understanding the world. Specified tales and fairy tales have been shown as important tools in the hands of the teacher to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. At the end of the text, there are scenarios illustrating the use of fairy tales and fables in a specific age group of early childhood.

A child, while observing the world, recognizes the rules and laws existing within it. This internal activity is a child's inborn feature. Through analysis of observed people's behaviours, a child discovers regularities and rules compulsory in common relationships. A child also learns to develop a constructive attitude towards problems and self-independence. To deepen this knowledge, family and public institutions, in which child's educational processes take place, become sources of support. One of such places is a kindergarten classroom, in which a young person shapes his or her personality and thus enlarges a chance of gaining success at school and in later life. Teachers hand down certain amounts of knowledge through reading stories such as fairy-tales and legends. Small children, who cannot read yet, touch pictures and elaborate their own beliefs from the surrounding environment. Fairy-tales influence children's development from the early age. However, in the first period apart from the plot of the story, assistance of a teacher or parent seems to be crucial, his/her intimacy, physical contact, timbre of voice and all the complexity of situation, which accompanies the guardian (Och 2003).

Cognitive development of a child is submitted to socialization and bringing up not only in the family but also in bigger, school and social groups. A child gets to learn about the world through actual operations. He or she uses magical thinking and looks for simple cause and effect associations. Fairy-tales also introduce the child to the world of plants and animals, together with their typical features and faults. Owning to them, a child begins to perceive human behavior and its consequences. Moreover, a child learns what virtues and characteristics are valuable by watching who is rewarded and who is punished, and why. A child acquires such ideas as good, evil, justice, love, friendship among others. He or she learns sensitivity, social behavior, as well as empathy due to the experiencing of all the events together with the heroes of the stories (Stefańska-Klar 2003).

Through listening, then reading stories or fairy-tales, a child desires to transform the new-known world into reality. Thus, a young human being expresses these desires in games, playing the scenes and adventures from the book (text) or inventing new adventures. Moreover, he or she wants to show the world through artistic expressions such as: painting of heroes, events and things existing there. Fairy-tales and stories are univocally associated with children, because it is commonly known that at this stage of development, small human beings learn the reality through an imaginary world, created for them to fulfill their needs and possibilities. If we look at this issue with more attention, it is possible to observe and realize that stories accompany us throughout our whole lives. Fairy-tales help to escape from everyday, often very brutal reality for a while and forget about problems. The atmosphere created by stories allows even adults to escape to the world of fantasy.

A fairy-tale is a piece of work, which develops and shapes a child's personality. A child gets to know the world through the plot in a story as he or she experiences existence in different environments. What is more, he or she gets acquainted with goals that a human wants to achieve, acquires the sense of existence, learns how to behave, gets to know the moral values which are expected and rewarded. Fairy-tales show the reality and encourage readers to get to know it. One of the most important roles of stories is to develop imagination (Molicka 1999).

According to Wincenty Okoń, a fairy-tale is: "a story with a plot based on fantasy: imagination, tradition or legend. A fairy-tale is the result of a folklore output or very often the effect of writing by great writers. It is reflected in works of J. Ch. Andersen, the Grimm brothers, S. Lagerlof, L. Carroll and in Disney's films. A fairy tale attracts particularly children of five to six years of age, it encourages their development, emotional life, shapes a sense of justice, enables

to discover the world. Owning to a story, children consolidate their beliefs concerning the features of the real world" (Okoń 2004, p. 41).

A fairy-tale is a basic form of oral folk work, allegory tale, often from the world of animals, with satirical- didactic character. A story is one of basic types of folk literary works, it strengthens folk beliefs of human relationships, presents ideals of good and evil, as well as criteria for human behavior assessment (Molicka 2002).

A tale mixes elements of real and fictional worlds. It also creates a poetic vision. Such forms of stories as lullabies, rhymed tales involving moral or not, folk tales and most of all stories handed down from generation to generation, allow a child to open to the world, other people and inner self. Stories help to overcome the fear of difference. Calm and regular rhythm of words, harmony and pictures appearing in a child's imagination, help a small human to release inferiority complex and traumas at school which adults and children do not realize. Moreover, contact with literary works enables to build proper relations between children and parents, teachers and, generally within the society. Literature for children enables the readers to understand such complicated issues as sense of life and temporary pain. It positively influences emotional and social development of a young reader(Baluch 2004, Kołek, Paszkowicz 2004).

Frequent and regular contact with literature is very essential for shaping psychical processes. Children who often listen to or read literary works, develop the process of thinking, remembering, perception and imagination. A child feels self-confident, competent and he or she develops good reading habits. The young person is not afraid of contact with the world: at school they would speak up and participate in other class activities bravely. From books, a child gets to know the world which he or she has not experienced yet. For example: a child from the city can learn about the conditions of living in the country. A small human being gets to know history, other

cultures, and learns how to appreciate the beauty of nature described in literary texts. Reading and listening to stories broaden a child's world (Ratyńska 1976).

Through reading or listening to fairy-tales, fables or stories children may transform their desires into reality. These desires are often expressed in games a child plays, presented as adventures from a book or invented and made up as new adventures. A young person wants to present himself or herself to the world through artistic expression, such as painting heroes, events or items existing in his or her surroundings. It can be said that literature generally supports artistic development among children. Even in the era of general globalization, we cannot doubt that patriotism is a desired value. Our Polish literature is rich in works stimulating love of the country and respect for national symbols. Nowadays, literature can pass love towards own country because of the Polish participation in the European Union. It is widely common that such notions as national awareness, pride and love are disappearing. Moreover, books show desirable systems of values, which cannot always be taken from the family home. From books, a small child can get to know such values as God, honors and mother land. Literature brings up in patriotism and passes on a good system of values.

A classic tale tells about important and mature issues in an easy way. It shows a sense of life, simultaneously solves moral dilemmas, reveals ways how to cope with difficult situations, helps children to get to know their own feelings. A tale reaches for emotions and hidden fears, allows to experience them and get used to them. Through symbolic pictures, it leads to maturity step by step. Heroes of tales, actively overcome difficulties and problems, they are determined, patient, dedicated and they know where to find help and how to use somebody's advice.

Tales teach how to cope in difficult life situations Existential dilemmas are shown in a simple and brief way to understand them easily. Heroes from tales represent a certain type: good or bad. Evil is not deprived of attractiveness, but a positive hero is much more attractive and this is why a child takes from it the moral rules. Moreover, in tales there are masculine and feminine characters presented; owning to this, a child learns social roles and discovers the place in a social system.

A tale plays an important role in children's emotional development. Different situations from real life are involved in fairy adventures. A child identifies with the main heroes, a companion on a trip, so a small human experiences joy, fear, sadness or pain. Together with the heroes, children meet new people, face enemies, undertake challenges, relax and play. Due to such identification, a child knows a new group of emotions, feelings and attitudes. A person learns social behavior accepted or rejected, from expressing emotions, ways of responding to difficult situations to fulfill needs.

A tale stimulates children's moral sensitivity, shows a pattern to imitate. It can also have an influence on shaping personality and inner being. Literature for children, taking into consideration young reader's psyche, enables to shape children's creative and active attitude which is shown in output and input expression. All this, comprises children's emotions and experiences.

Speech and thinking are two processes strictly connected with each other. A proper level of speech development among children enables to speak, make simple mental operations, create proper and understandable utterances. This is why all the activities concerning development of speech always have an activating character (Saba 2004).

Through listening to tales, a child at the pre-school age imagines situations, associates facts and creates logical whole, identifies with

heroes and assesses their behavior. While listening to literature read by a teacher, children have a chance to imitate and enrich vocabulary. They ask questions after listening to the story, assess if the story was interesting, they also play it in games or use for artistic work. After some time, a child listening to stories, enriches vocabulary and then starts to use it. A book is not only beautiful pictures and covers, but also an interesting text which children like to listen.

The most proper way of expression of the plot is a story. If we want to assess the importance of expressing the plot of a book we can state that:

- telling children's literature stories influences on improvement in speech because they are a pattern of the literary language, enrich vocabulary, have an impact on suggestiveness of speech,
- it visibly contributes to development of imagination, focusing of concentration,
- enriches children's knowledge,
- influences on shaping feelings and social-moral attitudes, aesthetic and intellectual ones (Dudzińska 1977).

Below, we present some suggestions of methodological solutions for applying fairy-tales and stories in pre-school education.

Script Number 1. The Subject: Fairy-tale world

General goal: interest children in a fairy-tale, children's literature
Objectives:

- a child can explain what is a fairy tale,
- mentions the titles of well-known fairy-tales,
- is able to distinguish positive and negative characters,
- imitates movements and gestures according to music,
- can keep within the outline of a picture while painting of heroes from fairy-tales with crayons.

Methods:

    Active: the method of individual experience, the method of given tasks, the method of exercising.

    Verbal: natural conversation.

    Visual:

    Active: brainstorm.

Didactic tools:

    pictures, envelopes, crayons, CD record, accessories.

    The course of the classes:

1. Brainstorm: What is fairy tale?
2. Active game entitled "Ball in a Castle".
3. Imitating of movements and gestures according to presented melody. Children combine in pairs, every pair welcome the queen and the king.
4. Music-movement dame entitled "Wolves and a Hare".

The king and the queen invite all participants to a game. Imitation of movements, gestures according to given melody and singing of the words of the song. Children stand in pairs in a circle. The person in front of the group is the HARE, behind it stands a WOLF which holds it. The WOLF pulls the HARE 4 steps back, the HARE stands behind it and claps 4 times in it's hands. During the chorus the WOLF catches the HARE'S hand and clap 4 times. In repetition of the chorus the change of the direction.

> I have, have, have a hare
> No, no, you can't manage
> I will go farther, don't seek for a quarrel
> Let's play cheerfully and dance around
> Don't let seek for a quarrel
> Even it we are a wolf and a hare.

1. "A Box full of Fairy-tale Treasure"

Children have to guess what fairy-tale the accessories put out of the box come from and put them below the picture of the proper tale.

2. Game entitled "Fare way with a Ball" (3 minutes of movement J. Blasius)

Children stand in this way to all of them could look at the middle of the circle through straightened legs and wink their eyes at everybody. We will turn around in this place two times and now we will stand on our toes. We will look back through our legs and now we will come back to the class-room from the ball.

3. Preparation of posters

Children get patterns of heroes from tales and paint them with crayons.

Script number 2. The subject: In the world of fairy-tales and stories

General goal: presentation of knowledge concerning well-known fairy-tales in cooperation with other children, improvement of skills in process of thinking.

Objectives: a child:

– cooperates with other children in task situations,

– can speak about chosen tales.

Methods:

natural conversation, pedagogics of game, movement activity

Forms:

individual, group

Didactic tools:

an animating shawl, a letter from a fairy, envelopes with description of tasks for children, pictures to a fairy-tale "Snow White" + pictures from other 3 tales; illustrative idea

presenting the heroes of fairy-takes: "Cinderella", "Little Red Riding Hood", "Hansel and Gretel", "A Little Mermaid", "Beauty and the Beast", glue, brushes, sheets of paper to stick puzzles; flowers cut from paper for every child, card of work for every child, cards with pictures from tales, CD record with excerpts from tales, music records.

The course of the classes:

1. "All who..." – game to welcome with an animating shawl

Teacher: It's nice to welcome all children. Today I would like to invite you to "the World of Fairy-tales". However, before going to this journey, I would like to check your fairy-tale preferences. I ask you to grab in hands our colored shawl.

Children: Stand in a circle holding in hands the animating shawl.

Teacher: Now, Children, who know the fairy-tales change the place and pass under the shawl. The children, who like to listen to fairy-tales change the place and go right. The children, who know various heroes of the tales change the plan and go left. The children, who like to create their own tales, sit down on the shawl. Now, the children, who like books, sit down around the shawl.

Children: Perform the teacher's instructions.

2. "Invitation to the World of Fairy-tales" – introduction into the subject of the class

Teacher: I think, I have heard somebody behind the door. Wait here for a while – I will check who it is. Unfortunately, I haven't met anybody, but I've found an envelope which is addressed to you. Let's check what is inside (the teacher reads the letters).

Hello!

I'm a tale fair and I'm coming to you from "the World of Fairy--Tales" where:

A tale is coming around the world in fairy clothes. Look carefully-maybe you know it...? On the land of fairy tales, where I came from,

a big disaster hit. A bad wizard Kadabra coursed it. In the fairy land everything has been jumbled. Now, nobody knows in which fairy tales lives and can't come back to it. This is awful and sad, but there is a piece of advice. You can help our heroes because you know all the tales very well. Do you want to help to remove the course from the fairy land? If yes, you must do all the tasks of bad Kadabra. I'll give you the envelope, in which the bad wizard has hidden the tasks. To do them, I must divide you into teams. I wish you good luck (Children are divided into groups).

3. "Snow White"– showing the plot of the pair-tale through illustrated picture story

Teacher: If you want to know what is the name of the first fairy hero who needs your help, you must solve the puzzle:

A step mother chased away her to the dark wood there she has found the little people and her prince (Snow White) (Children give the solution).

Teacher: Yes, this is Snow White. I think now I can already open the first envelope with the task from the wizard Kadabra.

TASK 1

I have prepared envelopes for you, there are pictures presenting different takes in them. Your task is to choose only these one which present the fairy tail entitles "Snow White" and put them in the proper order. If you manage to do this task the Snow White will come back to her tale.

Children: Choose suitable pictures and put them in the proper order.

Teacher: All teams have done this task well. Now look at the pictures from the story and raise the picture which shows:

– a hunter,

– a little person, a cat, a rabbit,

– a squirrel

Children: The Children point the pictures and say the name of the animals loudly.

4. "Merry Little People" – activity game

Teacher: You have managed to do the first task very well. I think, the Snow White will be able to come back to her friends and spend the nice time together. I'm not sure if you have heard. The most favorite game of little people and Snow White is a game of imitation. I think we will cheer up our fairy friends if we complain the game. Everyone of you, please go into the middle of our circle and show an activity to imitate. During our game you will hear a song.

Children: Children enter the circle are by one and show exercises or activities which are done by the rest of the children.

5. "Fairy puzzles" – putting together parts of the pictures cut into pieces

Teacher: I think, it's time to do the next task from the wizard Kadabra. Take places in your teams, please.

TASK 2

In a moment you will receive envelopes with puzzles showing heroes of well-known fairy-tales. You will help them come back to their fairy world. To do this, combine the certain parts into one, but don't talk loudly not to betray your hero. Why? You will get known while preparing to the next task.

6. "Guess who is this" ? – mime puzzles

Teacher: Now, when your puzzles are put together, I can open the next envelope with the task from the wizard.

TASK 3

If you want the fairy heroes from your puzzles could come back to their fairy countries, you must present your person through movements, gestures and mimicry without saying nothing. (Every team one by one presents their fairy-tale which is presented in the puzzles.)

7. "fairy Butterfly Dance" – activity game improving fast reaction to pause in music

Teacher: You have manages perfectly with the task. Let's do the next one. Before I read the task, I ask you to listen to the riddle carefully. When you solve it, you will get known the next activity.

> A small like a finger in of rose slept
> One day a frog kidnapped her
> Do you know the girl's name?
> (*Thumbelina*)

(Children say the solution of the puzzle.)

Teacher: Yes, it is Thumbelina and with this person the next task from the wizard is connected. Listen what to do to help Thumbelina come back to her tale.

TASK 4

Thumbelina will come back to her fairy-tale if you perform butterfly dance. However, you must be very careful because when the music will disappear, you must sit down on one of the flowers.

(Children take part in a game.)

8."Who lost these items"? – classifying task

Teacher: Well done. The next fairy hero could come back to her country.

9. Summary of the classes and children's activeness assessment

Teacher: The wizard Kadabre has already let all the heroes come back to their tales but he would like to ensure if you are excellent fairy experts. In a moment you will hear some parts of fairy-tales. Your task is to listen to them carefully and give the title. Don't say anything only show me the picture shawing the certain fairy tale (After listening to parts of the tales from CDs the children raise the picture showing the certain fairy tale).

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Iwona Zwierzchowska,
Małgorzata Centner-Guz

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

Development of Reading and Writing Abilities in Maria Montessori's Pedagogical Idea – Theoretical Basis

ABSTRACT

The issue of early teaching of literary skills inspires a lot of discussions and controversies. Among many doubts concerning the question of developing those elementary language abilities of children the most important activity seems to be the determination who, when and how should teach children to read and write. Answers to these questions are particularly relevant due to the requirements of the curriculum reform conducted in Polish educational institutions. It assumes that the development of reading and writing skills is planned for the stage of early school education and the kindergarten teachers' role is to formulate in students the readiness to learn the skills at school. The withdrawal of topics concerning teaching to read from the *Basic Curriculum of Kindergarten Education* caused different kinds of (over) interpretations and, as a result, a discord in the educational practice. A part of the kindergarten institutions limit their actions only to the development of the children's readiness for reading and writing lessons. Other ones, go beyond the recommendations of the *basic curriculum* and they actually teach those significant abilities.

In arising situation it is important that teachers are aware of and know various methods, ways and strategies of reading and writing teaching. The aim of this paper is to describe the assumptions formulated by Maria Montessori, who was the creator of the Montessori pedagogical system, involving the development of those children's key abilities at the preschool age. In the paper there have also been attempts to relate

Maria Montessori's ideas to current opinions, views and expectations concerning reading and writing process.

Key words: learning to read, learning to write, Montessori concept.

Introduction

A man, as a social human being, has developed over the course of the species development a tool that enables him to create and take part in culture. The tool is language in a written or spoken form. Oral communication comes from the times of primeval people. Then speech served to signal threat or it was a call for some specific life needs. In time, progress in trading and necessity to regulate structures of social life brought a desire to solidify information. Writing appeared which not only made the organisation of first life civilisations more efficient, but also allowed to express people's judgements and beliefs about ways of understanding and feeling the world in a permanent way.

Speech, as a human achievement which has been developing over many thousands of years, is today shaped to a satisfactory degree in the ontogenetic phase of human development within first few years of child's life. Mastering the use of phonetic symbols by a child influences the form of cognitive representation which is decisive for the way of perceiving the world (Tomasselo 2002, p. 130). The use of language enables a child to construct the image of the world in his mind, basing not only on perceptual – motoric experiences, but also through other verbal interactions. The learned symbolic representations are, among others, characterised by definite perspective, reflecting the way of looking at specific phenomena, by which a child becomes a member of an exact social – cultural group. Richness of linguistic experiences gives a child a possibility for optimal development in all spheres of functioning. Especially, if he or she is successful right at the beginning

of his or her school experience. Crucial meaning of the first years of child's life cannot be underestimated.

It is difficult not to agree with a thesis by K. Kuszak (2011, p. 211) that language is "cultural and national good, and, at the same time, a main tool of individual development". Thus, special care for learning the oral and written forms of language by a child should become parents' and educators' priority.

Language education aims, first of all, at teaching children to speak and write in all everyday situations, and to understand heard and read texts. As H. R. Schaffer (2011, p. 316) states "writing, similarly to speech, serves to make and transfer information. But, contrary to verbal speech, it is not an integral part of a human being and came into existence in a relatively late period of human history. Hence, it is a cultural achievement and, although such, today is treated as indispensable for our social and intellectual life, and that is why great emphasis is put on reading and writing education". The indisputable worth of these qualities, regarded as key ones, necessary in a process of acquiring and enlarging knowledge, learning about the world and expressing emotions causes the constant search for optimal ways of their development. Teachers are encouraged to learn and use various methods, conceptions, and strategies of reading and writing teaching. "There's a tendency in the world not to realize one model of reading teaching at the elementary level. Great stress is put to ensure success in children's reading thanks to the use of different models" (Joyce, Calhoun, Hopkins, followers of Jaszczyszyn 2010, p. 107).

Taking into consideration all above mentioned remarks, it is right to present various approaches to child's language education. This paper focuses on presentation the idea of developing the ability to read and write worked out by Maria Montessori.

Language education by Montessori

Learning to read and write is one of elements in the Montessori system. According to Montessori, language makes the basis of social life (Helming 1992, p. 100), and language education, apart from mathematical one is the key of education (Helming 1992, p. 103).

Language education takes place in the Montessori classrooms in two ways. Firstly, child's speech stimulation goes during practical activities, in contact with sensory materials, mathematical ones and while children realize tasks in the area of environmental education (children get various objects, illustrations or photos with named cards to work with). Stories told by a teacher or reading books for children play important role in awakening motivation for reading and writing in children. The other way of child's language educating is connected with some materials directly related to language education, exactly those which are used while teaching writing, reading, learning about grammar and arousing language expression in children.

The fact of distinguishing those two ways of education is merely to order the content of language education. In fact, the described ways intermingle and procced to one common aim. This aim is to gain "the key to the world", it is to understand oneself, others and a chance to become the world's active element.

Reading and writing education in Maria Montessori's idea

In Montessori pedagogical system there are no methods for reading and writing education. But there is "a method of teaching, being in compliance with mechanisms of child's development, enabling his own development" (Wierucka, Zwirzchowska 2008, p. 20). The idea of reading and writing education described by Maria Montessori is mainly based on potential abilities of a child to

acquire written language and periods of special sensitivity observed in children.

Maria Montessori's views about reading and writing education were formed during her work with children in Casa dei Bambini. At first Montessori shared the opinion that reading and writing teaching should not be started before a child is 6 years old. However, everyday observations of children at the age of 3 to 6 allowed her to see that interest in writing and letters comes much earlier (Montessori 1997, p. 251-252). Moreover, some mothers demanded to introduce children to the world of writing at the earlier age (Montessori 2012, p. 184). In consequence, Maria Montessori started working intensively on preparing educational materials which were to be used in writing and reading education. She also formulated some observations connected with children's fascination for writing. The author tried to see and describe the period in child's development when he or she shows special interest in symbolic graphic marks , i.e. child's sensitive phase for writing and reading.

Maria Montessori was convinced that children are characterized by internal dynamics since they are born. It is not any kind of dispersed activity but follows the internal scheme of development (Miksza 2004, p. 29). Its manifestations are changing, aimed at some specific kinds of activity or some specific elements of surrounding. The sensitive periods make time blocks which appear during child's development, in which children are really interested in some actions, phenomena, or some disciplines of knowledge. They are often described as "nature offer", which is momentary and can disappear without trace (Raapke 2011, p. 56). Montessori regarded her discoveries about periods of sensitivity as the most essential for pedagogics. After distinguishing and classi-fying, they were treated as a model for child's development when a child gains subsequent abilities and accumulates knowledge (Łuka-niuk-Quintanilla 1998, p. 18). Until today, those distinguished periods

of sensitivity make the basis for school curriculum in Montessori schools, and also they are used to arrange and furnish child's material environment. The contemporary psychological literature also stresses the significance of described periods for development of individuals, besides they function as sensitive periods (Brzezińska 2010).

Finally, Montessori placed the periods of specific sensitivity between ages three and six. According to her, children show great interest in various aspects of language depending on their age. And so, sensory aspects of written and oral language , i.e. shapes of letters and sounds of speech and the relations between them stimulate children's attention before the age of 6 (Montessori 1997, p. 285). In connection with it, children can learn to write and read more easily at the preschool age. After 6, their interest in language is more focused on its structural and significant categories (children want to know etymology of words, get to know new notions, discover the structure of language (Łukaniuk-Quintanilla 1998, p. 90). The special sensitivity in the speech sphere is then directed to grammar and word-formation.

In accordance with Maria Montessori's assumptions, learning to write precedes learning to read. Interest in the shapes of letters and special sensitivity to movements at the preschool age play the essential role in spontaneous attempts to draw letters. Maria Montessori wrote: "while writing, psycho-dynamic mechanism dominates" (1997, p. 255), "while reading we are absorbed with clear brain activity (psychic)". Taking into consideration the spheres engaged in writing and reading, the former one seems to be easier because of more intellectual functioning of the child. Consequently, Maria Montessori drew out some teaching aids to get to know and draw letters (touch letters) for children from 3 years old on. She expressed the opinion that when children learn about letters and their sound equivalents gradually, they are more eager to write down the first words. When a child wants to draw the word, it is natural that he or she knows it. He or she must make its acoustic analysis and give it its graphic shape

(using a movable alphabet or if he or she can, drawing letters). In consequence of many such exercises, reading ability appears, which Maria Montessori interprets as "not only transferring graphic sounds into their acoustic forms, but interpretation of thoughts expressed by means of writing" (Montessori 1997).

Methodology of pedagogic by Maria Montessori points out that ability to read comes along the trace of writing. The founder of this method presented spectacular opinions about children's interest in writing, which she placed before reading, and stated that "in 6 or 7-year-olds the motoric sensitivity of hand passes (to practice writing//drawing letters)" (Montessori 1997).

Maria Montessori did not write any handbooks for writing or reading teaching (nothing at all for language education). She was prone to name the way of writing, which she introduced experimentally (initially in work with mentally handicapped children, and later in work with normal ones), a psychological method. Inspiration came from psychological concept of work with children with intellectual deficits. However, it was the observation of freely working children, showing sensitivity to some specific stimuli and abilities related to the interest in reading material and drawing letters decided about the formulating the method of spontaneous writing (Montessori 1997).

Spontaneous writing, or rather writing captions under objects which were interesting for children, signing their own work, attempts to send a message by means of writing (*Mama – kocham*) or longer texts show the way leading to mastering the ability to read.

Maria Montessori expressed that in words: through writing to reading.

The necessity to make audial analysis of a word and to draw it with a suitable graphic symbol when a child wants to write it down, is, in fact, preparation for reading. Graphic images of subsequent sounds of speech, made by a child during his audial analysis (or rather laying down the letters from the movable alphabet or their drawing)

makes a child read a well-known word (a child knows which word he or she wanted to write). In time, multiple spontaneous writing, activating auditory-visual analysis and synthesis will lead to the ability of reading.

It might seem that if we allow a child to write in a way how he or she hears, then it would fix an improper way of writing.

Meanwhile, parallel learning to read which uses a global method (with plenty of reading material in the child's surrounding that comes from labelled objects and educational materials in the classroom or from developmental lessons) and "spontaneous" writing often bring about some specific difficulties for a child. They appear when a child wants to draw or observe words with digraphs, palatalization or spelling difficulties (specification of difficulties is characteristic of the language in a given country). The fact of noticing them provokes a child to ask and search for help at their teachers (parents). Checking the mistakes, which is characteristic of Montessori materials, is also essential in developing child's sensitivity for correct writing. With reference to linguistic materials connected with learning to write, it is usually a special pattern of proper writing attached to exercises in the form of working cards or children's personal notebooks.

The initial stage of acquiring the writing and reading skills, generally described in the Montessori system, points out that mastering writing by a child takes place in accordance with the child's interests and needs. According to Maria Montessori, (2005, p. 167) "generally after 4, all children are vitally interested in letters", although "only those who want" learn them.

Postulates for such a way of language teaching appear in the writings of the contemporary educators. Krystyna Kamińska relating to children's learning to read states: "let children at the preschool age learn to read in a way they choose the best, and at the moment they really feel the need to read on their own" (1999, p. 10).

Montessori's view about developing child's readiness to write and read does not mean isolated stages including educating partial abilities but rather synchronic ones. It happens during various activities inspired by prepared surrounding and resulting from respecting rules which regulate the life of a group. It is also enhanced by teacher's care to make children be aware of the relation between speech and writing. The willing to write down thoughts and meaning gives a child motivation to master necessary technical skills. A child who is curious about signs of alphabet surrounding him or her, begins to perceive that they are used to "cipher" sounds of speech. The need to order rich experiences, name elements of the surrounding and categorize things makes a child use a tool which is in possession of more experienced persons, that is by means of writing.

The approach to acquiring abilities to write and read based on supporting all child's psychic activities, giving material for global reading, making conditions for experiences that writing is a way of communication (exchanging information, desires, feelings) brings Montessori's system of teaching to write and read closer to a natural method. A child is aware of functional character of writing. Paraphrasing the words of D. Klus-Stańska and M. Nowicka (2005, p. 29) a child reads to learn what is written and not as it is stated by the authors about the conventional education system "at school a child reads to read nicely".

Conclusion

Analyzing the process of acquiring abilities to read and write in children in Montessori's system and in a conventional preschool or school groups of children we can notice sharp differences.

Some characteristic features of the process of acquiring abilities to read and write by Maria Montessori are the following:

- beginning learning to read and write at the moment when a child shows interest in these activities (individual teaching, paying attention to child's needs);
- creating conditions for spontaneous and occasional learning to read and write for children from 3 years old on;
- learning to write precedes learning to read;
- no elementary book for reading;
- displaying the social, educational, expressive, communicational and cultural function of language (Wierucka, Zwierzchowska 2008).

It should be also remembered that Maria Montessori's conception appeared over a hundred years ago. Development of psychology and pedagogics has progressed (in looking for optimal methods of reading and writing teaching, or generally in language education).

The notion of reading and writing has also evolved, its components have been specified, various strategies of teaching of those activities have been worked out and estimated.

In this situation all educational institutions working according to Maria Montessori's conception, that is, respecting principles regulating the process of teaching and learning children (among others the principle of individualization, independence, freedom of choice of a place, time and forms of activities) and rules of constructing educational materials (a rule of attractiveness, durability, isolation of difficulty, checking mistakes) must take into consideration methodic tendencies based on the contemporary theories in pedagogics and psychology.

This fact is expressed in organization the rich educational surrounding which enables a child to take up exercises and practices in a way that prepares him or her motor, intellectually and gives motivation to learn to read or write and serves the exact process of

learning to write and read. The basis for their construction are phases of sensitivity manifested by a child and his or her needs to be active. It is "this cognitive activity (in a child at the preschool age) which makes him or her discover, earlier or later, a magic world of writing and, intensively, to the best of their abilities, search for the possibility to decipher its mistery" (Kamińska 1999, p. 82). While searching for it a child should be skillfully accompanied by an adult": a parent, a caretaker, a class tutor, a teacher. As K. Kamińska truly states (Kamińska 1999, p. 9), "an adult arranging and supporting a child in his or her creative activity, giving advice and showing the direction for further inquiries in accordance to his or her needs, abilities and expectations is someone who is unconsciously awaited by a child". It is really good that Montessorian teacher and his actions suit the description of the person expected by a child.

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Małgorzata Centner-Guz,
Iwona Zwierzchowska

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

The Role of the Montessori Environment in the Development of Children's Reading and Writing Abilities at the Kindergarten Age – a Practical Approach

ABSTRACT

The process in which young children acquire the spoken and written communication skills in Maria Montessori's approach is natural and spontaneous. Children in Montessori model learn without any effort by establishing relations, first with their mothers, then with the general environment. In the Montessori-style kindergarten classroom, the natural character of mastering the language skills, including reading and writing, is supported by the teachers' attitudes and the prepared environment rich in stimuli for speech development. The children's sensitivity to speech connected with the senses enables them to make use of the developmental materials, as well as different reading games to learn reading and writing.

The purpose of this article is to present the process of acquiring reading and writing skills by children in the Montessori kindergarten, in the environment that stimulates the children's interest in the language and is appropriate to their current developmental abilities and needs. The authors are particularly focused on the material aspect of the classroom environment preparation, which significantly determines the effectiveness of the educational process in the area discussed.

Key words: learning to read, learning to write, Montessori environment, children, kindergarten.

Introduction

The use of writing by adults is obvious and not astonishing. However, acquisition of reading and writing abilities by children is not an easy process. It is one of the most important directions of didactic – educational activities of teachers and parents and the subject of interests and research of many psychologists, pedagogues and linguists. The educational and training activity of the kindergarten is directed to create multi-aspect maturity to learn to read and write from the first year of working with children. Teachers and other people engaged in child's education, search for optimal ways aimed at acquiring writing. In this article, the authors attempt to present an exemplification of the conception introducing a child into the world of writing, which was worked out by Maria Montessori and used until today in the institutions working according to the assumptions of her pedagogical system.

The Montessori pedagogical system is over a hundred years old now, but it appears to be still up-to-date and is successfully practiced in many countries around the world. It was born when knowledge of developmental psychology was only shaped and the nativist theory about learning was dominant. The Montessori method has not been pushed away into the shade of the educational reality thanks to its main rules of learning and teaching, such as the rule of individuality, independence and freedom of choice of the place, time and type of activity. The eternal quality of the Montessori system is the idea concerning the meaning of child's own activity in the process of acquiring his or her physical, social and intellectual independence. According to Maria Montessori herself, it is this idea which supports all educational activities. As a result, Montessori saw the essence of education in giving help to a child who wants to "be independent" and supportive of his or her own learning. In practice, it means arranging

the environment with a rich array of stimuli engaging a child and adjusting to child's psycho-physical needs. The engagement of a child, which is perceived by Maria Montessori as the main factor of his or her physical and psychical growth, lets us consider her pedagogical conception in the perspective of constructivist psychological theory (Bednarczuk, 2007).

The condition enabling to take up any activity – taking into consideration the needs, possibilities and interests of a child and leading to building successive key competences – means offering space described as the prepared environment. It must be designed in a way in which it gives a child the possibility to act freely, discover and solve tasks offered to him or her through engagement with the educational materials. Preparation of the environment in the first stage of educational process, covers materials enabling a child to take up activity in practical areas of life, educating his or her senses, mathematical education, linguistic education, social-biological educa-tion (i.e. cosmic education) and artistic education. In this article, the authors focus on the practical use of the chosen areas and elements in the organized Montessori environment in developing the abilities to read and write in kindergarten children.

1. Preparing a child to learning to read and write

Maria Montessori noticed a necessity to prepare a child to take up learning to read and writin the context of indirect preparation. Today, in a conventional approach, this stage is described as creating readiness to acquire those abilities. The ability of using written speech (writing and reading) is treated as a complicated activity, demanding child's maturity in many spheres of functioning. And so, for example, G. Krasowicz-Kupis (2004, p. 81-87) distinguishes two basic groups of reading and writing maturity components:

1) Non-specific components:
   – attitude and motivation
   – development of perceptional-motoric abilities (proper functioning of sight, hearing and kinesthetic – motoric analyzers and their integration);
   – intellectual development (thinking on the operational level).

2) Specific components:
   – Development of speech and language:
   a) phonological abilities (phonemic hearing, analysis and synthesis of sounds, syllables, recognition of rhymes, noticing similarities between words);
   b) morphological-syntactic abilities (building and inflection of words, building and using sentences);
   c) semantic abilities (communicative accuracy – proper choice of words, right usage of words, ability to construct statements, understanding);
   – linguistic awareness (comparing structures of words, reordering the sounds, transforming words and sentences);
   – writing awareness(knowledge about functions of writing, knowledge of the rules of writing, being aware of own competence, knowledge of meta-linguistic terms and notions connected with writing).

The components of child's readiness to systematic education of reading and writing, which draw attention in psychological literature today, were emphasized in the Montessori methodical writings. Montessori did not make an ordered inventory list of factors conditioning the acquisition of abilities to use the written speech, but she analyzed the mechanism and the essence of writing and reading in details. She mainly paid attention to motoric efficiency (of hand

or articulation apparatus), perception (seeing, hearing, touching) and motivational processes. She also ascribed great meaning to activities taken up by children in connection with practical life exercises and creating senses as those which have great importance for children's motoric and psychic abilities.

Practical life exercises

Practical life exercises cover many activities connected with care for oneself (washing, combing, undressing and dressing, eating meals), care for the environment (cleaning the floor, sweeping, laying the table, looking after plants and animals) and care for the community (assimilating social rules). Practical life exercises ensure physical exercises for children to enable them to improve their mobility (motor abilities) and coordination of movements to be better in control of their body and actions.

The methodology of Maria Montessori connected with learning everyday activities, in a very precise way, outlines following activities which make up a given ability. For example, while working with a frame serving to teach how to tie the shoelaces, a teacher slowly and precisely describes successive steps of untying and tying the shoelaces. These actions enable a child to notice the sequences of teacher's movements which make up the given activity. Multiple repetitions of defined actions support motoric processes of child's memory. However, it should be stressed that repetition of some exercises does not come from the adult's suggestions who want a child to master some defined abilities and efficiencies. The meaning of the multiple repetitions of the same actions comes out of his or her natural needs to move (body or hand). Maria Montessori strongly stressed its importance in the intellectual development of a child. She wrote that "movement gives support to psychic development and it, in turn, appears in next [sometimes very complex] actions" (Montessori 2000,

p. 164). Today, in the perspective of psychological science, the relation between movement (moving and participating in activities with manipulation) and development is obvious.

Motor activities are taken up by a child to serve different purposes than they are with adults. A child can go up and down the stairs many times without any rest, because he or she does it for the activity itself only. This endurance resulting from the maximum concentration on the given activity causes that a child pours water in and out of the dish with the same pleasure many times, polishes a clean and shiny brass object or for half an hour puts a key into the hole opening and closing the door. The external aim (a full dish, a clean object, a locked door) is only a stimulus, a pretext to start interesting and engaging activities for a child. Doing leads to perfection in a defined dimension and gives a child self – confidence.

Maria Montessori put a special meaning to hand movements. Thanks to them a child receives many sensory impressions connected with touch, integrates them with observations about his or her modality, and, first of all, reshapes the reality.

Practical life exercises done by a child connected with frames for tying (shoelaces, snap fasteners, zips, hooks and others) master manual ability of a child. They also allow a child to experience that if any activity is to be successful, it must be performed in a defined way, in consideration to sequences of movements. Those experiences are extremely helpful in learning the ways to draw shapes of the letters and individual attempts to write them down. Writing of individual letters is, in fact, drawing various elements of which they are made (straight lines, oval lines, lines and loops). Those activities need simultaneous engagement of an arm and forearm, wrists and fingers.

Other activities in the range of practical life exercises are also special trainings of movements. They lead to the development of big and little motor power, essential in the beginning of writing education.

Rolling up a rug after work activates a shoulder, an arm, a forearm and a hand and requires coordinated activity of those parts of the body and controlling the movements by means of eyes. To put a rug in the right place, it must be tightly rolled up, which is only possible when a child uses appropriate pressure of his or her arm muscles. If it is rolled up too loosely and, in the consequence, it cannot be put into the locker, then a child is stimulated to do it once again, but this time he or she must be aware to control the intensity of the pressure. We observe a similar mechanism in case of sweeping the floor. To brush a speck of dust onto the dust-pan, the movements must be subtler, but when a child brushes heavier materials, it is necessary to use bigger force. However, in both cases the successful sweeping depends on the proper sight-movement coordination. This coordination makes the movements stop in the right moment possible. The precision acquired during such exercises is used by a child when he or she writes letters on the lines.

Similar educational advantages can be observed while children take up other activities, such as dusting, cleaning of the tables, watering the plants or polishing brass objects.

Among practical life exercises, manipulative activities, such as using spoons, pliers, tweezers, a nut-cracker, decorative pins, scissors, sets of screws with nuts of different diameters, keys to various types of locks occupy a significant place. Motoric engagement of a child during classes with the above mentioned objects, leads to the concentrated work. Multiple repetitions of activities imply the lengthening of the time of child's concentration on a given task. This ability is indispensable in the beginning of writing and reading education.

Each activity connected with tidying up demands preparation of some defined utensils and manipulative exercises need to have a clean place. Doing everyday chores teaches planning of those activities and maintaining order in their area. The habits connected with those

abilities will make the organization of writing easier and, especially, care for the preparation of necessary writing materials and making good use of space needed to have a proper position of the body.

Education of senses

The other group of exercises which help in a significant degree to create child's readiness to start learning to read and write are sensory exercises. The materials used for sensory education were called by Maria Montessori the "materialized abstraction" (Miksza 2004, p. 57). Contact with them enables to see such features as: shape, form, color, size, temperature, texture, weight, taste, smell, intensity and pitch of sounds. When a child works with them, the senses of sight, touch and hearing are engaged and developed, which are essential activities for the development of reading and hearing processes.

Sensory materials are designed in such a way, that specific objects can illustrate abstract notions. For example, abstract notions such as big-small are illustrated by means of uniform cubes which have only one difference: the size. The difference related to a specific feature between next element is constant, which makes it possible not only to discover the relation big-small, but also compare those notions (big, bigger, the biggest, small, smaller, the smallest) and comparison of the features of those objects (bigger than this, but smaller than that). The exercises of sensory perception depending on perceiving, ordering and categorization of specific impressions stimulate learning operations such as analysis, abstracting, classifying, comparing and generalizing. The stimulating role of sensory materials is not limited to developing of the brain abilities above mentioned. Sensory impressions and their differentiating is always related to learning new notions and including them into child's active vocabulary.

Child's work with sensory materials not only determines an essential preparation for learning to read and write in psychic dimension. Those materials as definite objects, having defined structure and different sizes, demand the use of motoric activities

of different character and force. For example, catching and manipulating with the smallest cube from a pink tower set (dimension 1cm/1cm/1cm) engages palms, and especially fingers, which catch it. Their movements must be more delicate, not so energetic, with weaker force of pressure, especially when it is placed on the top of the tower and when it is taken down. But conveying and rearranging bigger elements of the tower (the biggest one has the size 10 cm/10 cm/10 cm) demands graceful but energetic movements of arms and forearms. The force of pressure during conveying and putting up the biggest cube must be much bigger than during manipulating with the smallest cube. The right mounting of the tower with the use of ten elements (with proper harmony between blocks) also trains the sense of balance and proprioception. These senses play an important role in acquiring the ability of reading and writing. The sense of balance guarantees the right vertical position of the body, sight-space transformations and helps to plan movements. Those abilities are necessary for a child to keep the right position of the body during writing, planning and placing the written text on the piece of paper or on the lined paper. The sense of proprioception is connected with the muscle control, for it enables to use the right force of pressure while using a writing tool. In a sensory aid set there are also materials which train these skills in a direct way (pressure bottles).

Maria Montessori paid attention to the fact that any writing activity requires movements of both hands: connected with catching and holding the writing tool and directly with drawing letters. The training of the habit to hold a writing tool in the right position takes place many times during child's work with sensory materials. We especially should draw our attention to a set of cylindrical blocks. The principal aim of the work with them is to define, compare and differentiate size features such as thickness, height and width. Each single cylinder has the shape of a tube and is placed in the hollow of the supporting block

which makes it a base. To take it out, a child needs to use spherical wooden holder situated on the top. The child takes out the cylinder of the block using a tweezers – like a grip. A teacher cares about the kind of the grip the child holds and pays attention that it should be in three points preparing the child to hold a writing tool in the proper position (between the index finger and the thumb with the help of the middle finger that supports them slightly). Identical holders are built in other elements of geometrical figures set which make, the so called, geometrical study room. The value of work with this material in preparation of children to writing lies not only in the fact that catching figures requires the definite position of the fingers. Children study the figures gradually by means of sight and touch (thesingle geometrical figures – circles, rectangles, triangles, polygons and other symmetrical and non-symmetrical figures – are placed in special matrix of the same shape as the figures). They examine characteristic features of a given figure by touching it or moving their fingers along the edge of the figures and along the matrix of the same shape. As Maria Montessori pointed out: "A little hand examining various shapes of geometrical figures prepares itself for writing" (Montessori 1922, p. 51). Exact following of the shape of the figure with child's fingers requires control of the movements, especially near its top. In turn, in case of round figures the movement should be monotonous and smooth. The work with figures from next drawers prepares child's hand in an indirect way to drawing elements of letters in the future.

Apart from those mentioned above, there are many other sensory materials that improve sensory functions of a child, necessary to acquire reading and writing abilities.

They are (among others) the following:

– in the area of materials developing the sense of sight: colorful tubes, red sticks (size features), constructing triangles (related to shape), geometrical solids (referring to space forms), colorful boards (referring to color);

– in the area of materials connected with touch: boards, touch boards, a box with textiles (referring to texture), bottles and temperature bottles (referring to temperature), weight boards (referring to weight);

– in the area of materials connected with hearing: acoustic boxes (referring to physical hearing), rings (referring to musical hearing).

2. Learning and drawing letters

According to Maria Montessori's psycho-pedagogical assumptions, the process of writing slightly precedes acquisition of the reading skill in a child's development.

The material which prepares a child's hand directly to draw letters, and precisely, to hold properly and use writing tool are metal matrices (it is a set of blue metal figures with holders placed in pink metal matrices). A child, who is supposed to work with this material, is given some tasks to do: put the matrix of the figure on a piece of paper lying on the pad, draw the shape of the figure from the matrix, put away the matrix and lay the figure on the drawn shape, draw the contour of the figure, put away the figure, fill it with parallel lines from top to bottom and vice versa (Montessori 1922, p. 85-86; Montessori 1997, p. 232-233). It should be explained that the double contour is drawn in two colors, while the third color is used to fill the area of the drawn figure (Fischer 2005, p. 53). In practice of many pedagogical institutions (for example Dutch and Polish) some differences can be noticed in the way of filling the figures. They probably come up from the willingness to optimize the child's work with the given material. Thus, filling the figures takes place in two directions: vertical, from top to bottom (the direction of placing the writing on the paper) and horizontal, from the left side to the right side (the direction of writing). A teacher should control child's work paying attention to the proper

tension of muscles. Child's work with this material trains motor power of the fingers and smoothness of hand movements during his or her using a writing tool.

From the first year of education (3 years old), a child in the Montessori group has the possibility to learn letters and draw them after some work with touch letters. The shape of letters is made by means of sand paper and stuck to wooden or plastic surface. A child follows the shape of the letter with his or her fingers in a way presented by the teacher. Drawing it, he or she says the sound corresponding to the letter, which enables him or her to associate the shape of graphic sign with its sound. Sight-hearing association is, thus, strengthened by touching and kinesthetic impression. Thanks to such a way of letters learning "the coordinated movement of an arm and hand is fixed, which is also followed by eyeballs, the shape of letters is reconstructed and then remembered by means of touching and seeing" (Montessori 1997, p. 231).

Other letters are introduced during the so called three-stage--lesson, which is illustrated in the following example:

A child chooses one touch letter, another one is chosen by a teacher (but it should be really different from the first one) Both of the letters are lying on the table in front of the child and the teacher.

1. Stage: The teacher is moving his or her fingers over the shape of the letter in the way how it is drawn while pronouncing the corresponding sound. The child is repeating the teacher's action. In the same way another letter is also introduced. The main point of this stage is to associate a design and its name. (In this case the shape of the letter corresponding to its sound).

2. Stage: The teacher is saying the definite sound and child's task is to show the exact graphic sign. It happens in a form of carrying out orders, like for example*: Give me an "a"*, *Put "m" on the chair*, *Show me a letter "m"* etc. The aim of this stage is to match a chosen design (shape of the letter) and given name (the sound of the letter).

3. Stage: The teacher is pointing at the chosen letter and asking: "What *is this?*", "*What letter is it?*" awaiting the exact sound of the letter. The essence of this part lies in checking if the child can properly define the shown symbols (uses the correct name).

Maria Montessori did not define the order of introducing the letters. The child's interest was decisive. The teacher suggested the choice of the second letter trying to indicate a different letter and taking care of introducing vowels at the earliest stage, which enables a child to make simple words from the movable alphabet. This will be discussed later.

In the next stages a child can do exercises connected with drawing letters and remembering the corresponding sounds (the teacher should take care of material conditions, necessary to do these exercises).

The first attempts to write take place on the loose material, and then a child should put a letter made of sand paper next to the tray to be able to check with the pattern if he or she has done the task properly. Next, it is suggested that children should try to write letters on the empty board (the teacher can regulate the size of the letters showing the area which can be used for writing), then on the checked board (which helps a child to "keep the letter" both in a horizontal and vertical position), and in the end on the board with lines. Writing in a notebook can take place when a child can fill the shape of the figures from the matrices with lines in a completely perfect way (the lines do not cross the borders of the figures and they are dense and parallel). The length of time to learn to draw letters is individually differentiated. However, Maria Montessori's personal experience connected with children's learning to write shows that even four-year-olds are able to master the knowledge of letters and ability to draw them, and so, in consequence as five-year-olds they can start writing in the notebook in ink (Montessori 1997, p. 252).

When a child learns most of the letters, some exercises can be suggested. They are as follows:

- recognizing a letter by means of touch (covered with a piece of cloth) and saying a proper sound;
- looking for known letters in reading materials (cards with words);
- pointing at the objects (gathered in the classroom or specially made boxes, wooden boxes, with names on them beginning or ending with a definite vowel)

During individual work in the Montessori group, the following things are used: phonetic dominoes with a different level of difficulty, phonetic boxes (with objects which start with a definite letter), or alphabet rugs (rugs with letters sewn on them and sets of objects that a child puts in the right place, following the graphic symbol corresponding to the initial sound).

Maria Montessori used the alphabet constructed in such a way that next to the card with a written letter, there was another smaller printed one, with a picture illustrating the word which began with the same letter (Montessori 1997, p. 218). Today, there are many educational aids in Montessori pedagogical institutions that serve to recognize printed letters, which enable children to master the ability to read printed texts. They are: picture lotteries, photographs and drawings signed up by means of printed words, written words and jumbled words.

The next important moment in learning to write and read is the introduction of the movable alphabet which helps to write down simple words by means of their acoustic analysis. As soon as a child can do that, there appears a desire to write down everything that is possible. Maria Montessori defines this special interest in writing as "explosion of writing" (Raapke 2011, p. 105). The joy of the child who is now able to transform words into writing, should not be extinguished by teacher's criticism if any mistakes appear, which may happen because of phonetic writing. The movable alphabet allows to "write down"

words, even though the child cannot draw letters efficiently. A child is happy when he or she can "cipher" spoken or thought out words or information by himself or herself.

The movable alphabet consists of three sets. The first one has letters made from synthetic material in two colors, red and blue. The size and shape of the letters are compatible with the set of touch letters. The second set is called the middle one. The letters are smaller than in the first set and have the same color. It must suggest that the shape only and not the color and size differentiate letters. The last set has small letters printed on white cards. The work with the movable alphabet begins with the big set. The teacher says a short and phonetically easy word (he or she can also use phonetic pictures illustrating given words). The teacher pronounces each sound of the word clearly and loudly putting down the right graphic sign at the same time. In this way, he or she does audible analysis of the word and then makes its general graphic image.

The initial period of reading and writing education based on studying letters shows that Maria Montessori came out from synthetic methods in her methodical approach. However, the way of acting, described above, which treats a word as a starting point, has analytical character. Maria Montessori saw a great importance in creating abilities of differentiating and recognizing sounds and correct articulation of a child's speech.

3. Reading

In the publication *Il segreto dell'infanzia* (Mystery of a child) Maria Montessori made a list of constitutive elements of pedagogical conduct. Taking into consideration the mastering of abilities of reading and writing the author advised:

- – learning to write without any connection with learning to read (getting to know and drawing letters);
- – writing as an introduction to reading (making first words by means of the movable alphabet or independent writing with the use of writing materials);
- – initial learning to read without books (Montessori 2012, p. 195).

Simultaneously, Montessori postulated, among others, abolition of reading education with the help of anelementary reading book (Montessori 2012). Refusing to use a book as a source of reading texts for a child in the initial period of learning of this activity appeared after observations of children. Montessori noticed that children who knew letters, but could not read fluently, concentrated for a moment on looking at colorful drawings when they used books. However, they put them away quickly because they did not notice that the text had some meaning. At the same time Montessori observed that children followed their teacher writing their own words on pieces of paper (signing up objects or sentences). They also did the same. So Montessori proposed children to read the cards with orders as reading material. They concerned various activities such as: *Open the window,* Come *to the door.*

Doing activities written on pieces of paper allowed children to understand that writing is another form of communication among people. For example: expressing their wishes orgiving information. After children had learnt printed letters (with the help of the set of letters prepared by Montessori), they immediately began to read information on the shop signboards, in the newspaper, on things bought by their parents. Their greatest joy was caused by the fact that they could understand the "mystery" signs. Today, early-school education is criticized because it concentrates on technical aspect of reading too much. As a result, "children stop seeing that a man reads to understand what is written" (Klus-Stańska, Nowicka 2005, p. 40).

An essential moment of reading education is, according to Montessori, that a child notices a relationship between written speech and speech. It leads to a discovery of books with stories, which authors wanted to tell the children. The children described by Montessori were not aware of this fact (op. cit., p. 187). Today, we can say after Shaffer (2011, p. 317), that they manifested the moment of making written speech. This notion is related to the beginning of learning to read and write, when children become aware that the written language is useful and has interesting meaning. Maria Montessori described a situation when she noticed a moment when children understood the essence of writing. A pupil in Casa dei Bambini came to school holding a piece of writing in his hand. Trying to draw his colleagues' attention, he asked what it was, and they answered that it was just a "normal piece of paper". "No, it is a story" said a happy boy and started reading it (Montessori 2012, p. 188).This event caused that books, which had been hidden in the bookcase, were given to children again. The above situation may suggest that literature and books in Montessori institutions should be available for children when they know letters and read words and sentences written by the teacher. Constant development of the 20th century literature for children and great reading offer causes that reading initiation takes place before children start pre-school education. Thus, a library and an organized place for reading are always present in the Montessori pedagogical institutions.

As it was mentioned, language education takes place not only during a child's contact with texts especially assigned for him or her, but also in other areas of his or her activity and connected with an everyday timetable. Children have contact with written texts while they label various objects in the classroom or use names from educational materials or in a collective class. There are also other opportunities to attempt to read, for example: during cosmic education, when defining cards for objects and photos are enclosed.

Conclusion

Nowadays, reading and writing are basic forms of social communication. Their mastery "is the base for acquiring knowledge and building various competences successively during the whole period of school education" (Półtorak 2012, p. 7), it allows for "active use of goods of culture and civilization" (Kuszak 2011, p. 204), it is "indispensable for intellectual development and functioning in social life"(Jaszczyszyn 2010, p. 89).

Meanwhile, despite the dynamic research on speech, reading and writing processes "we still cannot answer the question how to prevent the growing number of children with reading difficulties, and hence, the growing number of people who may be at risk from not sufficient level of education, not sufficient job and not fulfilling life" (Krasowicz-Kupis 2004, p. 11). Thus, there appears to be a necessity of searching for effective ways of dealing with children who face the task of mastering the written language.

The Montessori conception of reading and writing education seems to be very interesting among other proposed strategies. The use of developmental materials, made by the author, brought about spectacular results in the reading and writing competences of children at the ages between 3 and 6. Montessori's conception assumes that a child does not need to have a direct contact with a "preaching" teacher, but with the well arranged educating environment, rich in appropriate stimuli for child's level of development, needs and interests. Reading and writing education has to be, according to Maria Montessori, a way to freedom, self-sufficiency and independence (Wierucka, Zwierzchowska 2008). The Montessori teacher has a duty to prepare for children esthetic educational materials, which must be interesting, arousing their curiosity and encouraging children to reach for them. The teacher is responsible for the teaching and educational materials in child's environment. The environment inspires and makes it possible

for a child to take up reading and writing activities when the child is ready for that. The richness of the available materials causes that reading and writing education at the pre-school age is, in accordance with postulates suggested by K. Kamińska (1999, p. 18), "first of all, meeting children's interests and wonders about the surrounding world half-way".

The properly organized Montessori educational environment not only ensures effective mastering of reading and writing abilities, but also, "promotes development and growth of child activity, creation of talents, skills, interests, encourages inner motivation to act and learn and to become more self-sufficient and independent" (Guz 2007, p. 170).

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Edita Rogulj

Udruga Odgajatelja, Velika Gorica, Croatia

Information Literacy for Children of Early and Preschool Age

ABSTRACT

Children of the 21st century are at the time of birth surrounded by the most modern of technologies. Therefore, it is not surprising that from the babyhood they use digital technologies with exceptional ease. Because of the environment in which new generations are growing up, Prensky (2001) calls them "digital natives". Entering in the education system, children possess ICT competencies or so-called basic information literacy that should be further developed and upgraded. Information literacy is learned in the family already, but the question is about the degree of information literacy shared by parents themselves, and their willingness and ability to respond on all challenges posed by the rapid development of digital technologies. It often happens that a child becomes a teacher, and parent becomes a student. Children acquire new skills and knowledge without the educated guidance, they research, discover and learn. Therefore the preschool institutions as the first step in the education process must become a place that allows children to develop learning strategy for lifelong education. This area also includes the development of information literacy as the foundation of competencies of future generations.

Key words: information literacy, educational process, ICT competencies.

Introduction

Pedagogy of early childhood recognizes changes within framework of education, and thus the need for changing it. The global development of societies and changes that it brings cause in turn more and more powerful influences on the process of education that is needed to adapt and change according to the accelerated growth and development in all areas, especially in the area of technology development. The impact of technology on daily life of individual carries with itself the need for development of new competencies, which many call acquisition of information literacy skills. By implication of new knowledge in the process of education, it is creating the precondition for the creation of quality supportive environment that enables children to acquire new knowledge and develop the existing competencies. ICT competencies or information literacy are becoming integral parts of competencies of each individual, including children of early and preschool age (Stričević 2011).

Information knowledge is of vital importance in today's time of great technological advancement, so it is no wonder that many parents consider that children must master IT competencies as soon as possible, and that the technology use in the youngest age contributes to better overall child development. This way of thinking in the context of the educational system and its employees or educators puts a new challenge that requires a professional and planned approach with the goal of implementation of needs of society and parents with developmental characteristics of children of early and preschool age. This process is not and should not be static and unchanging, but dynamic and ready for frequent changes that accompany development and technological advancement.

The integration of computers in the preschool educational system is left up to the initiative of individual, educator or parent. All groups within the preschool institutions which have a computer, received

them through donations from parents or wider local community. This initiative certainly needs to be commended because it is a start of educational process with help of computers. However, the integration requires good preparation of all factors in the process of education. This means, for example that the ergometric conditions must be met in order to fully protect children's health. Additional training for educators in the field of information literacy on the quality usage of computers in the educational process becomes necessary. Only when all conditions for the best possible adoption of new knowledge and skills are met, can we say that we are on the right track for meeting the quality information literacy of children of early and preschool age. And all with the goal of preparing children for life in the 21st century, determined by technology.

1. Information literacy

Different authors give different definitions of information literacy, but all of them have a common stance on the need for developing information literacy from the earliest days of human life.

Psychological Society of Istria (see *Društvo psihologa Istre* etc. 2009) perceive the media literacy as an inclusion of technical knowledge about media, and critical and analytical thinking about a media content that should be implemented from the earliest age. They think that as a proposal it should be sent to the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and the Agency for Education who are responsible for the creation of Act on the Preschool Education. Visible is the progress of technology implementation throughout the school system, but preschool institutions are still not affected by this wave, so we can take this as a positive step into changes. Information literacy according to Mužić (1992) is to know using the computer in various areas of life and know its capabilities and limitations. Due to the large number of theories, definitions and accesses to information literacy,

the UNESCO in its report the Understandings of Literacy (*Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, 2006) gave four starting points for understanding information literacy; as a set of skills, the adequacy of practices, learning process and literacy as writing a text. Information literacy includes the ability to use a computer in all areas of life such as work activities, leisure and entertainment.

2. The role of parents in development of information literacy in their children

Most children have first encounters and experiences with computers from the safety of their mother's or father's lap: watching them using the computer, moving the mouse on the screen, enjoying the rapid changes of images and different sounds. Aftab (2003) calls that way of using a computer *lap surfing*. With growing up, children leave the safety of parental lap and move on to conduct their own free research. The early childhood is period when children learn under the strong influence of various external impacts. Such changes are often based on developmental psychology and seek to develop a practice that is developmental and appropriate in practice (Starc, Čudina 2004). The theory that is written by experts is confirmed only in practice, so is reported that 66 percent of Finnish preschool children regularly use computer as part of their programs (Zevenbergen 2008), while in Hong Kong, Leung (2003) reported that parents expect from their children to use computer from the earliest age. In order to verify the situation in Croatia, we did a research conducted in kindergarten "Cvrčak", Zagreb. For this purpose a survey was prepared and administered to parents, from eight groups. The survey of parents was conducted in two weeks in May of 2011. There were 103 parents who responded to the anonymous survey of children aged three to seven years of age. Of these 56 were girls and 47 boys. Of the total number of surveyed parents, five of them declared that their child is not using

the computer, or that is familiar with the computer, but they do not have it at home or in kindergarten, and took a negative attitude toward the computer. According to the survey access to computer is given to children from three years of age, and with age of the child grows the percentage of children who use the computer. Similar findings have been reported from one of the most important researches on the use of computers in the earliest age of children. Study done at the University of Illinois in the United States also documented that children as young as three start using computers[1]. That research conducted over ten years brought the following conclusions: "A three-year and four children who use computers in everyday life as an extra activity have significantly higher growth potential compared with children who do not use computers at that age".

This may lead to a conclusion that parents' positive attitude toward the computer and its use is essential for the development of information literacy at the earliest age. Aftab (2003) states that the *best parent is well-versed parent.*

The survey results show that parents take into account the length of stay of child on the computer, and the choice of content and supervision of adult. Visible is their understanding of issues and importance of teaching children the proper use of computers. Parents of young children are working according to plan on development of a series of computer skills, knowledge and information literacy. They believe that computers help children acquire information literacy skills through a variety of interactive educational computer games, looking at photos, watching cartoons, and by using of tools for drawing, writing and calculation. They believe that by interaction with a computer, children develop a large number of skills such as

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[1] http://www.cool school.net/indeks.php?ucitelj=vkoko&view=225, (access: 3.04. 2012).

locomotors skill, increase imagination, mathematical thinking, critical thinking, logical thinking, and are encouraged to be creative.

3. Development of information literacy in children

Children acquire new skills through play when the activity brings them satisfaction. Our task is to shape that game so that it represents a meaningful and acceptable level of knowledge that will be aimed at the adoption of new and expanding of old knowledge and skills in children. All children learn in the same way, regardless of their social, linguistic or economic background. Research in Dakar, Senegal showed that children from rural, poor and underdeveloped West African nations are accessing computers as easily as children from affluent suburbs in the United States (Negroponte, 2002). This and other research have shown that children have an equal ability to take advantage of technology regardless of their ethnic background or economic status around them. That ability of children to take advantage of the available technology, greatly facilitates the work of adults who need to be moderators of the proper usage of benefits that computer provides. Only in this way, will we avoid individuals thinking that a computer is not good for children and should be avoided. The computer and anything around us can be harmful if used improperly and in an unplanned way, but with a proper approach, it may become a valuable and useful tool. Therefore, it should be made possible for preschool children to play and explore the inside of a computer in order to more clearly understand the way computer hardware functions. Thus, children learn by manipulative research the magnetic plates, colored strings, graphic and sound cards, follow the way of connecting certain parts, and they can easily visually present the way computer works. Once they have done research and satisfied their curiosity, we can switch over to the software part that could not function without the hardware. In this way, children acquire the

concept of cause and effect relationship, the importance of teamwork and togetherness.

In situations when a child plays, the process of thinking is quicker and a child discovers very important things. For example, they learn that there are symbolic signs that allow for communication to happen (Hughes 2005), compatibility of procedures for expressing tasks and errors, the power of thinking and inventing in unity with others, the logical and temporal separation of a complex tasks, the control of action and interaction and enjoyment in personal verification of success (Malaguzzi 1987).

By expert analysis of experiences that a child acquires when they encounter a computer, their talents, resources and assets are discovered, as well as mastering the concepts in a practical and symbolic work on computer. Despite interesting things that make dismantling of the computer itself, the part that relates to the use of computer for learning, games and entertainment is far more interesting and attractive to children. Using a computer in preschool age, a child should be prepared not to fall into stereotypes imposed by those who only see the computer as a harmful element and cannot see the benefits of using it. Children of young and preschool age are ready to cooperate if they have someone who will guide them in a proper way interesting for them. Therefore, educators must be information literate to the extent that their knowledge can easily be transmitted to children in an interesting and stimulating way. The educator needs to be a moderator who makes the rules of using computers in a group of 20 children when there is only one computer. The educator must arrange with the children the rules that they can easily follow. In that way, the time during a day when computer is used, the time of a child stays at the computer activities, the dynamics of change of children mutually, are all negotiated. With all this, the most important is the choice of a computer content that is offered to children.The content must have its own goal and task in developing the child's perception,

skills and knowledge. Thus, educators select a content on a computer that will enrich traditional forms of learning. If this is the introduction to musical instruments, a computer can help children to have the opportunity to hear all the instruments at any time, without having to leave the kindergarten. For the morning exercise, a computer can be a leader of these exercises, which further motivates children to physical activity. Artistic expression can be stimulated by using software programs for drawing. There are countless examples of how the computer is expanding its use to those common and more traditional forms. In this way, the computer becomes a link between the child's holistic development and the new media.

When an educator has provided all of the above and prepared children to use computers, he or she can easily observe how children develop their information literacy skills. The educator is then just an observer and assistant when needed. In a discreet and subtle way, he or she leads children to develop their information literacy and become part of their development. Instead of direct teaching information which by itself does not have any meaning, expecting that a child remembers that information, it is much more valuable to support a child to actively explore problems and to independently come to answers and conclusions derived from their own learning.

4. Conclusion

The program orientation of education of preschool children (document which entered into force in 1991) suggests the need of improving existing basic conditions of the education of children in kindergartens (material, organizational and other). By realization of these conditions, it would ensure human and democratic way of life in preschool institution, respect of individual characteristics and needs of both educators and children. On the other hand, this document

gives us the kind of responsibility which all educators should finally become aware of in their work. Because of the way and time we live in, I believe that the inclusion of educational institutions in the overall information spread of literacy of children of early and preschool age is essential and indisputable. Potential gains for children are enormous. Computers help children improve motor skills, mathematical thinking, they increase creativity, critical thinking and problem solving abilities. In addition, computers enhance children's self-concept, and children show higher levels of spoken communication and cooperation. Children share leadership role more frequently and develop positive attitude toward learning (Clements 1994).

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Małgorzata Suświłło

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

The Psychological and Social Aspects of Foreign Language Learning in Small Children[1]

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss the psychological (intellectual processes, memory, motor skills, motivation and attitude to a foreign language) and social aspects (natural setting, classroom setting and social context) of foreign language acquisition by young children from the perspective of psycholinguistics. I emphasize the significance of teaching English in early years. I analyze research on how language acquisition relates to children's musical abilities and I present some examples of English classes in a nursery school. In the conclusion, I take account of some professional teacher competences which are important in the process of English learning and teching.

Key words: foreign language, children, acquisition, competence.

Introduction

A fluent command of foreign languages has become an unquestionable necessity in an era of globalization. The only questions that arise concern the starting age for foreign language instruction in

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[1]   The Polish version of this paper is published in: I. Witczak-Lisiecka, A. Głowala (eds.), *Języki obce w przedszkolu i szkole podstawowej w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej,* „Pedagogika. Zeszyty Naukowe" 2008, t. 7, Płock, p. 25-36.

children and what languages should be taught. A number of solutions have already been proposed and implemented as part of teacher training standards. Graduates from schools of education are expected to have a fluent command of English.

The decline of socialism in 1989 brought a radical increase in the demand for foreign language teaching to both children and adults in Poland. Globalization meant the emergence of English as the most popular foreign language in many countries of the world, including Poland. Until 2008, compulsory foreign language curricula were introduced, starting from the fourth grade of primary school. In September 2008, foreign language instruction became obligatory in all public schools in Poland from grade one, i.e. at the age of seven. It should be noted that many parents want their children to begin learning a foreign language already at a pre-school level. Foreign language instruction is optional in kindergarten, available for an extra fee paid by the parents. A similar situation had been observed in the first grade of primary school before foreign language teaching became compulsory. Children attended extracurricular courses organized by the school or learned foreign languages outside the school, mostly as a part of private tuition. Vast disproportions in language learning options were noted between children from urban and rural areas. Very few rural schools offered additional language learning courses, and this fact deepened already large discrepancies in educational opportunities for children in those schools in Poland. In view of the above, the Polish authorities' decision to begin foreign language instruction as early as the first grade of primary school, seems to be justified. Legislative changes created a demand for teachers specializing in elementary education. Specialist courses training teachers of English for the youngest students have been offered by the British Council in Poland since the 1990s. Those courses enjoy undying popularity, as it took Polish universities a long time to realize that elementary education experts were in very short supply. Language training costs

are higher than in other social and humanities fields, and universities are reluctant to train "dual-subject" teachers, especially when experts have to be transferred between departments[2]. Most universities (except for vocational schools of higher education) train students within philological departments, while teaching qualifications are acquired mostly in special interdepartmental units or faculties that offer courses in education. Language teacher training colleges were started in the early 1990s, and they somewhat addressed the problem of a soaring demand for foreign language teachers. Those colleges were founded with the goal of training teachers, not linguists. They are not authorized to award Bachelor's degrees, the first level of formal qualifications which must be attained for the purpose of employment in a school. Those institutions thoroughly prepare future teachers with emphasis on practical language instruction, but they have to rely on the academic prowess of universities for theoretical knowledge and professional titles. This form of teacher training is likely to disappear in the future, and in 2008, a relevant project was already proposed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education for the consideration of the academic community.

This study discusses the most important psychological and social aspects of teaching/ learning a foreign language. It contains an overview of various concepts referring to the role of age in foreign language acquisition based on the identified psychological and social factors. Subsequent sections of this study, present several examples of teaching English to pre-school students in view of the psychological and social aspects of foreign language learning in children. The concept of "teaching/learning", rather than "teaching", was used intentionally to draw attention to the learner's central position in the process. In line with the principles of humanism which assert an individual's right to satisfy his or her own needs, the teacher's role is

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2   This observation has been made based on the author's personal experience.

to induce learning in students and preserve the teacher's autonomy in this process (Wilczyńska 1999).

Psychological aspects of foreign language acquisition

The psychological factors of foreign language learning/teaching are:

– intellectual processes (explication and induction) – the learner's discovery of grammatical rules and structures by self-analysis;
– memory – indispensable when language appears and is to be mastered;
– motor skills – successful pronunciation of second language sounds, especially in the context of the speech organs (tongue, mouth, lips, vocal chords);
– motivation;
– attitude towards the foreign language studied (Steinberg, Sciarini 2006)[3].

Intellectual processes – according to W. Wilczyńska (as cited in S. P. Corder): "foreign language acquisition is principally an inductive process which is supported at the right moment by descriptions and explanations adapted to the learner's level of maturity and knowledge" (Wilczyńska 1999, p. 28). Explication, which in inseparable from the understanding of grammatical rules poses a problem for young language learners. Researchers Steinberg and Sciarini (2006), for example, have noted that while explanation can be used in teaching certain elements of a foreign language to adults and adolescent learners, the method is not a viable instructional tool for children. The above applies especially to children younger than four or five who already have a working knowledge of the native language, but are

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3   This classification has been suggested by: D. D. Steinberg, N. V. Sciarini.

unable to comprehend explanations such as: *use a plural form* or *use the past perfect tense*. Those children assimilate language by induction and the self-discovery of grammatical rules and structures. Children exposed to a foreign language are able to analyze and discover the general rules of a given language. This is a natural form of language acquisition which enables children to apply the discovered rules in new situations.

Memory – is of key importance in the learning process. Memory is needed for learning even of the simplest foreign words, associating the heard word with its designatum through the use of sight, touch, smell, etc. Memory also plays a very significant role in learning grammatical structures and rules which provide the learner with an extensive knowledge of speech. Experts note, however, that it "is not enough to remember entire phrases or sentences, the learner has to remember situations in which those sentences and their syntaxes were correctly used" (Wilczyńska 1999, p. 126). This type of memory is known as episodic memory. To illustrate, a student has to remember who said what in a foreign language outside of the classroom environment, in what circumstances and what that person's status was. Children under seven have a truly phenomenal memory which is of paramount significance in foreign language learning.

Motor skills of speech organs – motor skills are very important for correct pronunciation which is an important part of foreign language learning. In turn, better pronunciation in a foreign language is a prerequisite for successful communication with others. The articulation of speech sounds requires control over the muscles that move the speech organs. Those articulatory muscles have to be used correctly and at the right time, for example when opening the mouth correctly, placing the lips and the tongue in the right position (Steinberg, Sciarini 2006). Children have more flexible articulatory muscles than teenagers and adults. The above most probably explains why young children are able to assimilate the accent in a foreign

language much more easily than adults, and with the same mastery that is demonstrated in their mother tongue. Accent becomes stabilized past the age of 12. It is roughly at that age when motor skills, including the activity of the articulatory muscles, begin to deteriorate (e.g. vocal chords gradually lose their flexibility).

Motivation – is yet another important aspect of the teaching/ /learning process. At the age of two, a child does not feel the need to learn a foreign language, which is why it is exposed to that language spontaneously and naturally. A young child assimilates a foreign language somewhat automatically, even in unfavorable circumstances. All that is needed is a good model of spoken language (a child needs a role model) and the right linguistic "proofing" in the form of social and physical surroundings. A four to five year-old needs motivation to learn and is aware of the adults' attitude to a given foreign language. During both planned and spontaneous kindergarten activities, children can choose between the types of activities they want to be involved in. Children choose activities that are attractive and capture their attention. Small children are guided by emotions when making choices, which is why their motivation may be lowered if they do not like the foreign language teacher. At the pre-school age, referred to by J. Piaget as the stage of autonomy, a child begins to understand the consequences and intentions of his or her own and other people's actions (Piaget 1967). Most teachers realize that motivation is built by many factors, and they resort to various means that reinforce the enthusiasm to learn. In short, external motivation should evoke the student's internal motivation, subject to the child's age and level of development. This becomes possible only at the stage of formal operational thinking approximately at the age of ten.

Attitude – the learner's attitude to a foreign language significantly determines the success of the learning process. A negative attitude to a foreign language or its speakers may result in reluctance towards learning that language, while a positive attitude can contribute to

a student's greater involvement in classroom activity and successful language acquisition. Attitude is also capable of influencing memory. Researchers Steinberg and Sciarini (2006) have noted that children as young as four begin to develop an attitude towards a foreign language, especially by observing the behavior of adults. Children who use a different language at home and in school may be reluctant to speak the native language because they want to be a part of the peer group in the classroom. The above often applies to children who are part of national minorities.

Social aspects of foreign language acquisition

Social aspects include situations, places and interactions involving a foreign language where an individual's experiences may affect foreign language learning. They are, in particular:
– natural setting (family, play, work place),
– classroom setting,
– social context (community).
A natural setting for foreign language learning is similar to the setting in which the native language is acquired. This implies that language is experienced together with daily life situations and objects. It is acquired through interaction with others, for example during play. D. D. Steinberg and N. V. Sciarini (2006) quote the example of a five-year-old girl, a native speaker of English, who learned Japanese while playing with Japanese children during less than one year's stay in Japan. Older children may be reluctant to identify with the new community, and they resist learning a second language. They want to preserve their own identity and culture, and they avoid situations in which they would be forced to self-assert their identity. As observed by Preston (as cited in: Steinberg, Sciarini 2006), children who have not yet fully developed a sense of self-identity find it easier to adopt the norms of a new language community. Adults have fewer opportunities to learn

a second language naturally, and they are not as open as children. Interacting with foreign language speakers while shopping or visiting the bank may support language learning, but similarly to interactions with foreigners in the work place, it poses certain limitations. The number of opportunities to experience language in a natural setting decreases with age.

A classroom setting is a place where language is learned in a planned way, therefore it differs from a natural social setting. In the classroom, the teacher is usually the only speaker of the learned foreign language. Students learn the language not by self-analysis, but by following the teacher. All aspects of school life serve the ultimate goal of learning. As members of the school community, students are involved in the process of social adaptation, and they work not only for own benefit, but also for the benefit of the group. In a classroom setting, students have to observe specific learning procedures, they are expected to have a long attention span, wait their turn and do their homework (Steinberg, Sciarini 2006). Language learning skills in a classroom setting increase with age.

The social context implies shared situations in which a language, for example English, is used as the native or the foreign language. A situation in which English is a foreign language in a school for foreign students, for example from Poland, is more likely to benefit the learning process than when English is learned in a Polish school.

The effect of psychological and social factors on foreign language learning in children and adults is presented in the table below.

What is the critical age for foreign language learning? The answer is complicated and ambiguous. As shown in the above table, children learn better in a natural setting, while adults score less satisfactory results in this environment, but they are characterized by a high level of induction and the ability to learn through explication

Table 1. The significance of factors contributing to foreign language learning

Age	Psychological factors				Social factors	
	Intellectual processes				Setting	
	Induction	Explication	Memory	Motor skills	Natural	Classroom
Children under 7	High	Low	High	High	High	Low
7-12	High	Average	Average/ High	Average / High	Average	Average
Older than 12 (adults)	High	High	Average	Low	Low	High

Source: own findings based on D. D. Steinberg, N. V. Sciarini 2006.

(explanation). Unfortunately, a high level of induction does not support the learning of syntax rules because it lacks a reference to a natural setting which is a source of linguistic and non-linguistic data for analysis. Grammatical rules are not explained in a natural setting either. Due to average memory and lower flexibility of the articulatory muscles, adults are less successful in assimilating a foreign language than children. Children have better memory and they learn syntax rules more easily. In a classroom settings, older students and adults are better than children not only because they have a greater capacity for understanding grammatical explanations, but also because they know how to be students. They are familiar with the requirements of classroom instruction, they have a longer attention span and a longer cognitive experience (including in the native language).

Below is a description of two case studies investigating the discussed aspects of foreign language learning in children

Exemplification of psychological factors – music aptitude and English language acquisition

Studies investigating the connection between language skills (reading, reading comprehension, knowledge of spelling and grammatical rules) and music aptitude have confirmed the existence of this dependency (Suświłło 2001). Nevertheless, the existing sources of reference do not support any unambiguous conclusion that would point to a strong correlation between music aptitude and the degree of fluency in the English language. An attempt to find the connection between music aptitude and the level of English proficiency among 12-year-old students was made by one of my students in a Bachelor's degree thesis. The students' music aptitude was investigated with the use of the IMMA (Intermediate Measure of Music Audiation) test developed by Edwin E. Gordon which measured tonal and rhythm music aptitude. Language skills were measured by a language achievement test designed by the author of the Bachelor's thesis based on the results of English language tests. The language achievement test covered five sub-tests:

1) a grammar test comprising 4 problems where a total of 17 points could be scored;
2) a vocabulary test comprising 4 problems and a total of 27 points;
3) a writing skills test comprising 4 problems and a total of 24 points;
4) an oral skills test comprising 4 problems and a total of 19 points;
5) a listening skills test comprising 4 problems and a total of 23 points.

A maximum of 110 points could be scored in the language achievement test. Students could score up to 80 points in E. E. Gordon's test.

Unlike the IMMA test, the language achievement test was not a standardized tool, therefore the obtained results were compared without computing a correlation index. In addition to the above test, which for reasons of methodological accuracy should be referred to as a competence quiz, the author analyzed the students' written work which consisted of regular quizzes. The author interviewed the students and the English teacher for additional information on the learners' individual involvement, assimilation of different aspects of the English language and their level of motivation. Although a sample comprising of 20 students should not constitute a basis for formulating far-reaching conclusions, the reported results could provide the teacher with valuable material for follow-up work. The results obtained with the use of both tools were grouped on three levels: high, average and low. And so, children with a high level of music aptitude showed a high level of achievement in English, scoring 14 points more on average than students with an average music aptitude. Only a single student scored low in the written skills quiz. This seemingly simple correlation between music aptitude and language achievement was distorted by the results of one of the girls who, despite a low level of music aptitude, scored 100 points (out of 110) in the language quiz due to her long exposure to English. The girl began to learn English at the age of 3 in kindergarten. She then attended private lessons and was enrolled in an English class as of the fourth grade of primary school. She is reputed to be an ambitious and hard working student. She had traveled a longer way than some of her peers, and she was able to score such high results due to the motivational factor and continued exposure to English.

This is how the analyzed group's English teacher interpreted the students' achievements:

Musically gifted children show a greater talent for languages than students with low levels of music aptitude. They find it much easier to pronounce words, phrases and full sentences at different levels of

difficulty. The energy of the perfect pitch in music supports problem-free perception of the most difficult sounds. A child with a high level of music aptitude will describe the sound as nice, ugly, melodious or not melodious. This child will get pleasure out of reading, speaking or listening to a foreign language. The student will attempt to correctly reproduce every sound. In phonetics classes, only musically gifted students are able to take down the phonetic transcription of particular words because they clearly recognize every phoneme in the English language. (...) Their auditory skills enable them to judge whether they can correctly repeat a given phrase or perform a listening and speaking exercise. Language proficiency is the ability to communicate through speech which requires correct hearing perception[4].

Exemplification of the social context – situational teaching/ /learning of English at pre-school level

The two social contexts, i.e. the natural setting and the classroom setting, can be combined in a pre-school environment during spontaneous activities that are not planned, occur at various times of the day and in different places of the kindergarten facility. Such events can take place during indoor or outdoor play time, during meals, during the afternoon nap time, in the changing room, bathroom, hobby area, etc. This type of instruction may be referred to as the "situational introduction of language". The "situational" method was used during an experiment involving pre-school students between October 2002 and March 2003[5]. It was a quasi-experiment in education, conducted

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4   L. Numminen, *Słuch muzyczny a zdolności językowe (na przykładzie uczniów szkoły podstawowej),* Bachelor's thesis written under the supervision of M. Suświłło in a non-public university in Olsztyn, 2003.

5   Research for a Bachelor's thesis, K. Ostowska, *Sytuacyjne nauczanie języka angielskiego,* written under the supervision of M. Suświłło in a non-public university in Olsztyn, 2003.

on a single group of students without initial testing. Sample group students were selected on the assumption that they had not previously undergone any type of English language instruction. The applied research strategy was participant observation to avoid the need of correcting the children's incorrect linguistic habits. At the end of the experiment, the level of language proficiency was tested with the Child's Detailed Skills Charts and the Child's Activity Charts.

Below is a description of selected contexts in which situational English teaching strategies were deployed by the researcher.

<u>Situation I – children arrive at the kindergarten</u>. When eight children arrive, the teacher suggests a game of Lotto, and starts with a rhyme in English. The teacher tickles the children and says that those who laugh the loudest will be the first to start the game. The selected student receives a set of large cards with the same pictures that were previously distributed to other children. The chosen student, Alicja, shows a card with a picture of a car and asks: *Who's got a car?* Marek, who has the same picture, answers: *I've got a car*, and returns the picture saying *Thank you*. Alicja responds with a *Thank you*. Marek goes back to his seat, and the game continues until all children have shown their pictures. At the end of the game, children say out loud the names of the objects shown in the pictures, for example, Basia: *I've got a car, a dog, a teddy bear*; Jola: *I've got a doll, a train, an apple*. The children want to play again. The group grows as more students arrive at the kindergarten. As every day before breakfast, the teacher initiates a ball game during which children imitate the movements of different animals displayed in a series of pictures. The students have to give the animal's English name and mimic the way the animal moves.

<u>Situation II – washing hands in the bathroom</u> (before breakfast). The teacher instructs the children to line up and follow her (in English). She claps her hands (the students follow her) and says in English: *One, two, three, we go to bathroom, one, two, three, to wash our hands*. She then shows the children what to do by gesticulating and using

English words. The children repeat after the teacher: *I'm soaping my hands.* This is followed by a rhyme about breakfast which is especially popular among the girls: *One, two, three, we go to dining room. One, two, three, to eat our breakfast.* When one of the boys spills his soup at breakfast, the teacher responds in English, asking the boy to find the service room and bring back cleaning utensils. The teacher tells the children in English what the breakfast is made of, and the students repeat after her. As noted by the researcher, during meals, children can practice the use of nouns (names) as well as entire phrases which describe tastes (*It smells like...*), smells, favorite foods, etc.

Situation III – a compulsory class (language instruction in a classroom setting) is part of the curriculum and it has a clearly set goal: to develop or support the growth of developmental skills, for example, intellectual, artistic (musical, drawing) and motor skills. The teacher begins with a short talk about the weather and encourages the children to join in and use English weather terms. She then starts a game of Chinese whispers with a short English sentence about the weather. The game is followed by an exercise in visual perception during which the students have to complete a pattern drawn on a piece of paper. The teacher approaches every student, says out loud the names of geometric shapes displayed in the patterns and asks the children to repeat those names in English. The class ends with a short riddle about an egg.

Situation IV – outdoor games (in the school garden). Outdoor games are a daily activity in the kindergarten. Children can play in the snow at the temperature of -2°C. The teacher says in English: *Let's make a snowman.* She gives the students further instructions, she names the snowman's body parts in English and assists the children in their work. After decorating the snowman, the students learn a short

rhyme, they throw snowballs at the snowman and knock off its hat. Situations like these evoke highly positive emotions in children and they reinforce the learning of foreign vocabulary and phrases.

The researcher describes many other situations in which a child learns a foreign language through the use of words and phrases in an applicable context, as well as the students' responses to such situations. Yet it is the not the objective of this study to present the researcher's findings in their entirety. The results of the cited experiment indicate that this type of instruction enables children to acquire a foreign language in an environment that is similar to the natural setting. It provides the teacher with an opportunity to observe the progress made by the students. The results of a language skills test performed after the experiment have the following implications for practical instruction:

1. The teaching of a foreign language to children should rely predominantly on play.
2. Language acquisition takes place through language games and song learning.
3. Learning should be based on activity, movement, exercise and a full body response.
4. A child has to develop a versatile set of linguistic skills which are accompanied by other activities, such as drawing, coloring in or physical activity.
5. Children have to express themselves through various means, including drama, art and music.
6. The learning process should relate to specific objects and situations.
7. Learning takes place through multiple repetition[6].

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6   K. Ostowska, *Sytuacyjne nauczanie języka angielskiego*, Bachelor's thesis, p. 66.

Final conclusions

To conclude, it should be noted that the above factors conditioning the process of teaching/learning a foreign language have been presented solely from a psycholinguistic perspective[7], and that they never occur in isolation. Learning is usually the product of interactions between various psychological and social factors. Other skills required for effective language learning include music aptitude, perceptiveness and emotional readiness which activates the willingness to learn. Subject to the students' age, the learning context has to feature instructional methods that are attractive for children. The humanistic approach to language learning requires a high level of professional competence on the teacher's behalf in the following areas:

1) intellectual competencies – general knowledge of the social, natural and technical world;

2) specialist competencies, including a high level of linguistic competence (both in the native language and in the foreign language), the knowledge about language, speaking, reading, writing and listening skills, the knowledge and the skill of introducing children to a foreign language (including open style and flexibility);

3) psychological and teaching competencies related to personal traits which are required in the work with small children (e.g. friendly attitude, openness, empathy, etc.), the knowledge of child development and education, interpersonal skills, computer literacy, organizational skills, the ability to motivate;

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[7] A slightly different set of factors conditioning the acquisition of a foreign language is proposed by cognitive psychology, but a separate study would be needed to discuss them in detail. Ref. W. Wilczyńska, *Uczyć się, czy być nauczanym? O autonomii w przyswajaniu języka obcego*, Warszawa – Poznań 1999.

4) ethical competencies derived from a personalistic approach to education where the learner is perceived as an autonomous individual who constantly develops the self, but also who lives in a society and shares his or her knowledge and skills with others.

In general, the above skills make up a complete set of teaching and linguistic qualifications.

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**Beata Bednarczuk,
Krystyna Kusiak,
Renata Stawinoga**

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

Respect for the Child – Over Declarations

ABSTRACT

In the history of educational thought, you can find those of its pedagogues, who by observing the reality of school life and the child's learning process, built their own system solutions, carefully described, scientifically sound and practically verified not only by them but also by several generations of the or ists and researchers, students and their teachers, children and their parents. Among others Maria Montessori, Celestine Freinet and Janusz Korczak belong to this group. In their work there is no "pure empirical pedagogy or strictly normative speculation or meta-theoretical deconstruction" (Śliwerski 2003, p. 336), and the expressed and executed views result from the concern for the child's rights.

Key words: Maria Montessori's pedagogy, Celestin Freinet's pedagogy, Janusz Korczak's pedagogy, child, children's rights, respect.

Maria Montessori's Pedagogy

The nature of typical characteristics of the child

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Maria Montessori argued that the child has a natural, internal development plan. She described it on the basis of the observation of the child's behaviour which is manifested only in the atmosphere of freedom.

Montessori compared the newborn to an embryo, in which the code of human development is stored (Montessori 1975, p. 83-85). „It seems that a mangoes through two stages of embryonic development. The one is pre-natal, the other is post-natal, which distinguishes a man from animals" (Montessori 1992, p. 55). The scientist explained that during this stage the child has to do the creative work of building himself or herself. This activity which can be called constructive turns the child into a kind of a Spiritual Embryo. Montessori used this vivid metaphor to emphasize the fact that in the small child you can discern "trapped" life that is the creativeness sense, encrypted potentiality. This in turn, stimulated by environmental stimuli, leads to the formation of a man of our times, civilization or culture in which he lives (more on this topic, see. Bednarczuk 2007, p. 18-22).

In the interpretation of the mentioned researcher, the condition for the development of the Spiritual *E*mbryo is the impact of the physical and social environment, triggering activity and directing development. The environment of life is a building material which is necessary to form the future mental life. In the development process the child is directed by the inner sensitivity described by Montessori as *the periods of special sensitivity.* They induce children's interest in these elements of the environment that are consistent with their development plan, they change in the course of subsequent years of life, and their duration is determined by the need for shaping a new developmental skill (Montessori 1975, p. 84-85; Montessori 1992, p. 75; Standing 1974, p. 118-132). The sensitive period is not the absolute time, i.e. the only provided for the development of specific skills, but it is optimal. The organism has reached the appropriate level of maturity, that is "a given type of stimulation has a stronger, more significant impact on the development in certain moments in the course of life, not earlier and not later" (see Brzezińska 2004, p. 133).

The significance of introducing to analysis and research of the category *the* periods *of special sensitivity* is important due to the

fact that they show what experiences are essential to the child in the process of his development. In turn, a tool for collecting experience in Montessori's pedagogy, is *the* absorbent mind (Montessori 1975, 1992). This term was selected by the author due to the unprecedented ease and lightness with which the child as simulates the stimuli coming from the surrounding. We can say that the child gathers the material that will become a fabric for the future, conscious life. "Experiences not only fill the mind, they form it" (Standing 1974, p. 109), construct it, reorganize it, transform it. It means that the child is capable of storing in the memory all the experiences in which he has participated. Thanks to this unconscious intelligence, he absorbs experiences, which are then registered in his psyche. They transform, the mind and form its basic dispositions, such as thinking, memory, attention, and will. (see Zdybel 2009, p. 92-93).

Montessori calls the child in the first years of his or her life "creative". She justified the legitimacy of the term by the fact that the real purpose of the child becomes the joy of creation of himself or herself, which means work involving building of the future adult. In undertaken attempts and tasks, the child wants to be free, wants to work at an individual pace ,in the chosen place and time, without interruption from the classmates and the teacher. This is a condition of the internal maturation. At the same time the child independently gathers experiences which in turn he or she converts into a structured, integrated system of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Moreover, he or she develops the ability to think and act, which leads to him becoming an expert (see Ledzińska, Czerwińska 2011, p. 92). In Montessori's pedagogy upbringing and education area kind ofhelp for thechild in reaching independence from adults and achieving full maturity. The child development should therefore be perceived as a series of steps which are to lead to achieving complete independence, shaping the capability of independent and autonomous functioning (Montessori 1989b). The source of gaining independence becomes the child's

spontaneous activity. These two values (activity and independence) are inextricably related and their mutual relations, as the Italian teacher accurately indicated, are illustrated by the sentence: "Help me do it myself" (Montessori 1989b; Montessori 1972).

The right to freedom

Typical for the aforementioned extended embryonic period of the young child is the lack of a ready, established system of instincts, which animals have, and which directs their behaviour. But a man is basically free, "free to connect, as a dynamic link, to a variety of cultures, wherever and whenever. Free to make decisions and exercise his or her will. Free in the absorption of features of his environment, as well as in the creation of the basis for his future life. Free in the dialogue with his world, but never limited, or determined by the world" (Van Ewijk 2011, p. 2). "The fact that a man is not enslaved by fixed and predetermined impulses which direct him, as it is in the case of an animal, indicates the existence of a certain freedom of action, which, however, has to mature slowly (*Montessori after Holstiege*, p. 2), it cannot be given or acquired, it needs to be built and developed, freedom need scare (*Montessori after Holstiege*, p. 3).

In the Italian's concept freedom is a central category, it is a prerequisite for the development of personality. Spontaneous activity is the expression of freedom, hence in the field of pedagogy, freedom means the chance to choose the material, and thus the task (educational activity), from the offered set of aids and learning tools. Freedom manifests itself in the free determination of when, where, how, for how long, at what rate, and with whom the pupil will work. Therefore the child co-determines his or her learning process, for he directs his learning and activity, and through this he accustoms himself to using freedom. There is, however, one clear limit for all members of the Montessori community: the limit of one's own freedom is the freedom of others.

Learning in the organised environment

Montessori wanted above all to study, to get to know the child, who was provided with natural development conditions. She did not put in front of herself the task of developing, trying out or implementing a new, effective method of working with the child (see Trabalzini 2009a, p. 167). A kindergarten and school in the Montessori system are based on the principle of respect for the child's development and his or her needs, provide students with structured, rich in learning aids, initiating action environment in which there is no constant instructing by the teacher. A Montessori workshop can be described as a large, bright room, furnished in a thoughtful way. The workshop is divided into different areas of education, corresponding to specific layers of the curriculum(mathematics, geometry, learning the language, geography, biology, etc.), and each area is equipped with specific development materials developed by Montessori. The materials are designed in such away as to attract the interest and attention of the children, stimulate activity and to educate and develop by means of repetition of certain activities. The children's work in the classroom can take place at the desks, on the floor or in working arrears arranged by the pupils themselves.

In this way, the school becomes the environment determining the quality of children's learning and growth, and education and training aid in the development process. The necessary condition for the development is activity, because the most important thing in the child's growth is his independent and spontaneous activity. It is defined as experiencing the environment by penetrating it, moving in it, studying the objects found in it and the perception of the surrounding reality (see Centner-Guz 2009, p. 274). The prepared environment provides the child with the possibility and freedom to act, offers him the opportunity to explore the tasks and the content hidden in teaching materials or tasks designed by the teacher, or revealing themselves spontaneously. If the teacher carefully plans the environment, the child

has the opportunity to check and learn the methods of organizing the material programmed in the teaching aids, such as putting things in series, arranging, classifying, etc. In this way, the child masters the tools of learning, handling the material. "The organised environment (...) makes it possible for every child to follow their own rhythm, to regulate, to discover and properly evaluate their abilities. Everything takes place according to the principle of free choice, and through individual work" (Trabalzini 2009a, p. 170). As researchers and educators unanimously suggest, the prepared environment can be compared to everyday life environment, knowledge and development. This is a type of university research laboratory, in which the child carries out an important research project– he builds himself, pursues his full maturity.

Courage in the fight for children's rights

In 1950 Maria Montessori published her earlier book, *Children's Houses* under a new title *The Discovery of the Child*. She argued there that humanity can expect a solution to its problems only if it focuses full attention and energy on the discovery of the child and on the development of the human personality in the learning process. This goal defined her entire professional life. Montessori understood work as a service to the child, as respect for and realisation of independently discovered development rights of the child and young person (Kucha 2003; Surma 2008).

After graduation, Montessori was trying to help children with learning disabilities. She gained medical knowledge, sought help in the works by Itard and Seguin. She proved then that the rehabilitation of disabled children is possible through the teaching effort, which will facilitate the handicapped relatively independent life, free from the constant help of others. At the First Pedagogical Conference of Turin in 1898 Montessori proposed the creation of special classes for children with mental problems in primary schools and special

medico-pedagogical schools for children with serious problems (see Trabalzzini 2009b).

She wanted to have her educational strategies discovered during her work in San Lorenzo, which she undertook in 1907 confirmed: learning through the senses and movement, through experience, understanding and practice. She was then a researcher with substantial scientific attainments. She started working on the concept of education stemming from the observation of children. In 1909 Maria Montessori published the first handbook of scientific pedagogy. The experiments described there aroused so much interest that as early as in 1913 she led the first international course in her method in the United States. In 1929, Montessori founded the international association: Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), in order to coordinate the work of Montessori schools, including the training of teachers. In the same year, the first international conference of AMI took place, and she actively participated in the next nine conferences (in the years1929–1938 seven conferences were in session, the next ones were held in 1949 and 1951). She became a citizen of the world, because her pedagogy exceeds national boundaries (Grazzini 2001).

Montessori's books and dissertations published after 1934, were connected with the next stage of her research and teaching work. Observation and interpretation of the child's nature allowed the scientist to discover his function in the development of the world and humanity (see Surma 2008, p. 23). "Thanks to the child, whom we will help in satisfying the needs of growing, by preparing for him a new surrounding and ways of acting facilitating active gaining of experiences, thanks to this child, whom we understand and support, there may even develop better human individuality (Italian: *migliore individualita umana*). New people, new citizens of the new world (Montessori 1949). Montessori outlined a project of the formation of the New Man, starting from bringing up the New Child. She concluded

that it was possible to realize this goal. She raised the importance of social, religious and cultural education, developed a concept of cosmic education, became interested in education for peace and environmental upbringing (Kucha 2003, p. 327; Surma 2008).

In 1933, Maria Montessori refused to accept the title of "the Ambassador of Children" from Benito Mussolini's fascist regime. Her schools were closed, and she herself had to leave Italy in 1936 (Kucha 2003, p. 331). In Nazi Germany and Austria, her books were burnt, her schools were closed. However, Montessori-as a citizen of the world, a spokesperson for the child, even then led courses and training for teachers (Surma 2008, p. 25). Although World War II reduced the ability of running Montessori schools, it did not stop the development of the child-centred pedagogy. For her work on behalf of children, societies and peace, Maria Montessori was awarded the French Legion of Honour, appointed a professorship the University of Perugia, was the recipient of an Honorary Doctorate of the University of Amsterdam. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times. In December 1951, UNESCO invited Maria Montessorif or the celebration of the third anniversary of signing of the Declaration of Human Rights. In reply to the invitation Montessori wrote about the child as of the Forgotten Citizen of the world and it was her last article. She died 4 months later (Grazzini 2001, p. 9).

Let us recall that over a century ago Maria Montessori wrote that the proper design of the education system requires understanding how the child learns and develops. This is a basic and necessary condition for building a school that will correspond to the child's nature. The Italian scientist was interested in the essence and nature of the child's development, effective way of mobilizing his potential in life. Montessori, unlike most teachers, politicians or education activists, not only talked about the child's needs, but she also discovered and described them and demonstrated how they can be respected in

a school. Such important achievements cause the fact that Maria Montessori's pedagogy is defined as AN AID FOR LIFE, THAT IS FOR THE CHILD.

Celestin Freinet's Pedagogy

The nature of typical characteristics of the child

The model of working with children developed by Celestin Freinet, described by the author as a method- because of the awareness of the complexity of the matter which he had to face and the lack of pre-defined theoretical basis- can be *post factum* certainly considered as a system solution due to its completeness and internal consistency (see Kusiak, 2010, p. 280). And the author himself, characterized by great strength of spirit and deep humanistic beliefs (though not from the beginning expressed in word), can be considered as at ruly good teacher, because of having qualities (the evidence for which we find in his work), which J. W. David (after Strykowski 2003, p. 21-22) considers as building the "teacher's soul", i. f. love of human souls, the need for excellence, a sense of responsibility and duty, as well as moral courage.

The realization of respect for the child in the dimension defined as understanding of the pupil's nature since the first days of C. Freinet's teaching practice, essentially consisted of making strenuous efforts to recognize the physical and mental capabilities and needs of children (Okoń 1997). The deep conviction about the importance of knowledge on this subject is indicated in the words in which he writes, "And perhaps, my only teacher talent is that I could keep all the memories of younger years, which allows me to understand in the child like way the children I bring up". With this belief he also warns. "If you do not become like children again, you will never enter the enchanted realm of pedagogy" (Freinet 1976, p. 25).

C. Freinet based the construction of the pedagogical system on closely observing children's activity (not only in the course of lessons) to discover mechanisms and rules regulating it. He treated the generalized results of these observations as the foundation of his own method (see Freinet 1993). An example is the deep awareness of the role of positive reinforcement in the learning process expressed in the words "Show respect to the pupil's clumsy text by preserving itin print; praise the colour selection and composition of drawing sand include them in the collection for exhibitions; cover with enamel and harden by kilning the child's ceramics, which in its final form of fresh beauty can survive for ages. Then you will feel how the pride of well done a job will light your small workers" (Freinet 1976, p. 34).

In addition to seeking rules applying to all children, Freinet was also interested in each of them individually. Understanding how important the differences between children in different areas may be, and at the same time trying to provide a sense of dignity to each of them he recommends "Let each of your students find an area in which he could gain an advantage and success at least for a while. Among many techniques (...) you'll be able to discover in your class a master in writing, a poet, a draftsman printer, a computist, an accountant, a dramatic or comic actor, a sculptor, a carpenter, a musician, a singer, a dancer, a gardener, a messenger, a mechanic, an order enthusiast, a master in making fire in the oven... you can easily find thirty functions in which your thirty students can show off" (Freinet 1976, p. 56).

The right to freedom

In spite of the fact that C. Freinet was convinced that freedom is relative, in the characterized system we do not meet he relativized the interpretation of this idea. On the contrary, the author proposes in practice such freedom as we expect in democratic systems. As he

writes, "in the school the order, discipline, authority and dignity of the teacher must be kept, but it must be the order resulting from better work organization, the discipline constituting a natural consequence of the active cooperation of all members of the school community, and above all the moral authority, and only then the professional and social one, and it is not achieved by threat or punishment, but by the mastery of work, evoking respect. The dignity of our common activity of teachers and students, the educator's dignity is unachievable without respect for the dignity of children whom we want to prepare for their future role of mature people" (Freinet 1976, p. 86).

We find the implementation of this plane of respect for the child in Freinet's pedagogy even in the used forms of planning, control and self-control as well as in the creation of the institution of the school self-government with a specific educational tool which was the self--government newspaper (see Semenowicz 1966).

Planning, as an activity regulating the pupil's work, particularly in the current week, allowed the real subjectivization of the student, as it was not so much an effect of the teacher's work with the student, but rather of the student's independent effort, undertaken with the help of the teacher. Similarly, in the sphere of control: the student's autonomy in the conduct of control, e.g. by using self-correction flashcards, personal responsibility for the achieved result of work, his own decisions about the nature of actions taken in response to emerging problems, and finally a considerable margin of freedom in using the teacher's help, made the student a rightful and plenipotentiary participant of the education process.

The image of Freinet's pedagogy, in which the students undisputedly gain the status of subjects, is supplemented by the way of functioning of the school self-government. All students' genuine participation in it, the right to vote expressed in criticism, request surprise, openness in discussion undertaken on its forum cause the fact that you cannot

have doubts about its role in democratizing the relationships between the participants of the education process.

Learning in the organised environment

In Freinet's pedagogy we find the perfect realization of the postulate of expressing respect for the child by organizing conditions for his or her independent, constructive and effective learning. This is reflected in the adjustment of the broadly understood educational area (physical, curricular, organizational, methodological, personnel one) to the needs of the learning child.

The school space, though in the words of J. Doroszewska (1977, p. 109) was spartanly furnished, was however rich "in everything that creates the right condition for the student to work independently". C. Freinet efforts aimed at such an organization which was subordinated to the need to allocate a separate location, a so-called workshop, and supply it with appropriate materials, tools and utensils needed for the children to undertake multilateral activity (Okoń 1997, p. 88 et seq.) that means, various types of work such as experimenting, constructing, breeding, or in the scope of the language. Even though all of them usually took place in one room, children's diverse work could proceed in parallel and without interference due to the respect for the adopted rule saying that to every thing in the class had its place and was in its place (Semenowicz 1966, p. 101 et seq.).

Granting the child the right to independent and free work found its- also symbolic-expression in moving the teacher's desk to the end of the room behind the children's desks and leaving the front of the room with tables and triple board sat which students could present their papers and free texts. The recognition of the fact that the classroom space is a place of the child's work also resulted in the replacement of traditional desks by light tables which were easy to move according to the needs, and above all constant availability of resources necessary for independent study-work such as literature accumulated in the

generously equipped classroom bookcase, technical equipment or sets of self-correction flashcards (Semenowicz 1966).

Speaking about the preparation oft he learning environment, we cannot ignore the original techniques used in C. Freinet's school. The properties of techniques used in working with children(see Semenowicz, 1966): free text, searching experiments, lectures and „children's live theatre", at the same time leaving at the children's disposal the decision as to the time or form of work, suggest that in the characterized system we deal with the embodiments the most difficult rule for the teacher, as L. Witkowski writes (2009, p. 18), according to which he should "act in such a way as to be able to feel unnecessary". C. Freinet himself (1976, p. 107) believed that the role of the teacher is to be aware that his work actually never ends and to consistently adopt the role of an apprentice, who constantly searching, is to fill the difficult but noble mission of getting to know a man. These beliefs put into practice, even with the adoption of modern standards of professionalism evaluation allow us to call the French educator a modern teacher, that is, a reflective, critical and innovative one.

Courage in the fight for children's rights

Celestin Freinet began his teaching career out of necessity and without proper preparation (Okoń 1997, p. 82). Guided, however, by common sense (he himself defined the rules formulated by him as the pedagogy of common sense, and he thought that a brilliant researcher was someone who "referred to simplicity and life" (Freinet 1976, p. 5, 8 et al.), by drawing conclusions from the previous observation of life and relying on the current experience, he fairly quickly and with considerable success began to deal with difficulties troubling him in the undertaken teaching practice.

Tracing the road "on which the teacher, starting in extremely adverse conditions, thanks to working on himself and on his system,

becomes the creator of the original concept of teaching" (Okoń 1997, p 82) allows you to see in C. Freinet an example of a decisive, declared and reflective practitioner, capable of – thanks to a special kind of sensitivity – reflection, critical evaluation of the situation and introducing innovative changes (cf. Bednarczuk, Kusiak, Zdybel 2011, p. 260). And even if some of them have features of work called psychological, their more considerable part fits into work of historical significance.

Celestin Freinet's whole pedagogy, both in the idea and practice, grows out of respect for the rights of the child. The child is there understood and treated as a full-fledged person-man, who in the role of the student with his specific characteristics and needs, has the right to dignity and optimal development. Hence, searching in Freinet's pedagogy for this dimension of respect for the child, which manifests itself in fighting for children's rights and standing in their defence, does not present many difficulties.

An important argument is C. Freient's struggle (in a sense, also with himself) to develop, in the existing historical, social and personal context, such a methodology of work, in which the pedagogical value of respect for the child could find the chance for the fullest possible realisation. Another argument are his attempts to go with his own educational activities beyond the walls of his school in order to popularise (as well as re-verify) well working solutions, that is bringing significant benefits to the learning children. C. Freinet founded the French Modern School Movement with its institutions: the Cooperative Institute Ecole Moderne (ICEM) and the Secular Education Cooperative. He also organized conferences and issued magazines for children and teachers (Okoń 1997, p. 86, 99). The final proof of the C. Freinet's practical interest in children's rights is his participation in the preparation of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Janusz Korczak's Pedagogy

The nature of typical characteristics of the child

Janusz Korczak's works reveal he author's dreams about the child-
-friendly world, and thus about the people who realise "the child's right
to respect". The work of this very not able educator is the starting
point for discovering very actual pedagogical thinking. In order to
explore it thoroughly and implement it effectively it is essential to
reject contempt, distrust and resentment towards children. It results
in the adoption of an attitude of respect for his ignorance, the need
to be acquainted with work, to experience failures, the realisation
of the need of ownership, and the perception of the meaning of the
present.

Talking about the child's right to respect Janusz Korczak (1957)
claims that it is necessary to bend down, lower ourselves to him or her.
The world seen from the child's perspective is very different from the
adult world, but it is very coherent in its structure. It is created from
individual elements of constantly acquired knowledge like a building
erected brick by brick. Here there is only one truth, spontaneously
expressed feelings are always true, and good is clearly separated from
evil.

Optimistic faith in the goodness of human nature and of the child,
in his ability to create a world of value is a basis of the innovative
educational conception. In it Korczak called for the acknowledgement
of the child as a fully-fledged human being from the moment of birth
through all stages of life, respecting his or he need for his or her
own activity and independence and perception of weaknesses and
limitations resulting from his or her age. In particular, he referred to
the child's inability to take responsibility for the world and difficulty of
working on himself (Śliwerski 2003, p. 338).

Korczak, understanding the nature of the child's need for closeness with his or her parents, which he himself as a child did not sufficiently experience, in his debut feature article published in the press, wondered whether home will always be reigned by omnipotent wet-nurses, nannies, nurse-maids, governesses, tutors. Will their place never be taken over by parents? (source: Olczak-Ronikier 2011, p. 79). This characteristic attack on educational system of that time seems to clearly express the current modern view, stating that in early childhood no one can substitute parents to the child.

Janusz Korczak attributes a significant role to adults in the child's environment. It seems that he requires first thorough recognition of the child's nature, which will allows for the effective implementation of all of his rights, and thereby achieving full development. Korczak sees the basis for acquiring knowledge about the child in detailed observations, medical and psychological measurements.

Creating a character of the child – a king (Korczak 1996), the main protagonist of his book, fighting for peace in the world, Korczak made present in him the reservoir of characteristics so well-known from his in-depth observation of children's characters. For him every child in the real world is a hero of his own story, which should be read with respect, accepted without objection and developed with shared responsibility. "The child is a parchment tightly written with hieroglyphics, only some of which you will be able to read and some you can wipe or just circle and fill with your essence" (Wołoszyn 1978, p. 178).

It happened many times, that during medical examination, J. Korczak read the child's story from his/her scars, talked to him about the fullness of humanity, reading books, travelling and dreams. Asking questions, he listened to the answers that were specific compendium of knowledge about the child. The climate of Korczak's talks with

the child is fully reflected in the dialogues contained in A. Holland's scripts for the film by Andrzej Wajda (*Holland* 1991).

The right to freedom

B. Śliwerski notes that the essence of Janusz Korczak's concept is "seeking guarantees for human, and especially children's freedom and for the meaning of human life" (2003, p. 336). He adds moreover that "there is no freedom without personal responsibility" (2003, p. 344) for spoken thoughts, undertaken actions, disclosed attitudes. However, one matures gradually to responsibility, and what is permissible for a child is not tolerable in the case of an adult. The inevitable dependence on the smarter, influential, more experienced ones shouldn't in any way invoke the feeling of inferiority, weakness, lack of justice.

The child cannot be an addition to the life of adults, even less so the subject of manipulation. A child must be an autonomous power and value to be respected (Śliwerski 2003, p. 339). That is why, attacks on common sense and the human will are unacceptable. Any coercion and order of absolute submission to teaching and upbringing influences are the negation of the child's liberty. Therefore, so important is the inviolability of the right to freedom and decent life for both, the child and adult.

Among many directions addressed at parents and educators, the statement that "there is no education without the participation of the child" is worth attention (Korczak 2002, p. 24). Thus, an important part of Korczak's educational concept is children's self-government, which allows the revelation of the child's right to express his own thoughts, to express his doubts, to formulate complaints, requests, justifications, to live through his own effort and his own activity. The children's self-government, consisting of a peer court, a council and a parliament, regulated the life of Janusz Korczak's students and made their decisions important. How often in our times do the derivations of this solution bring significant educational results? Are the rules governing life in the nursery room or classroom determined by the

group not respected to a greater extent, than those imposed top-
-down?

Learning in the organised environment

While writing about the child's learning environment, it is worth
paying attention to ensuring the child adequate living and learning
conditions. This is a basis on which it is possible to build a sensitive
personality, conscious of its needs, rights and aspirations. Directed
activity makes the child independent and resourceful in life. Let him
or her learn what is necessary while working. For work is a synonym
of life (Korczak 1985, p. 88). Thanks to it, it is possible to gain life
experience that is more valuable than all theories.

During the study, it is good to take care of both the mind and
body. The child should not be overloaded with work, namely mental
work. A walk or physical exercise are no less useful activities than
learning languages or translation of notes into sound. School should
be an institution which teaches thinking. This statement is all the
more pertinent when we quote Korczak's question directed straight
to the school: Why do you everywhere teach to speak three languages,
but to think in none? (Korczak 1985, p. 79).

School as an institution is an organized environment where the
child is learning. Within its walls, didactic, educational, therapeutic
tasks are carried out and, considering the broader context, social
and political tasks as well. The inconsistency of interests of the state,
social groups and individuals in Korczak's and present times may
diminish the level of these tasks realisation. Therefore, it is important
to subjectivist interpersonal relationships that exist within the system
and have an effect on the outside.

Janusz Korczak's pedagogy makes it possible to look differently
at the adult-child relationship, to emphasize its two important
manifestations, which are: mutual learning with the child and the fact
of learning from him. It is, however, possible only if the adult learns
about the child's ways of thinking and acting with understanding and

openness, becoming a sympathetic guide and a reflective practitioner. Evoking Janusz Korczak and referring to the modern ways of thinking about education, it is impossible not to notice the convergence of attitudes and activities.

As can be seen on the basis of the continuously undertaken explorations a reflective teacher is a teacher who:

– sees himself as a partner in the student's educational space,
– manifests confidence in the students' competence and their personal knowledge and skills gained outside the school,
– creates opportunities for free communication, remembering about limiting monologue forms of communication in favour of a dialogue,
– designs educational activities, looks for consistency and relations between them,
– creates conditions for multilateral activity of students in a friendly, influencing senses of learning space,
– observes, analyzes and interprets the students' behaviour, accurately reads their intentions and responds to them according to his capabilities,
– reflects upon the course of the educational process, individual classes and teaching situations occurring within them,
– assess students' achievements and critically analyses the effects of his own action,
– introduces revisions to the didactic and educational plan (Stawinoga 2010, p. 412-413).

As we read in the "Afterword" to one of the editions of Janusz Korczak's work (2002) both parties are active subjects in the adult-child Nelationships. Hence, it can be concluded that in Korczak's concept, the child's subjectivity is closely related to the adult's subjectivity. Competencies and tasks of the adult and child are different, but much

is demanded from the first and the latter. In our times, this kind of relationship is called a meeting, a dialogue. Let us consider, however, how often there is a genuine contact with another man.

Observation of the realities of life proves that the child is usually looked upon in terms of "tomorrow", in terms of his future successes and achievements. Meanwhile, Korczak makes a concerned appeal not "enslave the child for tomorrow". Mature and responsible educational attitude, recognizing the subjectivity of the child, means that he is perceived in the dimension of "today". It makes it possible to perceive the fullness of humanity, to refer to the current phase of psychophysical development, to search for the zone of proximal development, to deepen the knowledge of the patterns and principles of functioning of the child.

"Korczak's educational stance cannot be a declaration, dressed in beautiful, sentimental, touching words. It isessentially a constant, daily, arduous effort, not calculated for any laurels or external effects" (Lewin 1986, p. 56). The documents defining the rights of children would, in turn, be more transparent and clear, if they referred to the greater extent to Korczak's desiderata in this matter (Lewin 1999, p. 71).

Courage in the fight for children's rights

The fairness and clarity of expressed views is the effect of many years of searching for the truth and the result of the undertaken road of life. Each life story is full of events that determine its continuation. That is why, it is worthwhile to refer to the moment when Korczakd is covered his teaching vocation in 1904. Young Henryk Golszmit was just finishing the fifth course in medical sciences at Imperial University of Warsaw and, as a teacher, he went with a group of Jewish children to a summer camp in Michałówka. The two months which he spent

in the countryside with his pupils showed him the world, which he previously had not known. The children, with whom he stayed, lived every day in poverty and neglect, without the right to access to public parks and gardens, with no chance for a better future for themselves and their families. They did not know how to play, were unable to enjoy nature, and were frightened and sad. A few days' stay in the open air was sufficient for them to start to look into the eyes, to joke about their weaknesses, to play with peers, to listen carefully to the bedtime stories. The child's nature overcame fear of coercion, admonition, rebuke, reprimand, or beating. When, after many years, the Summer Camps Association celebrated its 25 years of existence, Korczak once again was leaving with the children with a plan of literary usage of the gained experience. Then he made a decision that he would give faces, names, characteristics to Jewish children to arouse public interest in their fate. Again holiday rituals are repeated, adventures take place, relaxation is combined with fun and learning. The idea of showing that apart from the language, religion and outfit Jewish children do not differ from others becomes real. The fate causes the fact that a few kilometres from the summer camps in Michałówka, a Nazi extermination camp in the village of Treblinka is being set up. In August 1942,the same way as many years ago, Korczak is setting off with the next generation of his pupils on the last trip. It is a denial of the right to respect and should never happen (see Olczak-Ronikier 2011, p. 106-107, 128-129, 136-137).

Undertaking the fight for the rights of the child and coming to his defence is a task that must be realised by every man and at every time in history. Unfortunately, not every period in history favours establishing and respecting the rights of the child. Looking at this issue from a different perspective, we can say that time of freedom and peace is not a guarantee of their observance. The child -as the highest good and the future of the nation-is always in need of care and attention,

but does not receive it at all times and situations. The question arises, what every person can personally do to be over declarations realizing the right of respect for the child.

Korczak's latest biography by J. Olczak-Ronikier (2011) shows examples of conduct, and in a very interesting way leads through the places in which the task of fighting for the rights of the child and coming to his defence was realized. We can mention here: the Orphanage in Warsaw with work as a major educational factor, the boarding school for students who wanted to continue their education, the educational institution "Our House", suburban holiday camps for the poorest children. In each of these places the most important was the child-his needs, interests and dreams.

The necessity to undertake discussion on the rights of the child be came inevitable. In the document called the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, established in 1923,there was, however, a particular confusion of the rights of the child with adults' responsibilities towards him. Janusz Korczak knew about it, repeatedly referring to this document. "The child's right to be what he is" is also a human right. Thus, love and respect for the child result from his status of the human being. It seems appropriate to make a clear distinction between the rights of the child resulting from the general human rights and specific rights due to him as a consequence of being a child.

Janusz Korczak was an educator, a paediatrician, a writer, a moralist, a social worker. He can also be considered an untitled spokesperson for the rights of the child. The fact is that because of his qualifications he would be the right person for this position. The question is whether he would take the job? (Andrzejewski 2000). The choices he made: the resignation from higher levels of career and from starting his own family and the adoption of "paternal" attitude towards children from the poorestst rata of society and coming to their defence, testify the adopted way of realising his life vocation.

Instead of the summary

"A man has three names, the first from the parents, the second from the world and the third is given him by his deeds. A good name is a capital that knows no devaluation or limitations" (quoted in Falkowska, 1983, p 109). The durability and topicality of J. Korczak's educational thought and life approach presented by him can prove the authenticity of this claim. Similar associations come to mind when we mention the figures of M. Montessori and C.Freinet. Can, therefore, the same be said of today's educators? Undoubtedly, in this group there are people who recognize respect for the child as the highest value, and are over declarations in realizing their pedagogical vocation day after day.

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Krystyna Kusiak,
Beata Bednarczuk,
Renata Stawinoga

University Maria Curie-Skłodowska in Lublin, Poland

Respect for the Child – its Possible Dimensions

ABSTRACT

Respect is a category which, thanks to its interdisciplinary nature, precedence and specifik developmental dynamics make its presence indispensable in theoretical and practical pedagogical discourse. This two-part study will focus on the search for potential dimensions and possible ways of realizing it in the practice of teaching, with reference to historical and contemporary educational systems.

Key words: child, children's rights, recpect, dimensions of respect.

Respect is a category which, thanks to its interdisciplinary nature, precedence and specific developmental dynamics makes its presence indispensable in theoretical and practical pedagogical discourse. In this two-part study it will be considered with the search for potential dimensions and possible ways of realizing it in the practice of teaching, with reference to historical and contemporary educational systems.

Referring to Immanuel Kant's philosophy, L. Kołakowski (2002, p. 14) writes that "Respect (...), it is not an emotion like love,

friendship or fascination. It is not a belief, an intellectual act. It is located between the two and it is a phenomenon of quite peculiar nature. A manifestation of this peculiarity is the difficulty of giving a simple answer to the question: Can it be justified and how can it be justified that any thing deserves respect: God, a man, the truth?, The author writes, When I am said that every person deserves respect, and I ask «why?», what will I hear? May be only, because everyone is a man, "but then when I say «so what?» And what does it mean that a man is a man? then probably my interlocutor-humanist will not find a good answer".

The philosopher (Kołakowski 2002, p. 14-15), however, does not leave us without help in the presence of doubts previously raised by him and he suggests "In short, it appears that respect is directed to what is sacred, and the feeling of respect is a pale reflection of that worship also among those who have forgotten about God and holiness. The canons of our civilization, with its Christianity, biblical roots, still demand from us respect for every human being". Moreover, they also do this by referring to ancient times (see texts on the sources of the European identity: Pope John Paul II 2005, p. 97; Eco 2007, p. 292) when humanism as a philosophical, intellectual trend began to form its foundation sinthesis about the universality, absoluteness and precedence of virtues or moral qualities among which, no doubt, respect can be ranked (see Tatarkiewicz 1990, p. 73-74 et seq.).

In today's world so easily, "giving up to the temptation of selfishness and greedy consumerism" and full of "postmodern noise", particularly important is, as R. Kapuścinski writes, referring to J. Tischner's philosophy of dialogue, "a strong and clear voice raising such values as identity, respect, recognizing and appreciating another the Other, "and expressed in taking responsibility for him and being ready to bear the consequences of such decisions and such attitudes (Kapuściński 2006, p. 56-57).

It is the recognition of certain values, including those related to the respect for another human being, as universal, autotelic and purposeful in themselves (see Denek 1999, p. 40 et seq.). However it is often connected with the sphere of declarations, although willingly invoked, not so often respected because they are difficult to maintain in life. Thus, to act properly and decently, it is not enough to know what is good and decent because due to the nature of these values , so imprecise and difficult to define clearly, as in the case of many other concepts in the humanities, it is possible to interpret them differently (see Klus-Stańska 2010, p. 31 et seq.; Lem 1999, p. 336), (a distinct illustration of discrepancy of declarations and living practice can be found in reference to the category of fairness).

It is therefore not sufficient to remain in the sphere of difficult to reach final values. You need rather, without giving up there cognition of their universal though abstract nature, to begin understanding them as practical, or as R. Kapuściński (2006, p. 58) wants, "ethical precepts", affecting social life in its everyday dimension.

Referring this need to the area of interest of pedagogy it is proposed to understand respect for the child as expressed in:

- – understanding his nature (abilities regarded as typical for a particular development stage in which the child is as well as specific, individual),
- – granting him the right to freedom and autonomy in a wide range determined by understanding him as a subject of educational activities,
- – organizing conditions for independent, constructive and effective learning,
- – the courage to undertake the fight for the recognition of his rights and standing in their defence.

While the specified areas do not exhaust the possible or even necessary paths towards achieving a desired ideal, it is worthwhile

to more accurately determine how they are understood and maybe avoid very often formulated allegation of academic considerations (see: unreality and impracticality).

Development rights and subjectivity

When it comes to the first two specified areas of the realization of respect for the child, it is difficult to consider them separately because they directly pertain to the specific understanding of the student as a person, a subject in the educational process with his individual abilities and needs.

From the perspective of modern teaching experience, it is a truism to say that effective learning is conditioned by the child's immediate, active and conscious involvement in this process. If this, however, is to occur, the proper preparation of stimulating, attractive and purposeful educational offer is necessary and this requires as the starting point the knowledge about the properties(abilities and needs) of the learning subject. Their recognition requires the simultaneous adoption of two perspectives. One of them is determined by the properties understood as typical of a particular developmental stage in which the child currently is. The other perspective is determined by the child's properties understood as specific, individual. For each pupil has many features in common with the others but he is also someone different from the others. As T. Merton (1999, p. 43) writes "No two created beings are exactly alike. And their individuality is no imperfection. On the contrary, the perfection of each created thing is not merely its conformity to an abstract type but in its own individual identity with itself".

Reinforcement for the expressed belief can be found in the deliberations of A. I. Brzezińska (2005, p. 684 et seq.), who emphasizes the fact that that the foundation of all activities intended to support the development is broad knowledge about the person to whom they

pertain, and including above all, the realisation of the point in the development cycle at which that person is, what his current level of development is with regard to the achievements of other people of the same age or the same gender, or what achievements belong to the zone of proximal development.

In pedagogical relation constructed with appreciation of the rights of children in the early school age to respect, the reconciliation of these two perspectives means: on the one hand respecting, for instance, the specificity of operational thinking at the level of concrete imaging, the rights of the formation of concepts, characteristic features of emotional processes, or a moral development phase (see Appelt 2005, p. 259 et seq.). On the other hand, recognizing as an important variable the child's individuality, his individual cognitive and emotional features in such away as to deprive the child of his anonymity, impersonality, to avoid hiding hind a collective social role in which a single person actually "lacks a face" (Kapuściński 2006, p. 54).

The inclusion of the latter perspective, which allows to discern the uniqueness and personal value of every child, leads directly to the recognition of his rights as a student to freedom and autonomy in a wide range designated by understanding him as a subject of educational activities (cf. Cohen, Manion, Morrison 1999, p. 400) and to the development of the foundation of the subjective interaction a common system of meanings (Brzezińska 2005, p. 694 et seq.).

B. Śliwerski (2001, p. 158, 160) emphasizing the absoluteness of the rights of students to personal dignity, notices that it can occur only in such educational institutions or communities in which freedom exists as a social relationship based on the coupling of duties of entitlement. We can follow W. Puślecki (1996, p. 77 et seq.) and indicate that it becomes particularly real in the course of subjectiviz ing teaching, which taking place in the climate of mutual trust, honesty, empathic understanding, thanks to respecting a number of general-teaching and didactic desiderata pertaining to, among

others, organization of learning without fear, fosters independence and responsibility etc., turns the student into a plenipotentiary participant of the learning process, and the process itself into a two-subject, intersubjective event (see Śliwerski, 2001, p. 21 et seq.).

The child's learning environment-learning space dimensions

Analyzing the process of learning and teaching in primary schools, L. Cohen, I. Manion, K. Morrison (1996, p. 179) came to the conclusion that the organisation of the classroom has a huge impact on children's education[1]. Therefore, according to the aforementioned teachers, you cannot ignore the relationship between the organization of the classroom and the teacher's vision of the school or his personal educational theory, general curricular objectives, teaching methods and social relationships observed in the school. The organisation of the class environment should, as proposed by the authors, support the achievement of educational objectives, planned by the teacher (Ibidem, p. 192). The educational objectives are achieved through activities undertaken by the students. M. A. Mehl, H. H. Mills, H. R. Douglass (1958, p. 286-287) emphasize the fact that in connection with this, the principle of the learning area organisation must be facilitation and enabling the children to manifest various forms of activity in the complex- social, emotional, intellectual and physical-learning environment. After the general formulation of the task, the cited authors made its operationalisation. They pointed out

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1   More on the dimensions of the child's learning environment: B. Bednarczuk**,** *Fr*om demonstration to the child's activity in a school. Organisation of the environment supporting *pupils' development in the declarations of future teachers*, [in:] *For a successful start of the child in a school*, S. Guz, I. Zwierzchowska (eds.), Warszawa 2010, p. 334-346; B. Bednarczuk, *The learning atmosphere in the opinions of students of Montessori classes,* [in:] *Educational role of the school,* J. Kirenko, D. Wosik-Kawala, T. Zubrzycka-Maciąg (eds.), Lublin 2012, p. 99-120.

(Mehl, Mills, Douglass 1958, p. 286-287), that all educational activities undertaken in the classroom should be organized in such a way as to:

1. establish conditions favourable for the formation of individual work skills and learning habits;
2. develop such a social climate in which individual students will be able to draw the satisfaction from living in the class community;
3. maintain conditions favourable for the formation of correct behaviour;
4. develop proficiency in the use of learning tools;
5. help each student to experience the optimum intellectual development in terms of individual skills and life potential;
6. assist each student in the acquisition of emotional maturity.

The specific objectives, determining the organization of the class space, emphasize the belief that the learning environment is not only a place of compulsory education, but more a field of the student's activity. It consists of collecting and gaining of experiences, development of social skills and habits, satisfaction of their own needs, acquisition of learning skills, development of interests. A teacher, who wants to obtain these goals, must demonstrate care for the physical environment, as well as for the management of cognitive and social processes taking place in the classroom.

The physical environment provides a framework in which learning takes place, it can both help and hinder the child's learning process. Therefore it is necessary to plan carefully such elements of furnishing as placement of furniture and desks, in dispensable teaching aids, audio-visual equipment, interest corners accessories and special activity areas, bulletin boards, writing boards, exposition tables, etc. The way of the space utilisation has important cognitive and emotional consequences for the students (Arends 1994, p. 107), it has impact on the climate of learning, on undertaking dialogue and on the way of communication. The student who observes the specific arrangement

of the room receives information about how much personal comfort he will find in it, how he will feel in the given place. Another circle of information provided by the class interior refers to the "symbolic boundaries, expressed in concepts such as privacy, personal space, territoriality" (Janowski 1995, p. 48). R. Perry (2001) stresses in turn that the physical arrangement of the given place becomes a matter of great importance, because: it send a message about what is expected from the children and specifies what the children can do in the given place. A. I. Brzezińska (2005) indicates that the properties of the school environment affect the extent of interaction and the ways of coming into interactions among teachers and among students themselves. Moreover, they specify "acceptable and possible ways of influencing children by adults and influencing children by one another" (Brzezińska 2005, p. 308). What is more, the classroom properties influence the way of the curriculum realisation, both in an explicit and implicit way (Brzezińska 2005, p. 309).

Kerry and Tollitt (as Cohen, Manion, Morrison 1996, p. 193) give the school space the dimension of one of important scientific resources, the organisation of which is based on the specific rules:

– creation of opportunities to perform tasks focused on the child,
– enrichment of the child's formal work through real experience and fun,
– providing opportunities to participate in manual, expressive and creative games as the ways and means of learning – building knowledge,
– providing students with basic resources necessary for learning,
– creation of conditions favourable for spontaneous learning.

The classroom organized in a manner consistent with these principles becomes a true cognitive workshop.

Friendly shaping of the social and emotional environment is a condition for the successful achievement of this goal. Hence, another dimension of the learning environment, which is regarded as worth considering, is the one related to the realisation of social and emotional needs. "If children are to learn effectively, they have to have a sense of acceptance and security, to trust adults and to develop a sense of self-confidence and faith in their abilities and skills" (Perry 2001, p. 108). According to M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (2003, p. 240), the classroom constitutes the environment of the student's life and activity, a place in which he comes into interactions with teachers and peers. They are an important context of didactic processes and by this they condition the effects of learning. The social dimension of the learning space is specified by various social relations: a teacher – a student/students, a student – a student, a student – students, and the subjective style of teaching (Brzezińska 1994). In the interpretation of the Polish psychologist, the latter means the style of mutual contacting which respects the needs of both partners – the child and the adult, that is, it assumes the coexistence of joint activities and separate realisation of individual, personal and specific tasks.

The term "relations teacher – student", used by A. I. Brzezińska, is very general. Due to the nature of this article, it is important to point out that the central motive of the teacher-student relation is respect for the person: "If the child is to develop and function as a person, he needs to be treated as someone who is important in himself, and not just as a representative of some category. He needs help to develop the image of himself that will allow him to get to know his own value. Treating children as independent persons requires regarding them as people responsible for their actions and, therefore, having some control over their proceedings (Dawney as Cohen, Manion, Morrison 1999, p. 400-401).

According to A. I. Brzezińska (2005, p. 306) development context specific for the child results from mutual interactions of objective factors influencing the quality of learning and teaching processes (that is the school environment features) and subjective factors.

The rights of the child

The specified areas of the implementation of respect for the child, in which it is expressed in the preparation of the working environment, an educational offer appropriate for the child's developmental possibilities and needs, including the respect for his individual autonomy, are in fact the key components of one of the fundamental rights of the child-the right to education. As B. Śliwerski notices (2007, p. 82), referring to U. Fredriksson's observations, "the child's right to education is not only the right to attend school, but also the right to receive his or her education at the proper level". Similarly, it can be noticed that indications for the implementation of any of the dimensions of respect for the child without exception lead to the issues of the child's rights– which in fact, as it can be believed, grow out of it and lead to it.

The rights of the child, like many other rights, are social constructs created by people and for people. They are understood as a set of rights which follow from the civil rights which are in force in the given community and they determine the status of the child in the country, society and family (Balcerek 1986, p. 25). The discussion about the rights of the child is specific because they are created and enforced by adults according to their own beliefs and interests, and therefore not by the subjects themselves to whom the potential provisions in the documents are related. As B. Śliwerski writes (2007, p. 67), children's rights are "verbalization of what we, adult people, want and expect from children and from one another". Consequently, therefore, the persons concerned can learn about their rights only from adults, and

none of their rights can be justified without reference to the will of adults (Śliwerski 2007). It was revealed in early work on the rights of the child, in the document called the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, established in 1923, in a particular confusion of the rights of children with adults' responsibilities towards children. In order to emphasize the tone of this declaration, it is worth quoting a few entries: the child must be given the means requisite for its normal development, both materially and spiritually, the child that is hungry must be fed, the child that is sick must be nursed, the child that is backward must be properly educated (...), the child must be the first to receive relief in times of distress, the child must be put in a position to earn a livelihood, and must be protected against every form of utilization. The subject of the establishment and observance of the rights of children was resumed after World War II. The need to develop a more extensive document was recognized. After the introduction of amendments and additions to the Geneva Declaration, the International Congress of the New Education League proclaimed the Charter of Children's Rights. There was the statement that every child has the right to assistance and protection regardless of his race, nationality or religion. In addition, attention was drawn to the necessity of ensuring the childcare while maintaining the integrity of the family and preventive social welfare. The document regulating the functioning of every person, whether an adult or a child, became the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed in 1948 in Paris. The concern for the rights of the child became a part of the activities of the United Nations which resulted in numerous documents forming the system of protection of these rights. One of them, dating from 1959, known as the Declaration of the Rights of the Child formulated rules taking into consideration not only the conditions necessary for comprehensive development, emphasized the need to particularly care for physically and mentally handicapped children, and also recognized the right to learning and education, and the necessity

to protect against utilization, cruelty, negligence. The content of the Declaration makes it clear that humanity should give the child what is the best, and it seems that the words contained in it pave the way for the child's full subjectivity in international law. That document, however not having the power to obligate governments, institutions, parents to realize the rights of children, cannot in fact practically fulfil its task, just like other treaties of this type. Thus, after years of debate about the situation of children in the world, the UN General Assembly passed the Convention on the Rights of the Child obliging countries to implement it. This extensive document of international law comprehensively recognizes problems of the child. The reference to it in the settlement of real issues is altogether appropriate and desirable (more Matysiuk 2007).

The child as a human being and a member of a family, a specific community or state, is entitled to many rights referred as natural (acquired by birth and even before birth), common (due to everyone without exception), inalienable (one cannot renounce them), and inviolable(a man cannot be deprived of these rights). Their full list is quite extensive. In addition to the fundamental right to self-determination and dignity, it includes (cf. Śliwerski 2007, p. 72; Niewęgłowski 2005) those dealing with the right to life and development, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to express one's own views, the right to be raised in a family and to contact parents in the case of separation from them, the right to freedom from physical or mental violence, the right to health care and social security, the right to rest and leisure, the right to education and the use of cultural goods (see Czyż 1998, 2002). All of these are regarded as fundamental rights and, as such, have an established place in the most important state documents. However, their actual and the most desirable place is in social practice, in which respect for the

rights of the child is understood as a recognition of universal values, and their neglect or violation as a sign of their rejection.

Life, however, has repeatedly shown that the implementation of the noble idea leaves a lot to be desired, and the borders between declarations and reality, as well as theory and practice, are sometimes difficult to remove. As B. Śliwerski notices (2007, p. 66). Much stronger attention is more often directed to the functioning of a false myth of "adults' moral self-improvement in observing the children's right to dignified life", as well as to the existence of specific legal protection of adults against "discrediting their hypocrisy". It also happens in the case of such fundamental issues as the child's right to education and to maintaining personal dignity in the process of education. Therefore, the rights of the child should be a real source of educational objectives (Waloszek, 2006), as well as constitute in the undisputed way an important element of practice extending beyond the teleological sphere (Śliwerski 2007, p. 75).

With this awareness the persons determining the child's situation, who are responsible for the implementation of the arrangements and provisions into life, should recognize the rights of the child as directing their actions and feel obligated to special consideration and responsibility. However it requires, by J. Bińczycka claims (2005, p. 14), a change in human mentality, departing from the accepted patriarchal intergenerational systems, abandoning solicitude for only external „image of a democrat", undertaking for the child real action which care for his authentic good.

It must be remembered, however that way of respecting and fulfilling the needs of children is conditioned by the constantly changing context of childhood: the decline of the multigenerational family, parental loneliness, parents' long working hours, early initiation of efforts to secure the children's professional career,

and thus extending the list of functions that educational institutions should serve, covering children at a younger age within situational care and wider range of additional activities, including extracurricular ones.

In the new and constantly changing reality the recognition of children's rights should lead to continuous reflection. It must not be forgotten that, although in recent years the status of the child has been rapidly liberalized. Today more attention is paid to his rights and education has been "humanized". It happens that children today are still the object of a variety of influences from the adult to the point of appropriation of childhood. We more often discern that it has been endangered and impoverished by new forms of utilization and isolation and the gradual destruction of the world in which we live. Literature informs about the "disappearance" or degradation of childhood, even though we try to protect it so much. Increasing number of studies arising in the world talk about childhood, which is eliminated, shortened, commercialized, treated in terms of the gross enrolment ratio, disintegrated, colonized, pathologized, bureaucratized, technologized, to which adults try to give the characteristics of adulthood *(adultized childhood)* (Szczepska-Pustkowska 1997).

And here, doubts are raised by matter of choice and the child's participation in extra-curricular activities offered to him by parents and teachers, at the time, which until recently has been described as free time. On one hand, it seems clear that it is worth while to show the richness and variety of available forms of activity so that the child can thus discover what is important and fascinating for him. On the other hand, however, we deal with a specific, socially accepted form of coercion. The following questions arise: How many parents negotiate with the child the scope of his daily duties and privileges? How many of them let the child choose extra-curricular activities? How many leave at least one free afternoon at the child's disposal? The same questions can be asked to teachers who decide about, and thus are responsible

for, the nature and content of the education process. If they subscribe to the children's rights formulated on paper they should respect them in every situation. Because it is through and in learning, teaching and education that the rights in question can and should be realised.

The recognition of the status of the child-student as a human BEING must result in love and respect for him, and thus regarding him as a subject whose dignity in the process of learning is inviolable, who has the right among others to realise his own needs, to school education without fear, to the development of his own interests, to independence and responsibility, but also to the support from and partnership with the teacher (cf. Puślecki 1996).

It is worth noting that the discussion about children's rights in Poland is under*taken* by *many authors of scientific* publications (Balcerek 1986; Balcerek 1988; Bińczycka 1999, blade 2000; Smyczyński 1999; Marczykowska et seq. 2006; Matysiuk 2007) *who, though from different perspectives*, *also indicate that* it is *every adult's duty to make the transition from words to action.*

Instead of the summary

Leaving the undertaken considerations at the level of description of the desired state of affairs may lead to making a mistake, which S. Lem (2008, p. 132) describes in the brief words". I rested, unfortunately, on my laurels, believing in my innocence, that the most important thing has already been done– by thinking – and now there comes the purely executive part, which the others can deal with. An awful mistake!"

It is obvious that propagation of the noblest ideas even with the greatest conviction, just like presentation of practical indications in terms of obligation, do not allow us to think that they are in fact possible to implement in the teaching practice. Let the response to this need be the reference to examples of good practice growing out of, and saturated with respect for the child. They are found in many

systems, and undoubtedly in the system of Maria Montessori, Celestin Freinet and Janusz Korczak.

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Jolanta Szada-Borzyszkowska

University of Białystok, Poland

Educational Reforming the First Stage of Learning – Plans and Reality

ABSTRACT

An issue that is of a particular interest from the point of view of the education authorities and public opinion is the reform of schooling on the very first level of education. This paper discusses some reasons for implemented changes related to lowering the age of children starting their education in a primary school to the age of six. The analysis is made of financial plans related to implementation of the changes as well as the attendance of six-year-olds in the fulfilment of compulsory education during the transition period. Opinions are presented of six-year-olds' parents and the position of the scientific community on lowering the school age threshold. Actions taken by the Ministry for National Education are also presented to address the problems arising from the reform.

Key words: education reform, lowering the school age threshold, six-year-olds in school.

Introduction

Poland as a member of European Union, undertakes actions in different areas of social life, in accordance with EU directives. One of those areas is education, which involves the necessity to provide equal opportunity for Polish students, support for their individual development, facilitate good organisation of the core competences

learning process, provide help for students with special learning needs etc.

What causes particular interest of public opinion and educational authorities, is an issue of lowering the school age threshold. According to the ordinance of the Minister of Education, beginning from 2014, all children who turn six that calendar year will be subject to compulsory schooling obligation. Since 2009, when the education reform aiming at imposing the schooling obligation at six-year-olds was introduced, the debate whether it was a good or bad idea has been continued. Words of both – approval and critique are expressed in the mass media, academic and teaching publications and are a result of discussions of scientists, politicians, parents and other interested parties, as well as various institutions. Until today, some people have questioned decisions made by educational authorities and voice their fears, concerning equity of that decision and real chances of carrying the educational reform out successfully.

Arguments in favor of the idea to lower the school age threshold refer to the necessity of providing Polish six-year-olds with better access to education and of equalizing their chances in relation to their peers from other European countries (Marciniak 2009). Representatives of educational authorities state that "Polish school is mature enough to teach and care for six-year-old children" (Marciniak 2009, p. 12) and providing the youngest with better access to education is in their opinion the best way to equalize the education chances.

Arguments supporting the decision of state authorities undoubtedly stress the reasons of social and human nature, put forward by Ministry of Education, for conducting the education reform on the lowest stages of learning. The arguments seem to be obvious, convincing and unquestionable. However, the reform critics produce counter arguments; they challenge the idea of lowering the school age to six years old and level accusations that the education reform

on the first stage of learning is driven only by financial and economic reasons.

Development and popularization of this concept, arguments, stands on the given topic and ideas to put these planned changes in practice, requires presentation of the current situation related to the implementation of the lower school age threshold. In order to avoid any speculations concerning negative effects of this process, or overenthusiastic visions of the benefits those ministerial solutions bring, one should refer to facts, scientific theories or results of empirical studies on the basis of real-life determinants and factors, as well as factual transformations of Polish school

Main principles of the education reform concerning lowering the school age threshold

According to the ordinance of the Ministry of Education dated on 19 March 2009: "Child's school obligation starts with the beginning of a new school year in the same calendar year as a child turns six years old and lasts until the child graduates from lower secondary school (pl. gimnazjum), no longer than the child turns eighteen" ("Journal of Laws", No. 56, Act dated on 19 March 2009 on changing the act on education system and on changing some other acts. Paragraph 19, Article 15 section 2; item 458). According to the previsions of law all six-year-old children are subjected to the school obligation starting on 1 September 2014. At first for the period of 3 years that is from 2009 to 2011 and then for the period of five years, that is until 2013 (this period has been prolonged due to the parents' protests and numerous discussions). The Ministry planned a transition period that is a time, when planned changes are introduced gradually. During that period

parents of six-year-old children have a right to decide whether their child goes to kindergarten or to first grade. At the same time, every five-year-old child is obliged to attend preschool education. At this age all children – whether they have participated in preschool education or not, are obliged by law to start year long preschool preparation in kindergarten or in preschool department at primary school or in other form of preschool education ("Journals of Law" 2004, No. 256, item 2572, as amended). Obligation of preschool education has been in force since 1 September 2011. On the parents' request and with consent of the school headmaster, a five-year-old child may become a student, however on a condition that the child will receive a positive opinion on its psycho-physical maturity to attend first grade granted by specialists from psychological and pedagogical counselling centre.

Reform of the education system on the first stage of learning – funding

Subjecting six-year-olds to schooling obligation is connected with considerable financial expenses of the state. The money is needed, among others, to: organize the compulsory preparation group for five-year-olds, adapt school buildings to the needs of six-year-old children and provide kindergartens and preschool departments with necessary learning aids and toys. It is also necessary to allocate money to organize or adapt day-care rooms for six-year-old children; provide meals for the children; improve access to psychological and pedagogical counseling centers; increase number of job vacancies or working hours of psychologists and teachers at schools; organize a system of training courses for teachers who work with six- and five--year-old children to properly implement up-to-date teaching methods;

create good transport conditions for the youngest children travelling to kindergartens and elementary schools, which are located more than 3 kilometres from child's home; finance newly created preschool and day-care centre complexes; organize information campaign for future students' parents; create and implement monitoring system during the transition period and first years after the schooling obligation for six-year-olds is in force; prepare playgrounds for five-year-old children, who fulfil their one year long compulsory preschool preparation in public schools etc.

According to original estimates from 2009, the cost of this undertaking is to amount to 2 438 000 thousand PLN in total, out of which 1 278 000 thousand PLN is allotted from the National Budget (Annex to the Regulation No. 112/2009 of the Council of Ministers dated on 7 July 2009). The expenses needed for the implementation of the reform of the education system on the first stage of learning will be also covered by local government units and parents. Authorities responsible for the schools are obliged by law to cover at least 50% of costs generated while creating and modernising school playgrounds. Since 2011 six-year-olds are subjected to education subvention and in already passed National Budget for 2013, 320 million PLN was planned to subsidize preschool education.

Apart from the money from the National Budget, a few hundred million Euro was planned to be allotted from the financial resources of Operational Programme 'Human Resources Development', Priority IX, to propagate preschool education and to support EU projects which are being carried out. According to status as of the end of 2012, due to education of six-year-olds, in total 1 898 million PLN (more than initially planned) was transferred from the National Budget to municipalities. What is more, around 631, 5 million PLN from EU financial resources was allotted to support schools (*Actions of Ministry of Education for school education of six-year-olds,* 2012).

The number of six-year-old children at schools during the transition period

During the first years of the transition period, a rather small group of six-year-old children went to the first grade and started school education. In 2009/2010 school year this group only amounted to 4.3% of the total number of six-year-old children. In the following year of the transition period (2010/2011) the situation improved a bit and the number of six-year-olds in the first grade increased up to 12.5% (58 thousand of six-year-olds) of the total number of entitled children, which gives approximately four students per school (Maciejczak 2010).

On the national scale, in some schools there were a few six-year-old children studying, while in a considerable number of primary schools there was not even one. The participation of six-year-olds in school education varied, taking into consideration different provinces and the size of an examined town. Despite obvious demographical differences, the discrepancies in the number of six-year-old children starting their school obligation depended on other factors. Those factors were connected with, among other: the intensity of the campaign promoting the reform of the education system, a particular interest of the Ministry in certain institutions, the state of school preparation to receive a six-year-old, the interest of parents etc.

In the 2011/2012 school year and in the following 2012/2013 year, one six-year-old in five went to school. The numerical data from different provinces differed and ranged between 11% and 26.8% of the total number of six-year-olds entitled to start school obligation. In some parts of the country during the two year period upward trend was observed, however in other parts of the country the contrary was observed, when it comes to signing children up to school (*Six-year-olds say no to school,* 2012). The Minister of Education „calculated that

indeed, the majority, because in 90% of municipalities, six-year-olds go to school. However, those children attend not only the first grade, but also attend the reception classes in kindergartens only located in schools. In as many as 92 municipalities (out of 2479) there is not even one six-year-old at school" (Pezda 2012a).

Parents' opinions on lowering the school age

During the transition period of the education reform concerning lowering of the school age threshold, parents decide whether their child goes to the first grade, to the preparation group in kindergarten or to the kindergarten department in primary school. A Small group of parents supported the Ministry idea and sent their children to the first grade when this opportunity arose. A Vast majority was against the top-down directive. Until today different parent associations as well as other organisations exist. They criticize the idea of sending children to school when they are six. The most active parents have been presenting their negative opinion on the subject in question since 2008 and they will keep doing so.

A campaign called "Rescue the Young Ones" as well as association created under the same name are both an effect of growing wave of parents' dissatisfaction with the decision of the Ministry. Parents sent a protest letter to the Ministry of Education and also, in 2011, came forward with a competitive to ministerial civic education bill, with the following principles: age of school obligation – 7 years old; previsions of law allowing easy closedown or privatisation of schools and kindergartens to be withdrawn; preschool education to come under state subvention (www.money.pl). In the same year, the Legislative Initiative Committee of Parents' Ombudsman Foundation and Association gathered more than 347 thousand signatures of parents and other protesters who were against lowering the school age threshold. According to parents an amendment to the education sys-

tem bill dated on 19 March 2009 was introduced without proper public consultations and against public objection it rose. The amendment was not preceded by proper study and yet, it passes, despite the fact that Bureau of Research Chancellery of the Sejm prepared a disqualifying opinion on it. Financial resources from the National Budget needed to carry out the changes were not provided (*JUSTIFICATION to the civic bill on changing education system and an act changing an act on education system and onchanging some other acts*). As a result of the protests of dissatisfied parents, schooling obligation for six-year-olds was moved from 2012 to 2014.

In January 2013, the Parents' Ombudsman Foundation and Association started to gather signatures under a petition to hold an all-Poland educational referendum under a banner „Rescue the Young Ones and the older ones too!". The main principle of the petition is to take up important education-related topics in public debate. Apart from discussing the schooling obligation for six-year-olds, parents demand to take up an issue of compulsory preschool preparation for five-year-olds as well as the risks connected with closing down thousands of schools and kindergartens. As a result, the public debate is to contribute to the withdrawal of the reform completely by the government.

According to dissatisfied parents, the education reform ignores the needs of younger children. The majority of parents (76%) asked for their opinion think that six-year-old children are not ready to start education (TNS OBOP: 72 percent of Poles do not want six-year-olds at schools, 2011). Parents are concerned with overcrowded classes, lack of proper organization of day-care rooms, lack of „school equipment needed for six-year-old children – chairs and desks on a suitable height" (Pezda 2012b) and there is no other up-to-date equipment.

Parents also voice their negative opinions on kindergarten obligation for five-year-olds. The report entitled „Preschool education conditions after the first year of preschool obligation for five-year-

-olds" (see *Raport nt. warunkow edukacji przedszkolnej etc*. 2012) contains analyses of the results of the Internet survey. The analyses indicate many problems connected with preschool education of five-year-olds held in preschool departments located in schools. The main problems are as follows: there is not enough room for five-year-olds in kindergartens due to the necessity of providing room for three – and four-year-olds in such an institution; the municipalities force parents of six-year-olds to choose the first grade because of the shortage of space in kindergartens; children attending kindergarten located at schools are not provided with as most school canteens have been closed down; preschool departments are organised in bad conditions; proper care after classes for children at preschool departments located at schools is not provided; an access to education in kindergarten for children from poor families is hindered, due to high monthly charges; local authorities do not attempt to enter into a dialog to reach an agreement with parents in order to solve those problems.

Parents who have been sending their children to school in view were examined and their knowledge of principles of the education reform analysed. After the analysis, it was concluded that the parents' knowledge is diverse. Part of those parents who are involved in the matter know the legislation, new ministerial decisions, psychologists', teachers' and politicians' opinions as well as the stand on the matter of various political parties etc. However, a considerable group of parents show incomplete and selective knowledge of problems concerning discussed issue. (Suproń 2010; Juchniewicz 2010). The most obvious is the association of the reform with the necessity of lowering the school age threshold by one year (86% of tested parents out of 110 respondents) and also with the change of curriculum an organization of the learning process at school (30%) (Suproń 2010).Whatever the state of their knowledge, parents tend to express negative opinions or have no formed opinion at all. The arguments against lowering the school age usually concern: shortened childhood, lack of proper

school preparation to receive six-year-olds, overcrowded classes, difficulty in adaptation to school conditions for six-year-olds, lack of proper preparation of teachers to teach small children, risks and threats of the difficulties in fulfilling the schooling obligation faced by children. Occasionally parents mention aggression and violence at school as negative occurrences proving against lowering of the school age (Juchniewicz 2010).

The study shows that parents, whatever their opinion on the education reform is, try to gradually prepare their children for the first day in first grade. They reduce and relieve the tension and anxieties over school, try to teach their child independence in performing basic, everyday activities, prepare to abide certain rules and spend time with the child talking about the school (Jaszczyszyn 2010).

Opinions of education and scientific community on lowering the school age threshold

According to the Polish Dyslexia Association implementation of the reform on the first level of the education process can lead to „a numerous negative consequences for teachers, parents and mostly for school children" (Olszewska 2008). In the opinion of members of the Association proposed reform of curriculum mainly serves to achieve financial objectives, as shortening by a year the time spent by pupils and students at schools will allow making some savings in the state budget. Researchers on human development claim that six-year--olds should stay at kindergartens and the reform of education system may worsen their school start.

The Polish Dyslexia Association expressed a negative opinion on a concept of transfer six-year-olds from kindergarten to schools. The Association invoked data presented in the report following the study conducted in the year 2006, of preparatory classes of kindergartens and of schools as to their maturity to take up education in the

first class of primary schools (Kopik 2007). The report shows that "in almost all areas of preparation for school education, six-year--olds from kindergartens showed significantly higher level of development than six-year-olds from school reception classes. They were clearly more active, showed higher level of mental development and achieved better results in terms of preparation to start school education" (Olszewska 2008). Children attending kindergartens were developing better in the cognitive, social and emotional areas (Kopik 2007). Looking back at the research results contained in the report, doubts are raised not so much by the issue of time when a first class education is started by six-year-old children, as the fact of child's staying at school and being a subject of teaching and upbringing practices, typical for this kind of educational institution. A school is organized "according to the paradigm of mass production, unification of form and universal education content. Children under six years of age, in terms of their development, are unprepared to enter the social space. They enter the public space of kindergartens with difficulty – they come from family-oriented environment, which is emotionally dominated. They must learn completely new relationships, regulators; learn to identify themselves as a social subject. Children are too sensitive and fragile to be able to stand, sometimes, ruthless struggle for a place in a school community" (Matczak 2008).

Polish Committee of the World Organization for Preschool Education (OMEP) shared the view that transfer of six-year old children to schools will contribute to deterioration of their education. The Committee experts say that schools are not prepared to meet the basic needs of six-year-olds' development. Due to the short, lasting merely 4–5 hours, time spent by a child at school, teachers mainly focus on teaching tasks, while ignoring the need to develop the emotional and social areas. In addition, the lack of pre-school teachers in schools and implementation of inadequate methods of working

with a young child may pose a serious threat for education of six-
-year-olds (Olszewska 2008).

In their papers, scientists raise the issue of a child's maturity to
take up education in the first grade of school. They draw attention
to children's readiness to learn as well as to readiness of school as
an institution, to admit children who are a year younger than ever
before. „Child's readiness is most often understood today as the
effect of interaction: (1) maturation, which is natural, spontaneous
developmental changes occurring with age (including biological
changes associated with development of prefrontal cortex) and
(2) development stimulated by environmental factors and child's own
activeness...

School readiness, on the other hand, can be defined as sensitivity
of an institution to dynamic changes of the child's needs (intellectual,
emotional, social and moral) and as the ability to adjust conditions,
procedures, requirements and tasks in a flexible way to meet
these needs" (Brzezińska, Kaczan, Matejczuk, Rycielski 2011,
p. 2-3). "Criteria for school readiness are (...) the outcome of the
system of education, teacher's demands and parents' expectations"
(Frydrychowicz et seq. 2006, p. 5).

Certainly valuable suggestions for teachers contain scientific
publications, which discuss regularity of development of six-year-old
children. They also point out the importance of suitable stimulation
of a child. Proper educational offer from an adult's side "will enable
a child to use its resources – on its own if the resources are in the
reachable, present sphere of development and with some aid if they are
in proximal development. It may even speed up the maturing process
or to obtain more perfect shape of just developing competences"
(Brzezińska, Kaczan, Matejczuk, Rycielski 2011, p. 7).

Lowering of the school age means consent to admit children, who
are both biologically as well as from the point of mental development
have not mastered and have not yet exercised some functions, relevant

in the context of starting their school education. Immaturity of a six-year-old child to go to school cannot be regarded as a persistent problem; it is rather a challenge for teachers teaching in first grades, who should use their pedagogical knowledge and professional competence to support a child and to create opportunities for a child to a proper training.

An intention to transfer the care and education of six-year-olds to schools worries some psychologists and educators who call for a promotion of pre-school education and implementation of studies on school maturityon a large-scale. They recognize the risks connected with the lack of school maturity, and at the same its easier support and development in pre-school conditions (Śliwerski 2011).

Meanwhile, The Ministry of Education has been intensifying measures to promote the reform of lowering the age of starting school education. In TV commercials, children say how good it is to go to school at the age of six, a speaker ensures the viewers that the best age to start school education is 6 years, experts ensure that this is the best time for intensive cognitive development etc. In the meantime leaflets promoting lowering the school age are sent to kindergartens, local governments are asked to help in convincing parents so that they would earlier send their children to schools. Minister of Education has held a number of meetings with parents of six-year-old children; she also asks local governments to present the parents the benefits which will effect from such a scheme (Grabek 2013).

Assurances about the sense of the reform on the first step of educational process are also connected with specific actions taken by the Ministry of Education: curriculum changes have been implemented for grades 1–3 (curriculum requirements have been adjusted in each grade in order to meet developmental abilities of six-year-olds); new rules have been implemented as to providing psychological-

-pedagogical assistance in kindergartens and in schools for children suffering from some dysfunctions and for children requiring special educational needs, an obligation has been implemented of diagnosis of a child's development leaving a kindergarten (so called a pre-school diagnosis); new rules have been implemented to school practice as to individualisation of work with a child, adaptation programs are being implemented for six-year-olds who just begin their education in schools, different forms of professional trainings are being organized for teachers of 1–3 grades of primary schools, school supervising authorities are supported by government programs as to ensure safe learning, upbringing and health, pre-school education is being promoted, a new arrangement of payments for kindergarten for five--year-old children is being gradually implemented, alternative forms of pre-school education are being promoted etc.

Conclusion

For the effective implementation of any changes, including a reform on the very first level of education, you need a good, realistic plan, based on scientific research and on experience of others, social support, tolerance for different views, patience while waiting for the results, cooperation and creativity to solve problems arising as the effect of changing school reality. Among the most important reasons for lowering the age of compulsory education is to equalize educational opportunities of Polish children, improve the quality of education, and adjust the age of compulsory education to the standard obligatory in majority of European countries. "Lowering the age of compulsory education is a civilization change, allowing for better preparing children to meet challenges they will face in adult life" (from *A letter of the Minister for National Education to parents in school*

councils, see *List Ministra* 2014). However, it is necessary to take into account opinions of parents anxious by these changes, who in care for their children use all means to eliminate or defer, in their opinion, the existing threat. One cannot forget that in any action taken by an adult the most important should be children welfare. Therefore, whatever happens, we should ensure them a happy childhood.

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