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Edited by

Linda Daniela and Lūcija Rutka

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INTRODUCTION TO THE THEME

Education in the 21st century is addressing the concepts of life-long learning and improvements in teachers' non-stop professional development. New paradigms, approaches, technologies and many other novelties are being introduced to make teachers' education more and more targeted and efficient for the benefit of their students.

More than a decade of this new century, and even millennium, has passed. The ATEE Spring Conferences now address a 20 year period of existence, dissemination of innovations and better experiences in teacher education. This is a sufficient period to stop for a while, reflect on the achievements and evaluate the added value of the experiences in reaching a better quality of teacher education. The organizing committee of the ATEE Spring Conference 2015 invited the participants of this conference to highlight their findings, conclusions and innovations; the driving force of changes in teacher education:

- mechanisms of changes and theory-building in teacher education towards a better quality of education in a changing world; development of teachers' professional thinking and attitude; experiences in paradigm shifts; novelties in research;
- integration of novelties into pedagogy in a tertiary process; preparing teachers able to make decisions for implementation of new ideas; added values of innovations and teachings; relationships between pedagogical goals and learners' needs; meeting teachers' and students' individual needs; success in preparing teachers to work in culturally diverse classes; curricula development;
- school-based teachers' professional development; self-evaluation and peer evaluation in school practices; conducting quality education in a constantly changing society; the educating and induction of novice teachers for the continuous generational changes in this profession; etc.
- historical reflections on experiences and lessons learned in the context of current processes; the history of developments for today's advances in teacher education;
- inclusion and teachers' preparation for conducting inclusive educational processes; theories of inclusion and appropriately

facing everyday problems and challenges in current situations; the balance between learners' individual possibilities and equal opportunities for the individuals with their personal needs, etc.

Dr. Linda Daniela

HARMONIZATION OF THE TERTIARY EDUCATION PROGRAM THROUGH THE PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE CASE OF LATVIA

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DR. DITA NĪMANTE, DR. GUNTA KRAĢE

Abstract: *The realization of an inclusive approach to education in post-Soviet Latvia faces several challenges: a one-sided understanding of the notion of inclusion, difficulties with accepting tolerance as a public value, etc. Multiple criteria for the realization of inclusive education for teachers have developed in the study according to which ten teacher educational programs in seven universities were assessed. A necessity for guidelines that are binding to all teachers has been actualized by embodying the principles of inclusive education in teachers' professional standards.*

Keywords: *Inclusive education, tertiary education*

Introduction

The challenges of implementing inclusive education in the last 20 years have been one of the most topical professional tasks both for teachers, universities and the educational policy makers both in and outside of the European Union. Despite the purposeful endeavors of the international society in the field of inclusion, many children and youths in countries with healthy, functioning societies, including Latvia, still face hardships and obstacles in the process of acquiring a qualitative education.

Remembering that the task of the society is to ensure every citizen's right to receive qualitative education, the responsibility of all those involved in the system of education is to help enable all members of the society to realize these rights.

A UNESCO Report on the perspectives of tertiary education in the 21st century states that the rapid changes in the modern world require a new look at the essence of tertiary education in which the students, as

formers of public consciousness, take the central position. In this connection, the necessity to carry out conceptual changes in the tertiary education programs, to introduce innovations in university didactics is widely discussed (UNESCO, 1998).

Tertiary education in Latvia is the field that today is subject to fundamental reforms both content-wise and formally. An essential challenge with regard to tertiary education is to ensure its accessibility to all students, and the inclusive approach is a way of solving this problem that should certainly be considered.

In Latvia, this task has been recognized at the highest levels. The above aim of the “Guidelines for the development of education 2014 – 2020” developed by the Cabinet of Ministers, the Republic of Latvia, is to ensure “qualitative and inclusive education for the development of the personality, people’s well-being and sustainable growth of the country.” (Guidelines for Development of Education in Latvia, 2014).

Emphasising teacher education as an essential part of tertiary education, the declaration of Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma’s government determines that teachers’ professional activity must be based on the principles of inclusive education. The aforementioned declaration confirms that the necessity of embodying inclusive education in Latvia is topical, and the need for a systemic approach towards decreasing the impact of social exclusion created by the obstacles to acquiring education has been explored.

The embodiment of the inclusive approach in teacher education within the tertiary education of Latvia is the focus of the study presented here. It has been chosen purposefully, emphasizing the teacher’s role in the formation of the future society as well as treating education as the implementer of social transformations.

Inclusive education in tertiary education institutions for teacher preparation is topical. It is relevant not only to the issues of accessibility (ensuring the accessibility of tertiary education to a greater number of students) and the issues of organizing the study process (for example, how to ensure inclusive study processes for all students, including those students with special needs, students from other countries etc.) but also to the actual content of studies. Several questions become urgent in this context: How to include this in the content of studies? How to organize the studies so that future teachers are professionally prepared to work in an inclusive school, how to prepare “inclusive teachers”?

Study context in documents regulating education

Documents regulating education in Latvia emphasize inclusive education in the “Guidelines for the Development of Education in Latvia 2014 – 2020”, which the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia approved on May 22, 2014. It declares that “inclusive education is a process in which the respective diverse needs of all learners are satisfied, the participation possibilities of each student in the teaching/learning process, culture, and different communities increase and the possibilities for exclusion from education and the process of acquiring education decrease”. The above aim of the development of educational policies in Latvia is formulated as “qualitative and inclusive education for the development of the personality, people’s well-being and sustainable growth of the country” (Guidelines for Development of Education, 2014).

However, in Chapter 1.4 of the Guidelines, related to implementation of the principle of inclusive education and the decreasing of the social exclusion risk, different activities for ensuring inclusive education are envisaged, and they stress that they are aimed at everyone *except* tertiary education institutions. It means that when planning the development of education in the country, different support activities will be aimed at acquiring education until the secondary education level, indicating to a certain extent that tertiary education is not compulsory, therefore no special support is intended for its acquisition.

The above mentioned policy contradicts the binding legislative documents in the European Union, which determine that all people have equal rights to receive education, including tertiary education. For instance, Article 26 of The General Declaration on human rights states that every person has a right to education (The Universal Declaration of human rights, 1948). Similarly, Article 13 of the International Covenant of the UNO on economic, social and cultural rights declares that the participating countries recognize every person’s rights to education (Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, 1950). Also, Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on the protection of human rights and key freedoms establishes that no person should be denied the right to education (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2012). Thus tertiary education should also be equally accessible to all according to each person’s individual abilities.

In Latvia, the constitutional rights of each person are defined in The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia. Article 112 outlines that the State guarantees the right to an education for everyone, emphasizing that primary education and secondary education are to be ensured free of

charge. However, this article is relevant also in the context of tertiary education, despite the fact that education at this stage is not guaranteed free of charge (Latvijas Republikas Satversme, 1922).

Article 91, in turn, states that all people in Latvia are equal in the face of law and court. Human rights are implemented without any discrimination that indicates the commitment of the state not to allow restriction of ungrounded rights by some particular features (Latvijas Republikas Satversme, 1922).

Latvia's Court of Constitutional Rights has defined the principle of the prohibition of discrimination in the following way: "The aim of the principle of the prohibition of discrimination consolidated in the second sentence of Article 91 - to eliminate the possibility that the key rights of the person are restricted on the basis of some impermissible criterion, e.g., race, nationality or gender" thus also the right to education.

Respectively the prohibition of discrimination means that it is prohibited to differentiate people judicially, i.e., to define particular groups of people according to the criterion included in the prohibition of discrimination. Article 91 also includes traditional principles of the prohibition of discrimination which can be found, applying historical and teleological interpretations. However, finding out these "unwritten" rules is not the objective set for this study.

The catalogue of criteria of discrimination prohibition in *The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia* includes the criteria mentioned in Article 12 of the constitutional law "Rights and obligations of the person and citizen" adopted in 1991 which are supplemented with those included in the European Charter of Key Rights (Latvijas Republikas Satversme, 1922, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, 2012).

It should be mentioned here that for Latvia, as a member state of the European Union, not only the rights of the whole European Union are binding but also those legal principles that are not admitted to the formal rights of the European Union but are forming the common "constitutional tradition" of the national rights of the member countries.

Thus joining together the catalogue of criteria of discrimination prohibition existing previously in Latvia (historical interpretation) with the one existing in the European Charter of Key Rights (teleological interpretation in connection with the European Charter of Key Rights) we can state that the second sentence of Article 91 contains the following catalogue of the forbidden criteria: race and the color of the skin; nationality, ethnic origin; language; birth and origin; gender; age; disability; genetic features; sexual orientation; religious conviction; political and other opinion; world

outlook; party belonging; social position and social origin; property and similar conditions.

It would mean in the context of inclusive education that despite the special needs of the individual (e.g., disability) every person should be ensured equal possibilities, equal access to the services and support that is required to secure the rights guaranteed by The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, thus also the rights to tertiary education.

Along with what has been mentioned above, the prohibition of different attitudes is also consolidated in other legislative documents. For instance, Article 3 of the Education Law defines and consolidates the individual's rights to education, stating that discrimination is seen in the understanding of the term used in the Law on Protecting Consumers' Rights. It underlines that direct discrimination is such an attitude to the person which due to a person's gender, disability, race or ethnic belonging in a comparable situation is, was or could be less benevolent than towards another person (Education Law, 1999, Consumer Rights Protection Law, 1999). Indirect discrimination, in its turn, is seemingly neutral regulation, criterion or practice that creates or could create negative consequences due to a person's gender, disability, race or ethnic belonging except the case when such a regulation, criterion or practice is objectively grounded with a judicial aim for the attainment of which the chosen means are proportionate.

Although no problems of direct discrimination are observed in the tertiary education of Latvia it should be taken into consideration in the context of inclusive education that the special needs of different people from the point of view of health, socio-economic origin, etc. can limit equal access to education to all students or those willing to study as it is guaranteed by The Constitution of the Republic of Latvia.

Analyzing the Constitution of the University of Latvia it is possible to ascertain that Article 3.8 defines that every citizen of Latvia, people with permanent residence in Latvia as well as foreign citizens, has equal rights to study at the University of Latvia regardless of their gender, social status, race and nationality, political views and religious convictions (Constitution of University of Latvia, 1996).

Thus when analyzing the education accessibility aspect in Latvia that has been consolidated in the legislative documents of the Republic of Latvia in the context of inclusive education, it should be concluded that the rules were drawn up envisaging that individuals are not to be grouped according to definite features, e.g., health conditions, and guaranteeing that a person can receive an education in accordance with his/her needs.

The aspect of the acceptability of education, in turn, is explained by the adjustment of the content and methods of education to the learners' needs,

including the determination of the quality standards, making conditions for creative freedom based upon the attainment of the necessary standards (with the help of academic freedom and the scientific autonomy of tertiary education institutions), and ensuring the complete and full-blooded development of the individual's abilities. The acceptability of education is also secured with the creation of the appropriate environment.

It must be concluded that the legislation in Latvia which envisages the necessary conditions for ensuring inclusive education at the tertiary level to implement and embody the principles of inclusive education in tertiary education practice in order to secure both its accessibility and acceptability is topical.

Theoretical framework of the study

Inclusion is not only an issue for the education system – inclusion is an indicator of a society's democratization. The attitude of the society towards inclusion demonstrates its tolerance level, which is a significant value to a democratic society. Similarly, the position of the individual and society towards inclusion actualizes the problems of such values of the civic society as social belonging and recognition (Rose, Florian, 2012).

Every person has the necessity to feel that they belong in their society, to feel recognized in a particular social community; however, to implement the rights of all people to recognition and to belonging, the demand for every individual to be tolerant of the diversity in their society needs to be rooted deeply in the order of all things. Social exclusion is the indicator of the lack of a sense of belonging and a recognition characteristic of a definite part of the society, as well as indicating the deficit of tolerance on the part of other members of the community (Watkins, (ed.), 2012).

The solution to the problems mentioned above in a Latvian context, as it's a relatively new democracy, is a complicated task, and the role of education in its solution is undeniably important.

The term "inclusive education" in the guidelines for inclusive education developed by UNESCO is explained as a process in which the respective diverse educational needs of all learners are secured, increasing everybody's participation possibilities in the teaching/learning process, cultural events, and different communities, and decreasing the exclusion threats from the process of acquiring education. Inclusive education is the most effective way to promote tolerance, and to achieve the qualitative education that should be accessible to everyone. Inclusive education does not only mean the adjustment of the school or university environment to

the needs of different social groups; it is mainly connected with the formation of values and attitudes, and the transformation of understanding values in a broad social context (UNESCO, 2004).

The issue of inclusive education in general comprehensive basic education and secondary education in Latvia has come to the fore since 1998, when the main emphasis was laid on the rights of those learners with special needs to obtain an education in comprehensive mainstream schools. Since the beginning of the year 2000, the issues of inclusive education have been connected with pupils who drop out from school and do not obtain their full compulsory education.

Inclusive education in the context of tertiary education in Latvia has been actualized relatively recently. There could be several reasons for that, though their mentioning could be merely hypothetical as there have been no empirical studies in Latvia on that specific topic. It is possible that the problems of inclusion in tertiary education are little actualized because tertiary education traditionally has been the place of excellence and high academic abilities, the competition for enrolling students with the highest academic achievement, the maintaining of the important status of academic abilities for ensuring academic success has created a culture of tertiary education in which inclusion has not been considered a priority.

The authors of the study consider that education should be viewed as a continuous process in which tertiary education is not only one of the next stages of acquiring education after secondary education, rather it is inseparable from the continuous lifelong education process, thus it is an integrative part of education which has to do with the same challenges as other stages of education, and one that has to seek solutions and react to changes in education and society. Besides, tertiary education has always been a bastion of democratic values in a society that supports the processes of democratization. Thus, the issue about the actualization of inclusive education in tertiary education is natural.

Recently the issues of inclusive teacher education have been widely discussed around the world. One of the most extensive projects, "Teacher education for inclusion" implemented by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education between 2010 and 2011, made 14 visits to different European countries and published "Teacher Education for Inclusion: PROFILE OF INCLUSIVE TEACHERS" at the end of the project, which includes several competencies that an inclusive teacher must demonstrate in his/her professional work (Watkins, (ed.), 2012). The competencies defined in the profile of the inclusive teacher are structured in four areas:

1. Valuing learner diversity – learner differences are considered as a resource and an asset to education;
2. Supporting all students – teachers have high expectations for all learners' achievements;
3. Cooperation with others – collaboration and teamwork are essential approaches for all teachers;
4. Continuing personal, professional development – teaching is a learning activity and teachers should be taking responsibility for their students' lifelong learning.

Also, there was a project implemented by the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, the “Inclusive Practice Project”, in the framework of which a new approach to teacher education in university teacher education programs was developed, that has received broad international resonance (Rose, Florian, 2012).

Latvian scholars were working on their solutions to the embodiment of inclusive education in teacher education, basing their research on the conclusions of the studies mentioned above.

Methodology and the course of the study

The researchers and experts working on the implementation of the project “Development and implementation of the support programs for establishing the support system for the young people under the exclusion risk” (Agreement No.2010/0328/1DP/1.2.2.4.1/10/IPIA/VIAA/002) since 2010 have begun purposeful cooperation with 15 municipalities and 39 educational institutions in Latvia to create and approbate the system for decreasing social exclusion among young people, and for promoting inclusive education in the municipalities and educational institutions (Daniela, Nīmante, Kraģe, 2014).

This project was one of the rare projects in Latvia to be based on scientific research, as the coordinator of the project was the University of Latvia and the partners were 6 leading higher education institutions in Latvia that are engaged in teacher education: Daugavpils University, Liepāja University, Christian Academy of Latvia, Rēzekne Higher Education Institution, Rīga Pedagogical and Education Management Academy and the Sports Education Academy of Latvia. The approbation of the system for decreasing social exclusion was started in 5 regions of Latvia in the year 2012/2013 in 15 municipalities, in 25 mainstream comprehensive educational institutions (schools). The participants of the approbation were 944 teachers, 237 technical staff of the schools, 99

specialists of the support staff, 103 representatives of the school administration, 7884 pupils, 310 pupils' parents and 15 coordinators from the municipalities. In the academic year, 2013/2014, 14 other schools joined the previous 25 general mainstream education institutions.

The introduction of the above mentioned systemic approach resulted in decreasing the impact of factors promoting social exclusion in the municipalities and schools involved in this process. Marked changes in several key indicators, like the significant drop in the number of insufficient assessments of academic achievement; the decreased ratio of unjustifiable missing of classes per pupil; a reduction in the cases of students repeating a year, etc., have been observed in the project schools during a one year period. All results are summarized in the collection of scientific articles: "Support to inclusive education" which was published in the summer of 2014 (Nīmante, Daniela, Krage, 2014).

It was only natural that the necessity to evaluate the interpretation of principles of inclusive education in tertiary education study programs emphasizing the field of teacher education came to light in the course of the project.

The work was started on the exploration and improvement of the principles of inclusive education at the level of tertiary education in 2013 in the framework of activity 6.3 ("Harmonization of tertiary education programs in accordance with the principles of inclusive education") of the ESF project "Development and implementation of the support programs for establishing the support system for the young people under the exclusion risk".

During the first stage of the activity (August – November, 2013) experts from seven higher education institutions in Latvia (University of Latvia, Riga Pedagogical and Education Management Academy, Liepaja University, Christian Academy of Latvia, Rezekne Higher Education Institution, Sports Education Academy of Latvia, and Daugavpils University) on the basis of the conclusions drawn from international studies, developed criteria for the implementation of an inclusive approach to teacher education that were applied in the evaluation of the study programs of ten higher education institutions:

Table 1 *Criteria for implementing inclusive approach in teacher education*

Dimension	Criteria
Methodological dimension	The introduction of the idea of inclusive education in the description of the program, its aims, objectives and learning outcomes. The introduction of inclusion technologies in the study program. Implementation of the integrated, inclusive approach in studies.
Personal and professional dimension	Understanding of man as value. Increasing the possibilities of individual responsibility. The embodiment of the values of inclusive education.
Environment dimension	Accessibility of resources of the physical and virtual environment. Learner-friendly environment (social, emotional climate that promotes learning). The environment is open to creativity and critical thinking.
Legislative dimension	Implementation of the principles of human rights, tolerance, egalitarianism and empathy: - in the legislative documents of studies. - in the course content. - in the teaching practice.
Social dimension	Diverse social skills for promoting inclusion (joint work in heterogeneous groups). Cooperation of equal standing and equivalence among the education subjects (university faculty-students, university faculty-university faculty, student-student). Problem-solving literacy.

Findings

Ten teacher education study programs in seven higher education institutions were evaluated in the framework of the project activity “Harmonization of tertiary education programs by the principles of inclusive education”. It was concluded that 1) the idea of inclusive education has been worked into the description, aims and learning outcomes of the analyzed study programs; 2) the requirements ensuring

the inclusive approach are formulated in such an abstract way in the course descriptions that the real, concrete needs of the students that are the cornerstones of the implementation of inclusive education get lost behind them; 3) the current economic situation in the country creates difficulties in ensuring optimal accessibility to physical and virtual resources to all students; 4) it is necessary to continue the improvement of the competencies of all university faculties and other staff that promote the implementation of inclusive education in the study process; 5) more attention should be paid to the social aspect of the content of the study courses which would promote the development of inclusive cooperation skills and attitudes; 6) the establishment of the support structures promoting students' inclusion should be furthered; 7) the promotion of tolerance is vital in facilitating cooperation of equal standing and equivalence among all those involved in the educational process on all levels.

An important conclusion was formulated: the evaluation and improvement of individual study programs is not the fundamental way of embodying the approach of inclusive education; it is necessary to work out common inclusion principles for the education and further education of all pedagogues (teachers and other educators). Additionally, it is useful to treat the principles of inclusive education in the context of all professional activities of pedagogues, and guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education that is binding to all pedagogues should be worked out.

To achieve the aim mentioned above during the second stage of the project activity (February – April 2014), a working group was set up comprising education experts from several higher education institutions as well as non-governmental organizations: the University of Latvia, the Sports Education Academy of Latvia, Daugavpils University and Soros Foundation Latvia.

Experts developed a methodology for formulating the above mentioned guidelines: the duties of teachers' professional activities are grouped in seven areas that are decoded in tasks; tasks are formulated as learning outcomes; learning outcomes are expressed as knowledge, skills and attitudes; teachers' professional development is presented on three levels: bachelor, master and expert.

The guidelines for implementing inclusive education in teacher education were formulated in the following structure based on the statements of psychology and pedagogy sciences:

- To have a good knowledge of pupils' development and learning;

- To have a good knowledge of the subject content and methods of its teaching;
- Planning, management, and evaluation of the teaching/learning process;
- Development and maintaining a safe teaching/learning environment;
- Assessment and evaluation of pupils' learning;
- Teacher's professional development;
- Teachers' professional cooperation.

The developed guidelines were approved in the higher educational institutions represented by experts as well as in two seminars organized by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, after which a decision was made that the guidelines should be published and referred for public discussion (Daniela, et. al. 2014).

The Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia, following the end of the project, made a decision to improve the standard of teachers' professional work, and experts from the project "Development and implementation of the support programs for establishing the support system for the young people under the exclusion risk" were invited to participate in the implementation team.

Thus, it is possible to conclude that the study programs analyzed in the project formally comprise different aspects of ensuring inclusive education in higher education institutions; however, the way to best realize it in order to ensure both the accessibility of education and its acceptability is not clear. The overall conclusion is that there are two basic directions in which the work should be done: 1) to ensure that tertiary education is accessible in reality, even to students who need extra support; 2) to ensure that the teachers who will implement the principles of inclusive education in their work with pupils are properly prepared.

Work on the formulated direction has been started by developing guidelines and initiating changes in the standard of teachers' professional work. Unfortunately, it should be admitted that work on the first mentioned direction (ensuring the accessibility to tertiary education) is largely connected with financial and technical resources that are insufficiently allotted for the solution of these problems. For example, the arrangement of rooms makes them inaccessible to people with motor disabilities; only people with hearing disabilities are provided assistance services, and then only for 10 hours per month, etc.

Conclusions

- The well-grounded introduction of the values of inclusive education in the content of teacher education programs widens the implementation of an integrated and inclusive approach.
- More extensive application of information technologies in studies will provide real possibilities for decreasing the problems connected with the social exclusion of young people in society.
- Development of the provisions of real and virtual social networks in tertiary education institutions will not only decrease the social exclusion but will also help analyze and solve particular inclusion problems.
- Regular further education possibilities of the faculty in the field of inclusive education have to be included in teacher training; it is also important to initiate discussions about values, possibilities, good practice and problem-solving models in inclusive education.
- Purposeful and coordinated cooperation of tertiary education institutions regarding the improvement of students' life scenarios and the development of individual study plans is a significant instrument that embodies inclusion.
- It is necessary to take into account that ensuring the embodiment of the principles of inclusive education in teacher training, improving the study programs and also the content acceptability is being promoted. However, without solving the issues of the accessibility of education, no equal opportunities for the acquisition of education will be ensured, which, in turn, will lead to distortion of the principles of inclusive education thus facilitating the marginalization processes of different groups. It can be formulated in words as "We will teach you how to be inclusive!"
- In order to ensure the unity of the accessibility of education and the principles of content acceptability in the context of inclusive education, a systemic approach is necessary on the state level, envisaging support for the embodiment of these principles. This must involve also the stages of tertiary education, and should not only exist at the levels of primary and general education as it is formulated in the legislative documents and guidelines for education development that are in effect at present. Until now these questions in tertiary education have been discussed in the working groups of different projects or as the result of individual initiatives that have not been followed by wider-scale systemic changes.

- However, the most important thing is to accept that the implementation of inclusive principles in teacher education does not only mean encouraging the endeavors of social support groups – this is the outcome of the cooperation and improvement of the whole system. To achieve this radical change of focus from those “who are to be included” to those who should be ready for inclusion, tolerance is needed. We have to keep in mind that these roles could change depending on the situation.

The authors of the study hope that this will help the immediate change of paradigm in the context of inclusion: from solving the social exclusion problems in tertiary education to an innovative and systemic perspective in which the rights to development of every individual are considered.

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PRE-SCHOOL TEACHERS' COOPERATION WITH THE FAMILY IN THE EVALUATION OF A CHILD'S PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIALOGIC SPEECH

AGITA ABELE, AGRITA TAURIŅA

Abstract: *The aim of the study is to analyze cooperation between teachers and parents of pre-school age children in assessing skills of physical and dialogue development, using a segmented evaluation model, and provide recommendations for the use of this model in daily routines. The study applied both theoretical and empirical methods (monitoring and surveys). The results obtained suggest that parental involvement towards helping the child achieve at school, as opposed to considering it solely the teachers' responsibility, enhances a child's personal growth, as well as contributes to increased parental awareness, support for the child's physical development, and the development of dialogic speech.*

Keywords: *Physical development, dialogic speech, evaluation, 5 – 7 year-old children.*

Introduction

The law for general education in Latvia dictates that children are to engage in pre-school education until they are seven years old. Depending on the condition of a child's health the pre-school educational period can be extended or reduced by a year, this is decided by the parents and based on a general practitioner's or psychologist's recommendations. Point 201 of this law states that it is compulsory to engage any child above five years of age in preparation for primary education (Provisions for the General Education Law, 2010). This addition to the law came into effect on 01.01.2010. It is because of this law that cooperation between parents and pre-school establishments has gained added significance in the last five years.

Personality formation of a pre-school age child (5 – 7 years old) is a significant process both from the standpoint of parents and the

kindergarten. How do we promote the cooperation of pre-school educational institutions with parents? How important is it to agree to a discussion on the objective vision of the child's achievements from both the teachers' and parents' point of view? How do you encourage and strengthen parents' interest in the child's physical development and dialogic speech development?

In order to create competent attitudes for pre-school educators and families, with interest in aiding the child development process, to promote a better understanding of a child's successes and more specific methods to bolster them, and to support a child's attempts at overcoming difficulties and to grow, every pedagogue has to also evaluate their own communicative experience, not only with children but with adults too, as well as their ability to work and to strengthen the spirit of teamwork. Tense situations are successfully overcome by those who acknowledge the complicated nature of a pedagogue's profession and those who skillfully, through interactions, create a unified position with the parents. If a teacher succeeds in establishing a professional authority in the eyes of the children and parents, if he/she is not afraid to act decisively and overcome difficulties, then there is ground for new collaborative initiatives.

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to analyze cooperation between teachers and parents of pre-school age children in the assessment of children's physical and dialogic speech skill development using a segmented evaluation model, as well as to provide recommendations for the use of this model in daily routines.

Materials and Methods

The study applied theoretical and empirical methods (modification of the Evaluation model, monitoring and surveys). Statistical analysis of the results was performed with the SPSS-17 software package (standard deviation, median and mode).

Results. Theoretical Background

Recent experience shows that a child's family actively evaluates the work of a pre-school education establishment and its pedagogues accordingly to their understanding of the essence of pedagogy and its methods. Quite often pedagogues are not listened to as competent and

knowledgeable professionals who could provide helpful advice, yet the consumer-parent position is quite typical – the establishment and not the parent is responsible for the child's development. When parents are asked to support the development of their child's skills and attitudes, situations have been observed where the parents express disdainful opinions, such as pedagogues not having performed their work correctly, or even demonstratively show no interest in the child's achievements. The child's emotional reactions and parents' lack of confidence in their ability to successfully communicate with the child can cause parental anxiety. In such situations, it is crucial that a pedagogue's professional opinion, suggestions and tips are taken into consideration (Lika, 1996). The variety of interactive situations produces a wide range of problems – communication barriers, conflicts, emotional aggravation and subjective perceptions. A. Samohvalova points out that in any situation of problematic communication one must analyze:

- The ability to express difficulties and the depth of a problem's complexity;
- How the intensity of communication difficulties affects results of communication (Samohvalova, 2011).

A family's pedagogical abilities are determined by its cultural background – everyday interests, how they interpret traditional values, develop art skills, get involved in different movement and sports activities; also important is their enthusiasm for getting children involved in these activities. A vital characteristic of a family's pedagogical abilities is the relationship among family members, which creates a particular micro-climate. Cooperation between family members, having a similarity of opinion in different situations, unified demands for a child's education and development, mutual assistance, respect, care, and taking responsibility are all important factors. Parental authority and cooperation determine characteristics of the given family's relationships.

Conflicts which result from differing opinions within the family, uncoordinated demands and actions, or due to other reasons, significantly affect the children, and sometimes even traumatize them. Modern day experience shows that it isn't enough for parents to be both pedagogically and psychologically informed, it is also important for them to make a habit of actively collaborating with the children in practical situations, and also to create a stable relationship with the children's teachers. When defining the term “cooperation”, A. Spونا declares that cooperation is coordinated work carried out by two or more people when striving towards a common

goal with continuous self-evaluation of results achieved. Cooperation is a way of acquiring experience, a chance to imitate a better example, to supplement experience with new knowledge, skills and attitudes. Cooperation is unimaginable without the skills to:

- Exchange thoughts;
- Exchange views either verbally or in written form;
- Defend own points of view;
- Take into account other people's points of view;
- Make decisions and act them through;
- Evaluate processes and results (Spona, 2006).

The article looks at the views of pedagogues and psychologists on cooperation between teachers and parents in pre-school education establishments and schools. In our research, we focused on 5- to 7-year-old children, even though, depending on the country, a child of this age could be in school or pre-school. In the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), an organization of 34 countries which also contains 21 EU countries, 60% of six-year-olds attend schools. In Ireland, Great Britain and Malta children start attending schools at the early age of five. In Latvia, there are two options for educating five-year-olds – families can choose to send the child to a pre-school establishment, or to have the child attend children's play groups on school premises.

The American Federation of Teachers has also done research involving the 5- to 7-year-old age group and explains how positive parent-school communications benefit parents. The manner in which schools communicate and interact with parents affects the extent and quality of parental home involvement with their children's learning. Parents also benefit from being involved in their children's education by getting ideas from the school on how to help and support their children, and by learning more about the school's academic program and how it works. Perhaps most importantly, parents benefit by becoming more confident about the value of their school involvement (American Federation of Teachers, 2007). A. Baldins and A. Razeva emphasize that one of the key requirements for schools and families to successfully cooperate is motivation. The motives for collaboration may be:

- The parents' desire to understand the new and unknown;
- Parents striving towards self-realization and self-actualization;
- Parental desire to strengthen the bond with their child, through