

EXPRESSION OF DIALOGUE AS AN EFFECTIVE INDICATOR OF EDUCATION QUALITY IN LITHUANIAN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Lithuanian educational institutions provide public services (The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania, 2003; The National Education Strategies for 2013-2022; The Concept of the Good School, 2015), with the help of which the aim is to turn Lithuanian education into a sustainable basis for an energetic and independent person who responsibly creates his own and the country's future. The effective quality of education can be determined by its compliance with the social and economic conditions of the society, because the quality is closely related to the standard of living, the economic potential of the country. In today's society, when the education paradigm is changing, scientists, educational policy strategists and everyone who cares about the well-being of a young child and the quality of his education have no doubt that the bases of the successful future are laid in preschool childhood. From a social point of view, it is important that the provided educational services would meet the needs of parents and education politicians, as this is an important and significant indicator of the quality of education. In order to reveal the expression of dialogue in a preschool educational institution, a qualitative research was conducted. The data were collected through interviews method, and the research results were processed using the qualitative content analysis. During the empirical study, the tendencies of dialogue expression were evaluated, which help to develop a free and creative personality. The research results show that the dialogue is not a one-time activity, but a systematic and long-term process not only to achieve the desired level of quality, but also to maintain it continuously. According to the respondents, effective quality of education and long-term agreements between all representatives of the community of the educational institution can be achieved only with the help of dialogue.

Keywords: *Expression of dialogue, quality of education, educational institution, educational paradigm.*

1. Introduction

Countries' preschool education systems are determined by many specific factors such as goals, targets that are raised by the government, historical development and cultural characteristics, traditions and values. Ensuring the quality of children's education is an educational priority in many countries, because quality children's education is perceived as the basis for creating public welfare. Lithuania can be classified as a country where the preschool education system is characterised by an orientation towards integrated, i.e. childcare and education forming a single whole, pre-school education.

The concept of quality is formed through dialogue between interested groups and is based on the values and expectations of a specific society. It is a dynamic, continuous and democratic process. The quality in an educational institution is measured by assessing several aspects: structure (accreditation procedure, requirements for educators, program development, child/teacher relationship); the process (the place of play in the educational program, the relationship between the child and the teacher, the relationship between education and supervision in the program, documentation, evaluation of achievements); child's achievements (added value of education for the child, child's development, his readiness for life, readiness for learning, child's health).

The perception of quality can vary from one educational institution to another, as each one has its own way of looking at its educational processes. When assessing the quality of the process in a preschool, a very important criterion is the interaction between the parents and the preschool, based on a mutual dialogue and its expression. Therefore, when assessing the quality of a preschool, the most important area of assessment should not be to analyse what is the quality of the preschool, but rather to analyse the results the preschool is achieving in terms of the education of the children (Ishime et al., 2010).

2. Literature review

The perception of the quality of education, including pre-primary education, can vary from one educational institution to another, as each institution has its own way of looking at the educational processes that take place within it. According to Banu (2014), quality is a subjective, value-based, relational, dynamic concept. To understand the meaning of this concept and to identify the determinants of the quality of preschool education, it needed to include the social, economic and cultural diversity context.

The quality of preschool education has been studied by many foreign authors, whose work reveals the importance of the quality of preschool education, as well as the attitude of educators and parents towards the quality of education. Researchers point out that there can be many and varied factors that contribute to the quality of preschool education, which is why they categorise the factors of quality of preschool education according to structural, global and the process as a whole component. Quality factors often include components such as staff qualifications, family involvement, adult-child contact based on mutual dialogue, managerial skills and learning environment. Most often, the assessment of the quality of education in a preschool consists of the education and competence of the teachers, even the education and competence of the preschool director, the involvement of the family, as well as the race of the children in the classroom, the family's social situation, the curriculum, etc. (Denny, Hallam, & Homer, 2012).

Parent-preschool interaction is an important criterion in assessing the quality of preschool education. Dialogue is based on the constant interaction, communication, cooperation and coordination between the participants in the educational process. There is no universal model of dialogue expression that would work in any environment, because dialogue is related to the content, process and context of an institution's activities (Bankauskienė et al., 2009).

3. Research methodology

In order to reveal the expression of dialogue in a preschool educational institution, a qualitative research was conducted. The data were collected through interviews method, and the research results were processed using the qualitative content analysis. This method selects the most frequently mentioned meaning units in the text and counts their frequency, which indicates certain features of the phenomenon under study (Tidikis, 2003).

The study of the preschool participants' dialogue expressions was based on communication theory, which states that people communicate through the transmission of messages, where the sender and the receiver encode and decode information, use communication channels and tools, and where one person influences the other person's behaviour or state of mind. Successful communication is determined by the positivity and accessibility of the content of the message, the "matching" of the meaning given to the message by the sender and the receiver, and the choice of effective communication channels and means of feedback (Fiske, 1990, cited by Miltenienė, 2005). Communication between teachers, parents and leaders is an important prerequisite for quality education. Communicative action is understood as a process of dialogue in which preschool participants interact with each other to achieve coordinated actions that have a positive impact on improving the quality of education.

The sample of the study is based on a non-probability sampling method of selecting a group of subjects using criterion sampling, where "sample units are selected from the population in accordance with criteria established by the researcher" (Rupšienė, 2007, p. 31). Participants had to meet the requirement of being a preschool teacher, a leader or a parent of a child attending preschool.

4. Results

In defining the concept of quality, leaders are guided by the notion that the quality of pre-primary education is a shared agreement between the participants in the education process, which guarantees that the services meet pre-established requirements. According to the leaders, it is very important to build a team of creative educators, where staff members trust each other and share their ideas. There is also a need to continuously improve the quality of services by raising the methodological level of teachers. Leaders identify the continuous interaction between the participants involved in education, based on a general dialogue and the principle of equality, as a key factor in the quality of education.

Preschool directors emphasise that the continuous interaction between parents and teachers allows for a close and cordial relationship. There is a tendency that teachers' competences in creating and developing dialogue do not always meet the needs of parents: '<...> sometimes help is not asked for, or is not asked for in the right way', teachers are trying to have a meaningful dialogue with parents and to

create a favourable climate in the institution, but it is not always the case. Parents have untapped skills that could be used in their children's education. Parental support is highly appreciated and volunteering activities can improve the dialogue between preschool teachers and parents, making it less formal and less official: "<...> everyone can contribute in different ways, some with ideas, others with work". There is a need to develop the competences of preschool teachers and directors in promoting parental volunteering in preschools. The analysis reveals the need for new forms of dialogue that enable parents to be involved in their child's education and to feel that they are equal partners in education. The analysis reveals the need for new forms of dialogue that enable parents to be involved in their child's education and to feel that they are equal partners in education.

During the interviews, the preschool directors had the opportunity to give suggestions and observations on how to improve the existing dialogue and its expression in the preschool institution.

Table 1. Category: 'Leaders' suggestions for improving dialogue in preschool education'.

Category name	Subquaternary names	Proving statements	Number
Suggestions from directors to improve cooperation in preschool education	Increasing the use of technology in education	* <i>Improve electronic communication;</i> * <i>The latest technology;</i> * <i>It is very important that teachers are proficient in information technology.</i>	6
	Professional development for teachers	* <i>There is also room for teachers themselves to develop through professional development;</i> * <i>To encourage teachers' motivation to improve;</i> * <i>We would like to improve, to raise that methodological level.</i>	3
	Achieving greater interaction between educational participants	* <i>How much closer the relationship between leaders and the community should be;</i> * <i>The dialogue must be inclusive, it is important to encourage all participants to be active and creative</i>	4
	Search for new dialogue forms	* <i>Finding newer, more effective ways of communicating and attracting them to us.</i>	3
	Modernising the environment	* <i>Modernising groups.</i>	4

The interviews revealed that parents are aware of the importance of dialogue in their children's education, but are reluctant to take on the role of active participants and lack initiative in dialogue processes. The respondents are of the opinion that dialogue and its expression in preschool institutions must be improved.

The results show that younger teachers face greater difficulties in maintaining a dialogue with parents and colleagues. They often lack the knowledge and skills to develop effective dialogue.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

In defining the concept of quality, leaders are guided by the notion that the quality of education is a shared agreement between the participants in the education process, guaranteeing that the services meet pre-established requirements. Preschool directors point to the constant interaction and dialogue between the participants, based on the principle of equivalence, as a key factor in the quality of education. Therefore, preschool directors need to develop the existing dialogue more consistently and purposefully, forming a united team of teachers, creating a safe atmosphere of trust, supporting and empowering leaders, and exploring new ways and forms to strengthen relationships and effective dialogue.

In order to provide quality services, the preschool education institution should encourage parents to be actively involved in the management of the institution's education by making suggestions and decisions, develop a willingness to help, to volunteer for and actively participate in the organisation of

festivals and outings, and to develop a system of informing and counselling parents as one of the most effective ways to express the dialogue. In addition, it is also very important to promote the professional development of preschool teachers, as well as the enhancement of managerial and communicative competences, ensuring prompt and purposeful dialogue and its expression with colleagues and the families of the children.

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