

## FACILITIES PROVIDING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE UP TO THREE YEARS OF AGE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF ERUDITE EMPLOYEES

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**Abstract:** This scientific study presents the concept of qualitative research of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in facilities providing childcare up to three years of age. It focuses on caring of the youngest generation of children in the area of children's nursery centres, childcare facilities, where this care in its educational component, is rather unintentional, involuntary. At the time of the information boom, parents often have problems with choosing parenting strategies without any pedagogical advice or educational programs for children. The current adult society places great demands on active and significant life in society, but the issues of early childhood education and care are not addressed with adequate attention and seriousness.

**Keywords:** focus group, qualitative methodology, facilities providing ECEC up to the age of three, caregivers.

### 1 Institutionalized childcare at an early age of the child in Slovakia

The ECEC in Slovakia is becoming increasingly important, as it is in the case in other countries of the European Union. Currently, there are some international conditions and specificities that characterize ECEC. These conditions are detailed in a document published by the European Commission in Brussels (2011) entitled 'Announcement of the Commission: Early childhood education and care is an optimal start for all our children in the world of the future. The quality of early childhood education and care is dependent on many of the factors discussed in the above mentioned document. Factors that improve the quality of early childhood education improve the curriculum, staff, and overall management of early childhood education and care. The aim of early childhood education is primarily to educate, care, and encourage a versatile development of an individual. Childcare facilities up to three years of age must comply with the legal conditions applicable to the Slovak Republic specified in Act No. 448/2018 Coll. on social services, which is referred to as the so-called "Act of the day nursery care centres". According to this law, it is concluded that the main requirement for ECEC is the expertise of the caregivers themselves. A caregiver in a childcare facility up to three years of age who does not achieve the required education cannot work in a facility of this type. Before adopting the current legislation, the requirement of such education was not desirable and the position of a caregiver in early childhood education and care facilities could have been performed by an individual without the required education. Fields of study that are suitable for the practice of ECEC caregivers in Slovakia are defined as: "educating-caregiver practice, teacher education for primary schools and nursing, or medical assistant." The condition of employee education, as well as other conditions, in the form of strict criteria from the current "day nursery act", apply to the facilities of state nurseries, as well as to other childcare facilities up to the age of three, private day nursery centres, private centres with kindergarten, etc. They are registered in the central register of social services of the respective self-governing region. Exceptions, are private day nursery centres, private children's centers, civic associations and other private establishments, that take care of children up to the age of three, and are not registered in the register of social service providers at the higher territorial unit of the region in question. Regulation in accordance with the currently valid legislation thus created two groups of facilities, namely, those that meet the legal conditions and those that do not officially meet them. The "legal guarantee" may or may not be decisive for the parent when choosing a particular facility for his/her child.

### 1.1 Educational strategies, methods, principles and process of raising children of an early age

The basis of success is a suitably chosen strategy as a certain intended and applied approach (not an algorithm) to achieve intentions and goals. The strategy framing the process, prevents from diverting from the intention and goal, affects the content of the proceedings and gives it a specific form. I. e., that each strategy chosen produces different results. The strategy incorporates several methods that complement each other, linking them to the same purpose of use. A method is the way in which goals and results can be achieved. An individual, through his deliberate action, causes that the goals take on a particular form, and the results are better demonstrated. The methods are chosen with regard to the subjects (the children being educated) because they are to be adapted to the level of development that the subjects have. The caregiver thus chooses the appropriate strategies and affects the whole educational process in the long term. The strategy of an open educational process (with relevant methods such as persuasion, etc.) is aimed at educating an active and responsible citizen. Educational strategies correspond to adult societies and their culture, which means that they are also chosen with regard to the nature of life favored by the adult society (children are brought up to the image of an adult society). Educational principles determine educational behavior, acting; they are its basic norm. Educational principles systematize the educating of the child and establish the caregiver's educational conduct, thereby make this behavior intentional and less random. The caregiver is aware that he / she carries out his / her educational conduct consciously, intentionally, purposefully, and on the basis of educational principles. Achievement of objectives is a systematic, methodical - conceptually thought-out and continuous action, taking place according to the chosen strategy, method and principles, that exclude randomness, unpreparedness, deviation from the set objective and so on. The educational principle is the steady action of the caregiver. Educational principles influence the formation, course and outcomes of education. Educational situations are provided with educational principles, but they do not have to be present, in everyday situations. Then it is necessary for the caregiver to "draw" e.g., clarify what has happened, with reference to educational links and consequences. This is important because life, and action in it, is formed through speech, which is to be accompanied by the caregiver's actions. Educational principles become evident (understood) to a child when educating is related to speech. Speech is justification of proceedings. It thus makes it possible to put ideas into action. People create things by action and words, so communication in education is essential. It is also essential to not forget the forms of education which are the external arrangement of space and time, in which the content of education is organized. Part of the educational process are the conditions that influence the educating. The factors of education are all that enters the educational process, and the children and the caregiver are subjects of education. Educational acting is not a phenomenon on its own, it is often embedded in a wider framework of adult social behavior, which is a fact, and it is desirable that the caregiver should be able to differentiate the boundaries of this process and fully focus his/her attention on it. Educational performing in the facility for the youngest population is a continuous educational activity, i.e., it is such acting, which is in its entirety controlled. Educational strategies, methods and principles are the factors of controlled and systematic education. The educating of the youngest generation is a responsible activity that requires the integrity of the caregiver. The caregiver should include knowledge of, in particular, the pedagogical sciences (in close relation to other sciences), in order to be able to plan, to carry out, evaluate the educational process with respect to the child / children being educated and achieve the intended educational outcomes. The basic ideas that determine and frame the caregiver's educational conduct are summarized below:

A child is accepted in its diversity. The child has many ways to communicate with the caregiver in the educational environment. Conventional language (typical for the adult population) is only one possible way. The caregiver should take care to create an accepting and accommodating educational environment, in which the child has the ability to choose and change the way they communicate with the him/her. Crying, shouting, laughing, silence, and so on., are the speeches by which the child communicates with the caregiver. The caregiver is supposed to obtain a way of communication from the child that will be beneficial for both. The recommended conjunction of a common speech code is play in which the child has the opportunity to alternate ways of communicating. As part of the educational process, there is direct speech in communication with the child. Inclusion of unknown concepts within the communication with the child is based on the belief that the child learns by becoming more familiar with the subjects, together with their conceptual designation. Terms that are not directly linked to objects in the child's environment can be misrepresented by the child. The diversity of the child is a manifestation of its uniqueness, even though its actions in the educational group bear common features (which also depends on the setting of educational conditions). It must always be borne in mind that every child is unique in pedagogical terms. The caregiver avoids denying the uniqueness of the children brought up by him in the educational group; on the contrary, he/she changes and regulates his/her educational behaviour, in terms of respect for the diversity of each child. Pedagogical significance is unambiguous; The purpose of educating a child is to let it be aware of itself and its potential, so that the child can realize what it can (already) do. Self-awareness of the child is a prerequisite for accepting oneself as a competent human being.

It is accepted that a child needs a safe educational environment filled with the appropriate interior and subjects / objects, to support the process of education to act actively. Pedagogical significance is contained in the idea that children need to be given the appropriate space, which is an educational challenge for them, but also a space in which they will feel safe and fearless. A safe educational environment is a space in which a child receives benefits from educating. The educational process should take place in the corresponding spaces where the external factors are in accordance with the set educational conditions. One of the pedagogical principles is the principle of systematically protecting a child from harm, danger or any threat and to spend all material and human resources on it, as well as to pay attention to its health. At the same time, this principle is a humane commitment to the youngest (defenseless) generation.

It is accepted that educational communication is paramount. Educational communication is an essential educational tool, so it must be conducted intentionally, prudently and responsibly. The caregiver speaks through it with the child, and it responds to the call with its speech and action. The child's communication is usually straightforward, which means that the caregiver can derive the child's needs from it and determine the content of the communication, i.e., what the child wants to communicate to the him/her. The whole educational action unfolds from the nature, form, and content of the communication. The educational consequences affect it, and therefore it should be conducted in favor of the child's educating goals. Ideas, messages, references, requirements, guidelines, instructions, approvals, etc., anchored in words (sentences), affect the thinking and action of individuals. The meaning of the proceedings lies in the words by which people describe and execute the action. The caregiver should take care of what words and phrases he/she chooses (and how he/she puts them into sentences), because they influence educational events. Steady communication makes it possible for the child to clarify what the caregiver requires from the child. Communicating in the process of educating the youngest generation, should be clear, concise, concrete and understandable. Such communication prevents confusion and allows the educated child to focus its actions on what is and may be, and on what is not and must not, and therefore, what is specifically required from the child's action. The pedagogical principle in communication means talking to a child, listening to a child and speaking with the child in such a way, that the

caregiver is aware of the meaning, value of the words and their impact on the behavior (actions) of the educated child, with regard to the educational situation.

It is accepted that educating is an intangible act, which means accepting the fact that the caregiver treats intangible educational tools, while acting in an intangible process of education. The content and intent of education must therefore be communicated appropriately and clearly. Educational activities and actions must be accompanied by clarifying communication. Some educational activities can be materialized (that is, to do something with the use of material resources), but the process of education is a strong idea (it is not possible to fully apply law to it) - the processes of education are based on the so-called "strong thoughts", concretizing the actions of the caregiver and the educated and their believing in those strong thoughts. All the more so, the process of educating requires a caregiver's full awareness of the intentions, goals, processes and consequences of education. The procedure is influenced by the rules governing the child's self-control, thus promoting its development. The pedagogical principle of nursery (caregiver's) education reflects his/her personal belief in the meaningfulness of the educating process, which is deliberate action based on the awareness of strong educational ideas. It is accepted that the process of educating is a certain relationship between the caregiver and the educated child/children. This relationship is an interaction, mutual interaction, demonstrated in communication, action, play, care, in various educational activities, but also in eating, sleeping, staying outside, in greetings, and so on. To act synergistically means not to go against the educated, but to find harmony with them. It means going together, following the educational action and goal. The relationship between the caregiver and educated is to be based on trust. The relationship is also filled with educational means, with the use of which the caregiver intends to provoke concrete educational changes in the process of education. Human behavior has its consequences (which applies equally to educating), and it is therefore good if children at an early age realize this. The child learns by observation and imitation, so the caregiver's behavior should be thoughtful (not arbitrary), systematic (not random) and targeted (not aimless). Thus, a child can get an idea (experience) that the interaction of the caregiver and the child being raised is a human-enriching and mutually reshaping relationship. The relationship should also be based on the mutual respect of the caregiver towards the child and vice versa. Unilaterality has no place in such a process. To create such a relationship, such qualities as consistency, exemplarity, accountability and justice must be developed. Educational reality tends to be varied, educational situations can be both educationally challenging and simple, but they can never remain without the caregiver avoiding at least the four mentioned qualities. The clarity of the signals in the form of these qualities allow the child to create respect towards the caregiver and itself. The pedagogical principle of creating and maintaining a relationship between the caregiver and the child being educated, is based on the fact that the caregiver's action is responsible and encourages the child to enter into a (co-educational) relationship. It is accepted that educating requires the establishment of boundaries and rules, and their respect. An adult, a caregiver is a model for a child. The caregiver should be the model to observe the rules, by presenting the child that the actions of man, people are subject to the rules, that no one should act arbitrarily and act against the will of others. The borderlessness of the proceedings is in contradiction with the educator's thinking, because the boundaries and rules are one of the educational means of the process of education. The boundaries define the area of action, and this space can be filled by the child's / children's independent, active, conscious and creative action. The added value of such a child's action, in the space bounded by educational principles, is goal-oriented action. Children up to the age of three demand room for self-active action, and the caregiver applies the rules to make the child's educational practice useful. The rules are tied to the process of self-control, and this requires that they be clear, unambiguous, reasonable, and proportionate to the child's educational experience, because only then they can pursue a thoughtful arrangement of the daily order in educating. The child

learns self-control, while at the same time, adapting to the narrower and wider social environment. The nature of such a child's behavior is strongly supported by an adult, a caregiver, who acts in the way he/she requires from a child. Steady and repetitive educational behavior becomes part of the logic and reality of the educated. The pleasant and assuring experience of repeated educational success has a fostering effect on the child's self-control. Enhanced child control has a significant share in adapting to new situations. The pedagogical principle of educating a child / children by using rules on the basis of established boundaries, emerges from the idea that every act is based on intellectual plan and emotional regulation (personally managed behavior adapted to social and physical conditions). Education is aimed at purposefully supporting the processes of self-control of the child / children, as a prerequisite for their success in the society of children and adults.

It is accepted that the process of educating is based on the deduction of educational principles. Inferring educational principles from a child and an adult / a caregiver, is a dynamic process that presupposes mastery of the educational situation, from which the educational principles should come. Educational behavior transforms the educational reality, changes the behavior of the educated child, and causes such consequences. The consequences should be analyzed by the caregiver (e.g., to avoid wasting educational resources, time and effort and to find an appropriate educational principle) and analyzing the educational management, which will allow to draw an educational principle that is more appropriate for that child. The caregiver should not leave any unforeseen educational situation unnoticed, if he is convinced that the educational principles should be identified and adapted to the child being educated. The process of educating is a process with a long-term perspective, and educational principles set it up and make it predictable and planned. The educational process is a deliberate process, which means that educational action is a conscious action tied to the goal. However, the caregiver is not confined to a single educational activity in his or her educational process, but takes into account those activities whereby the child can be more fully developed. After considering the selected educational activities, the caregiver combines them into one educational activity, in which the child is engaged. An educational activity, with diverse but mutually overlapping activities, is inspiring not only for one child, but also for a number of educated children who connect e.g., by the same interest in activities. This consideration is supported by the caregiver, by identifying the needs of the child and assessing the pedagogical suitability of the activities for the particular child. Within one activity, it is suitable to involve children who are (from the perspective of the caregiver) close in terms of needs and opportunities for development. Children up to the age of three can do different activities themselves, but they can also do them with the support of a caregiver and another child / children. Autonomously acting children are children who firstly receive support, but later give up on support. A child acting autonomously is a child who enjoys the activities he / she is doing and who is interested in the activity. The pedagogical principle of educating children, based on educational principles, means a managed, coherent, systematic, structured, planned and especially, valuable process of education.

It is accepted that the process of educating has its (caregiver's defined and understood) educational purpose. The educational intention is what is pursued by education and is consistent with what is to be achieved (goal). The caregiver has a general conception of the process of educating, which is actually a conceptual purpose of education. The attitude, along with the emotional dimension, is the essence of the educational purpose. The caregiver focuses (the intention) on educating the child by developing the attitudes, wills, and higher emotions of the child. The caregiver has a direct and indirect influence on the development of human characteristics and the specificity of the child. The fact that the child is influenced in the process of education, in order to consciously acquire domination over his/her actions, helps him/her to begin to gradually control him/herself, in the sense of educational principles (adaptation), and then begin to master the contents of educational activities (or

even the educational situation), to control him/herself in following activities and situations. One of the long-term educational aims is to lead the process of education, so that the child succeeds in the situations in which it occurs. If a child goes through the process of gaining dominion over itself in its actions, it is also a process of becoming independent. When a child is able to do the activity itself, then the caregiver may consider it a success. The educational intention is of a long-term nature and framing the whole educational activity of the caregiver. It is beneficial for the caregiver to subordinate his / her educational activity to the intended educational purpose, as it will gradually direct it to individual steps that will not be random, but will create a certain sequenced system. Educational goals that are in line with the intention and vice versa, are related to the educational goal. Educating is a professional activity - a thoughtful, targeted, deliberate, systematic, continual action, taking place in accordance with certain strategies, that excludes randomness, unpreparedness, diversion from goals, intentions and inconsistency. The educating process should be planned, organized and evaluated (under its full control) by the caregiver.

## 1.2 Education and educational strategies of parents

Family education is a purposeful activity of a parent focused on the development of a child's personality. It is an interaction of the parent and the child, and the behavior of both subjects is influenced by each participant. Family education is as an interaction, as a two-way issue, of subjects involved in the implementation of education. Parental behavior is influenced by the behavior of the child and vice versa (Thomas, Chess, 1984 In: Fontana, 2010, p. 25). Education in the child's life is reflected in different ways. It creates conditions for its cultural, character, and emotional development. The child's parents have a prior position and a vital role in education. Their attitude towards it is a phenomenon that determines the style of education, choice, as well as the effectiveness of educational resources (Ziemska, 1980 In: Žuborová, 2010). Two main dimensions of parents' behavior are described by Maccoby, Martin (1983 In: Fontana, 2010). Dimension 1 - the opposite of care, demanding and controlling and not demanding and controlling. Dimension 2 - Responsive and un-responsive to child-oriented care.

Parent-oriented, that means un-responsive care and rejection. The combination of these dimensions is the result of four distinct behavior patterns. Authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent and neglectful style of education. The authoritative style of education is characteristic of parents justifying their decisions to their children. They require adequate behavior from their children, with regard to their age. Children work with their parents, strive for the best performance, their behavior is self-inflicting, and at the same time, peer-friendly. The authoritarian style of education is characterized by obedience and respect of the child towards the parent's authority. Parents enforce their power without prior communication. The child tends to isolate and be aggressive towards peers, and his/her behavior is non-spontaneous. A responsive and child-oriented style of education, when parents require little, is an indulgent style of education. The child is characterized by irresponsible behavior, inability to rely on him/herself, immaturity, inability to control his/her own impulses, tendency to aggressiveness, etc. The neglecting educational style is applied by parents not interested in their child - in his/her opinions, feelings. They avoid two-way communication. Children tend to use drugs, are typical for moodiness, cannot control their feelings and impulses (Fontana, 2010, p. 23-24). We consider education to be demanding, because good education is associated with the self-educating parent. In order to achieve a goal in education, it is necessary to modify the thinking, behavior and lifestyle of the parent (Rovňáková, 2001 In: Tománek, 2012, p. 100). Education in the family is only marginally studied by Slovak pedagogy. We agree with Ondrejko and consider it a paradox, because the family is a prior socializing agent and constitutes the basic cell of the world we live in (Ondrejko, 2008, p. 561). Educating children should be a prior task for their parents, because they are

responsible for their child. Paradoxically, the results of family research show that:

- Child upbringing/educating is an essential problem for parents - the 1991 family survey questionnaire conclusion (Tirpák, 2009, p. 100).
- Chronic lack of time is a phenomenon characterized by the results of research on family in Slovakia. The father spends an average of 9, and a mother 24 minutes a day for discussion with their child (Zelina, 1994 In: Šatánek, 2005).
- Employed parents do not have an overview of their child's activities in its free time. The education is negatively influenced by the "second shift" of the mother, after returning from work. Caring for the household absorbs her every free moment (Končal, 2008, p. 531).
- The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by UNESCO and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 November 1989, are being violated by a part of the parents. Parents deny children (in relation to them) their right to have their own opinion, exercise their own interests, choose school, finance, and the right to personal freedom - research carried out by Šatánek via the method of questionnaire 2004/2005 (Šatánek, 2005, pp. 105-109).
- The results of the research tasks VEGA 1/2044/03 pointed out the shortcomings of parents in the quality of their educational impact. They manifest themselves in disregard of the fundamental rights and needs of the child - results of partial research tasks of the scientific research project VEGA 1/2044/03 "Family environment as a factor of socialization and personalization of the child's personality" (Šatánek, 2005, p. 100).

Research findings of the research project VEGA 1/2044/03 "Family environment as a factor of socialization and personalization of the child's personality", showed that the basic conditions for successful socialization of the child in the family are: Appropriate manifestation and recognition of the child's love. Respecting his/her personality as an autonomous subject. Appropriate, stimulating and emotional environment, corresponding to the individual needs of the child. Quality interaction and communication of subjects in the family (Šatánek, 2005, p. 100).

A thorough analysis of the theoretical background of the authors dealing with the issue of education - Tománek (2012), Dolinská (2009), Pupala (2004), Průcha (2009), has identified several functions of education in the family:

- The Protective function. Education is the protection of the child from the world and, on the other hand, the protection of the world from desolation. Before the desolation of the social space, in which we live, as a result of the penetration of new phenomena rolling into the world together with every next generation (Pupala, 2004, p. 77).
- By the term Generation, we understand a group of people sharing a similar cultural experience, born in approximately the same time frame (Tománek, 2012, p. 141).
- Transformation / assimilation function. Education is a dynamic phenomenon, determined by the dynamics of human being. It is an integral part of the culture and, as a consequence, itself undergoes various changes. Because it is a phenomenon taking into account the needs of the present time and the prospective needs of contemporary society (Tománek, 2012, p. 98-99).
- Existential function. The aim of education is the ability of a person - a child - to act in education (Kaiser, Kaiserová, 1993 In: Dolinská, 2009, p. 144).
- The child's versatile development function. Education as a purposeful activity of a parent, focused on deliberate all-round development of a child's personality (Jůva, 1967 In: Tománek 2012, p. 96).
- Educational function. The family is the first social space in which the subject (child) finds his/herself. He / she learns

the mother tongue and learns communication and language skills, by interacting with other subjects (parents), who intentionally and unintentionally expose them. It is the realization of educational processes - the processes of learning intentionally and incidentally (Průcha, 2009, p. 65).

Real educational processes in family education determine or influence, in some way, the constructs that parents have in their education. Educational constructs are such theories, models, plans, scenarios and other theoretical creations, that actually influence educational processes (Průcha, 2009, p. 67) in the family.

## 2 Research problem and research objectives

At present, the child's education at an early age is not systematically addressed in Slovakia. Similarly, it is also abroad. There are few research studies on early childhood education. They are overshadowed by the research of preschool and elementary age children, but issues of toddler and infant education are rarely addressed. There are few state-run institutions in Slovakia to educate children of early age. It takes place in facilities until the third year of the child's age. Based on period-conditioned domestic and inspirational foreign programs, and in line with the socio-cultural conditions of the present world, early education proves necessary not only for the development of a child in rapidly changing conditions, but also for parents, who are rapidly returning to their profession, and even for weak parent orientation on the systematic support of the child's educational needs. Parents also have difficulty in choosing parenting strategies, at a time of rapid information boom, while the absence of pedagogical counseling, including educational programs for children. The current adult society places demands on active and significant life in society, but does not give adequate attention and seriousness to the issues of early childhood education. The main goal of the research is to conceptualize ECEC in facilities providing care up to the age of three. Our intention is to:

- 1) Identify the educational aspects of institutionalized care provided in childcare facilities up to the third year of the child's age.
- 2) To present and analyze the essence of subjective statements of caregivers and early childhood childcare professionals, in connection with the research problem identified.
- 3) Conceptualize the methodological-content form of early childhood education and care, by identifying educational issues and educational needs, considered by caregivers, parents, and early childhood education and care professionals.

Research presented here is of a social nature: it interferes with an area that is widely represented, but its lacking scientific attention. We use research as a fundamental tool for developing science. We apply a qualitative methodology that is desirable in the study of subjects and their human activities.

### 2.1 Research questions

- What are the specifics of educating early childhood children in the family and childcare facilities up to the third year of the child's age?
- What are the positives, the negatives of the current education in ECEC facilities, providing care until the third year of the child's age?
- What early childhood educating constructs can be identified, based on mental and social representations of parents, caregivers and other early childhood educators?

As a research tool, to address our research in view of the research problem, we have decided to apply a focus group.

## 2.2 Entering and conducting research

The target group of our research project were caregivers in ECEC facilities, providing care up to the third year of the child's age, and specialists in early childhood education, together with parents. Research terrain was represented by state-run childcare facilities, up to the third year of age of the child, and maternity centers in Bratislava. We managed to carry out research in 4 childcare facilities in Bratislava. At the end of the research project, we managed to implement a workshop (creative workshop) in one of the childcare facilities. We have presented some of our findings, where the research results also raised questions - space for participants to discuss. Participants were: experts of the Pedagogical Faculty of Comenius University, deputy of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, employee of the Red Cross - organizes a course for educators up to the third year of the child's age, participants in the caregiver's course, a representative of pedagogical-psychological counseling and prevention, parents of children, the Director and Deputy Director, together with the educators of the ECEC facility in Bratislava. We have organized 4 discussion groups with child caregivers, 4 discussion groups with parents of children and one with experts dealing with various areas of early childhood educating and care. In the research project, we have gained a great deal of research data. After returning from the field, we have transcribed them from the audio recordings into text form. After studying the research material thoroughly, we opened the text using the open coding method, where we read it several times and proceeded by sentences or short sections, looking for similar phenomena. Again, we focused on the localization of phenomena in the text of the statements, which had a clear narrative character, and the analysis which was based on reducing, categorizing, clarifying, synthesizing and comparing, in order to obtain the most comprehensive vision of our research object.

## 3 Interpretation of research results and research findings

Institutional education for early childhood in Slovakia takes place in ECEC facilities, providing care up to the third year of the child's age. We solved the project of our research at the time when the so-called "act of the day nursery centres", of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, was being solved and met with senior executives of the Department of Labor, Social Affairs and Family in Bratislava, to presented our project to them. We did not agree on the cooperation, but we met with them at the last discussion seminar. The research was conducted in nursery centers and state-run facilities in Bratislava. These are family-type facilities with permanent staff. Caring for the child is the responsibility of the caregiver, but we have identified that in the state facilities, the majority of employees have the qualification of a nurse (currently the study program is disabled). They have many years of experience and many have been in the facility for 30 years and they carry out their work at a high professional level. We also note that cooperation with parents is a priority for all facilities. The day of the child in the nursery has a set timetable and precise rules are set for all participants, which determine the direction of the facility.

### *Children's nurseries just before 1990*

In the past, nurseries, nowadays, they are ECEC facilities for children up to the third year of the child's age. Very many of them were abolished in the 1990s. The nursery workers were nurses, who had knowledge at the level of GCSE in paediatrics, and were prepared for work with children. At that time, the nurse was an expert who helped parents. The staff of the nursery (at that time) had support in methodological manuals and literature. Educational components were elaborated in detail, could have been viewed in the library, directly at the facility. The instructional nurseries were set up in each city district and were responsible for the quality of the facilities under their leadership. We note that they used to conduct quarterly trainings for nursery workers, where they showed them how to carry out the process of educating in the facility. Before taking up their jobs, nurses and nursemaids had to practice in instructional nurseries. The nursemaids did not pass the school-leaving examination, but a

training in the form of a courses. We identified that it was prescribed when and what educational component should be implemented in the process of education. The nurses consistently led the health and injury documentation of the child - (called) the filter, they prepared for each educational activity according to precisely defined criteria. The instructional nurse, speech therapist, and psychologist controlled the prescribed quality of all facilities. A pediatrician was also a support worker for the nursery.

We assume that good, proven elements in the educating process persist to the present day. But some of the caregivers said that above all, they do not currently have the support of methodologies, speech therapists, psychologists and paediatricians, who no longer cooperate with the facilities on daily basis. The subjects consider current state nurseries as high-level facilities. When comparing the past, they see it as an amateur approach. They consider it unsuitable for a child to have a precisely defined educational component at the exact time of day. It is desirable for the caregiver to have thoughtful and planned activities, even if the education is to be conducted throughout the whole day. Access should be individual and the caregiver should respond to the current physical and mental settings of the child (for example, he / she can be teething).

### *Organization of daily activities for children in an ECEC facility, up to the age of three*

The operating time of the facility ranges from 06:30 am. until 5:00 pm, or sometimes until 5:30 pm. It is adapted to the needs of parents. In the past, children stayed at the institution from 06:00 am until 6:00 pm, later until 5:00 pm. Directors of some facilities have accommodated the facility's operating time in favour of parents. Since you no longer need to open the facility in the early morning hours, current employed parents have the option of picking up the child from 5:00 pm. until 5:30 pm, depending on facility. The smooth operation of the facility is ensured in a three-shift operating time. In the morning, the caregiver receives each child individually. In collaboration with parents, he/she lists the group's diary and filters out children who might endanger other children in the group, or the child itself. If the caregiver discovers a child's unfavorable health condition, it is sent to the pediatrician for examination and subsequently accepted after submission of a satisfactory health certificate. The caregiver records every child's injury. She/he works intensively with the parents. Both sides are closely informed of each change in the child's behavior. The caregiver also keeps records of attendance. Morning exercise, snack and hygiene. In this part of the day the child learns to coordinate its physical activity, improve basic self-help skills, habits and learns to sit on the potty. Caregivers use different strategies to motivate the child to sit on the potty, stay there for a while, until the need is made. Disposing of diapers is a serious element in the development of the child, a step towards its independence. Therefore, we will discuss this topic in more detail later. We identified targeted educational activities, in a set of activities, carried out almost throughout the whole child's stay in the facility. The child's cultural literacy is developed by education. Based on research data, we have identified 7 areas of education:

1. Culture of communication - language, speech and communication as the core of education.
2. Movement culture - body movement, cognition and progressive control.
3. Safety and care culture - healthy lifestyle and health protection.
4. Culture of getting to know - physical and natural environment and its discovery.
5. Culture of coexistence - social environment and coexistence with others.
6. Culture of behavior - emotions, attitudes and their balance.
7. Culture of interpretation - art.

Caregivers prepare educational activities for children. Namely, it is an artistic, movement, intellectual and musical field of education, and self-help skills activities. The children in the facility are divided into groups according to their age: infant,

middle and large. There are children from 6 months to two years in the infant department, the middle department is for two, to two and a half year olds, and the large department is for two and a half, to three year olds. There are 3 caregivers in each group and they carry out educational activities. We find that they have no prescribed plans, methodological guides, or any support material, that would assist them in their work. They follow the methodology from 1989., but they are proactive and they look for inspiration on the Internet. In the facilities, it is up to the caregivers to agree on what targeted educational activities they will carry out on a given day; in unfavorable weather they also implement more targeted areas of education. We assume, that every day in the nursery, all educational areas are represented. Children listen to children's songs every day, sing, practice, try to draw, learn new things etc. The Caregivers approach the child individually. We have identified an individual approach when we observed the planning of activities. Each caregiver in the group offers a different activity with different levels of difficulty. The child decides on its own, chooses what it wants to do, depending on the zone of its current and proximal development. This means that it is essential to choose the educational activity, when realized what a child can do on its own and what it can do with help. There are situations where the child does not have the capacity to concentrate and carry out the educational activity with the other children in the group. For example, when it is teething. Then, the caregiver will offer the child a different activity. It is important to reassure the child to feel safe in the facility (some children call the caregiver grandma).

In good weather, children are allowed to move around in the school yard and walk around the facility. They observe the surroundings and the world around them. The caregivers show them and explain the surrounding phenomena (children develop speech and explore their surroundings), and patiently answer all their questions of interest.

#### *Significant Critical Points in the Institutional Educating Process of Children up to Three Years of Age and Family Educating*

In the following section, we present the results of the research obtained in 4 discussion groups with caregivers in the facilities, and 4 discussion groups realized with the parents of the children in the nursery centers. We also present the results of the latest discussion, at a professional level, with a relatively wide scope in the field of participant involvement. The involved, are experts in every early childhood education-centered area, ranging from academia, healthcare, psychology, up to politics. The discussion was also attended by the director and selected caregivers from the establishment, where the last discussion took place. Also 2 parents of the children participated. A substantial proportion of the experts involved, also play the role of parent or grandparent. We have subjected the research data to a thorough analysis and we have identified critical points in the process of education. At the closing seminar, we briefly presented the results of the research, where we pointed out these critical points. The identified critical points became a means of further discussion of all the experts involved. Our intention was not to influence the subjects, but to briefly justify our choice of topics discussed.

#### *Promoting the independence / competence of the child*

When we talk about supporting the child's autonomy, competence, it is important to point out the individual dimension. There are parents supporting independence, but also parents leaving the development of independence to the child itself. We note that it is essential to communicate with all the participants, respectively. By this we mean communication of the facility with the family and communication between family members.

#### *Parental congruence and co-operation with the caregiver*

We note that there are situations where there is a discrepancy between the caregiver's and the parent's actions, therefore cooperation between family and facility is important. For example, in a facility, the caregiver puts the child on the potty at regular intervals, and afterwards it is given a clean diaper. When the diaper is dry, it is useless to keep the child in the diaper. It is

essential to maintain the discussion and to cooperate with each other. Caregivers respect the reservations and needs of parents. It's as if they were on two poles. On the one hand, there is the caregiver, who knows what to do with a particular child, on the other hand, the parent, who refuses the implications. Caregivers are also encouraged to communicate with a parent who is not interested in how the child was doing in the facility during the day. Such parents consider staying in the facility as a key element in the upbringing, education, and teaching of a child to act independently and in the home environment the child simply just goes to bed. On the contrary, there are parents who want to teach the child everything themselves, and parents who cooperate. A significant breakthrough for successful cooperation seems to lie in the success of the child.

In the past, the infant/toddler has learned from diapers significantly earlier than today. We note that parents had more children, so they had to be more independent. The diapers were different, the child felt it was in a wet environment. Nowadays, children use diapers in which they feel dry. It is important to put the child on the potty at regular intervals and later, when it can hold the urine, you should dispose it of diapers. Independence, competence gives the child freedom. It is happy because it becomes independent. Independent of adult help. It doesn't have to be in a dirty diaper anymore, doesn't have to wait for someone to wash it, change it, because it can do it by itself.

We think communication with the child is beneficial. The child has to get used to self-help skills activities gradually. It should gradually learn and be given time to try to dress, wash, eat with a spoon, etc. We note that children in ECEC facilities have enough opportunities to progressively improve their autonomy. Caregivers consider the development of autonomy and competence a priority.

#### *Love*

The basic and immediate phenomenon we have identified in ECEC centres, as well as in the family, is love. Love has different forms in the family.

We identify that love is the foundation of education, and we conclude, that how parents understand and apply it in education, has a definite impact on parents' constructs in education. Rejecting an authoritarian approach to education, and seeking for respect for the child, is a phenomenon on which parents clearly agree. Their opinions differ in what behaviour they still respect from the child, and what they cannot, or in no case, will. Every parent tries to respect (more or less successfully) that a child needs a mother. She responds to the needs and wishes of the child - she carries it in her arms, sleeps with it in one bed, the mother breastfeeds it, etc.

*We assume that parents' opinions differ in the following:*

- Whether a child should be raised/educated within the boundaries of set rules or not.
- Whether, or not, the child should respect the specified rules. Whether only the child should respect these rules or the same goes for the parent too.
- Whether a parent has enough will and energy to be consistent. Whether he/she tries to evaluate - to "guard" the behavior of the child, or is able, and willing, to be attentive to him/herself (in the role of a parent and human being).
- Whether he / she can identify errors only in the child's behavior or in his / her own.
- Whether he/she can admit the mistakes, and stand up to them, as an opportunity to rectify (behaviour) or failure.

From a rigorous analysis of research data, we have found a clear match between the interpretations of caregivers and other professionals which shows that the basic feature of a good caregiver is to love children, have a positive attitude towards them. The caregivers simply said, they like children, have the will to make a child happy, as well as a parent in the question of raising a child. They ensure it by means of a purposeful educational activity. They are patient and try to offer new

activities to the child, to show it something new everyday. They have the sincere joy of every child's progress, every smile, do not hesitate to praise, encourage and support. They provide scaffolding for the child to follow. They are helpful to the child and know that this is how the child learns. What it can do with the help of a caregiver, will gradually become something it will be able to do by itself (the zone of actual and proximal development). For example, it doesn't matter whether it can paint or model from plasticine. What matters, is being happy, recognizing and learning something new. It does not matter that it gets dirty, because it recognizes new materials and uses them. We note that a positive relationship with the child is a prerequisite, and at the same time, a property of a good and responsible caregiver. It is the concern for a child, an interest in making a child happy, by means of a targeted professional activity (through play). By this, the child will learn to be independent and become happy when autonomous. Security and safety are also important. The rules and rituals introduced in the facilities provide the child/children with security and safety. A parent understands love differently from a caregiver. The caregiver makes the child happy through educational activities during the day, by teaching it to be relatively independent. A parent can only understand love from that emotional side. Or that he will let it do everything, and perhaps the parent considers it a manifestation of love. And when a caregiver does not do it, the parent may be judging that he/she does not like his child. Should the caregiver love the entrusted child/children, should they like it/them? The profession of a caregiver in ECEC facilities up to three years of age, is clearly feminized. There is a single man in Bratislava who not a caregiver, but a director. We note that experts as well as caregivers consider it beneficial to see men and children interact on special occasions. And here we can see a thin line of understanding love. When a man-caregiver says he likes children, that he loves them, the parent can understand it differently. In our opinion, a caregiver, man or woman, should have a professional approach, be responsible, be playful, creative.

*Respect for the child's personality, boundaries and rules in the child's educating in the family*

Based on the analyzed research data, we identified 4 approaches of parents to the phenomenon of respecting the child's personality:

1. Respect the child within the boundaries.
2. Respect the child - be benevolent towards it.
3. Respect the child and want to be respected.
4. Respect that the child/infant needs a mother.

Rules are closely related to boundaries. In our opinion, compliance with the rules can be understood as a kind of prevention aimed at not exceeding the boundaries of education. We believe that consistent compliance, with the rules established by common agreement, can be of benefit to the child not only because it must not do something, but also because pleasant things or experiences are repeated in the same way. Based on the obtained qualitative data, we identified 3 groups of parents to the phenomenon of education boundaries:

1. Parents considering the rules in education as important.
2. Parents classifying rules in terms of important and less important.
3. Parents considering the rules unnecessary, but safety is of high importance for them.

When we try to answer the question of how parents understand the boundary phenomenon, or how they apply it in education, we consider it important to divide their views into groups. Based on the data obtained, we identified three groups of parents:

1. Parents considering it important to give the child boundaries via educating.
2. Parents choosing boundaries in education, based on the character of the child.

3. Parents not perceiving boundaries in education as important.

*Collaboration of family and early childhood education and care facilities providing care up to the third year of the child's age*

We identify that communication is an essential critical phenomenon in family and facility collaboration. Parents approach the collaboration differently. Some are interested in how their child thrived during their time in the facility, others not as much. But still, caregivers' superiors require active communication and collaboration with parents. We note that caregivers are seeking for a way to cooperate with the parent. Oftentimes, parents do not attach seriousness to some aspects of education. The most effective strategy, identified by the caregivers, is to highlight the success of the child. Parents are surprised how come the child is doing things "right" in the facility and not at home. Importance lies in the fact that the child spends a substantial part of the day in the facility where, the caregiver actively engages the child, perhaps more than the parent. We assume, that the fundamental phenomenon, complicating the educating in the family, is consistency in parenting and the time enabling the parents to be consistent. Caregivers are consistent in their work and have a child-only time. Parents know how it should be theoretically, they are interested in the subject matter, they talk to friends about it, they do study various materials on the Internet, but still, the problem is consistency. They have no time. We note that active family educating (active time with the child) is often minimized for every parent-child interaction. Experts, as well as caregivers, warn of the need for active time spent by parents and children. In everyday life, education is part of all other activities, because education is life. The child observes the parent and their surroundings, and also learns what a parent might not even realize. The child mimics the behavior of the parents, as well as the behavior of the caregivers. It brings the family-inspired designs to the children's society (class). It is necessary to set aside active time, respectively. It means to talk to the child and teach it to think critically.

It often happens, that the child transfers patterns of negative rolemodels to the play activities. In such a case, the caregiver seeks to divert the child's attention by another activity, and/or uses the strength of the group and the positive patterns, that the child identifies (with) and then applies itself.

We note that for more serious problems, such as child aggression, family and facility cooperation is of high importance. The parent often finds it very difficult to accept that something is wrong especially, when the child behaves differently at home. It happens that the parent does not take the words/advice of the caregivers seriously, and hardly ever believes them. The parent often refuses the recommendations of a professional and only when a more serious problem arises, he/she will seek the help of a psychologist, etc. We note that the reflection of the child's behavior is a reflection of the family's educational situation, of the recognized or undeclared patterns. "This means that the behavior of the child is the mirror of that particular parent. The parent has a problem with accepting, or not accepting, realizing it, or not realizing. Unless there is a truly established diagnosis, it is important for the staff of the facility to explain to the parent why it considers it important that the child is to be examined, because only by examination the diagnosis can be confirmed or not. The caregiver should protect the other children in the group. When a child gets sick or has health problems, and the morning filter confirms it, the child cannot remain in the group until he / she has a proof of his / her health condition from the pediatrician. When an aggressive child threatens other children in the group, he / she may, in extreme cases, be excluded from the group. It depends on the operating rules, that the parents are obliged to sign and accept. However, we note that the staff is in every case, trying to work with parents and solve the problem.

*Parallels of educating in an ECEC facility, providing care up to the third year of the child's age and family educating*

The most important educational parallels in ECEC facilities providing care until the third year of the child's age:

- The carer defines and understands love in a completely different way than a parent. The means of the carer is targeted professional activity, educational activity (play). Independence and rules are the means of the carer, in order to make a child happy in the facility. It is a display of the carer's interest in the child. We note that a parent understands love more on the emotional level.
- Communication and collaboration with parents and cooperation with other professionals, especially the psychologist, is important. A healthy child successfully learns to respect boundaries, if the family works with the facility and can receive expert advice and assistance. The means is not a ban, but a distraction from the unacceptable behaviour. The caregiver teaches the child to think critically and explains the child's specific educational problems at an appropriate level.
- Pointing out the success of a child is a breakthrough phenomenon in family and facility cooperation.
- Communication and collaboration between family and facility is important. It is important that the child's independence is promoted both in the facility, and in the family, in terms of educational/pedagogical theory.
- The success of a child is a motivation to work closely together and trust the facility.
- Parents admire and sincerely enjoy each child's success. They are astonished and do not understand why a child would perform a particular activity and develop it in the facility, but refuse to do, or understand and apply, specific principles in education at home.

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