

Karin Fodorová

Karin.Fodorová@osu.cz

University of Ostrava

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THEIR HEAD TEACHERS

Introduction

The educational needs of pre-primary school teachers represent a starting point of their professional development. The professional development comprises three levels: skills and experience gained in practice, self-study and further education.

Professional development is a separate area of professional education for teachers, which is preceded by a professional preparation, the study of pre-primary school teaching programme. “The term preparation means that in its course the education process includes namely meeting the professional requirements, meeting the conditions given by the character of the future profession, possibly with regards to legislative aspects, creating preconditions for the possibility to be employed” (Burkovičová, 2008, p. 77). Areas of preparatory education and professional development can also be described by terms *pre-graduate education* – professional preparation, and *post-graduate education* – professional development.

In the professional preparation of future teachers, in the preparatory education “there are discussions mainly concerning: the objectives of preparatory education, issues of content, optimal proportions between the pedagogical and specialized segments of the preparation, and share of theoretical and practical studies” (Burkovičová, 2008, pp. 77–78). The level and character of preparatory education of teachers are important for their professional practice, also conditioning their professional development as regards the focus of their self-study and further education.

Preparatory education of pre-primary school teachers as a starting point of their educational needs

Preparatory education of teachers equals qualification preparation of the teacher for their profession, influencing the quality of the pedagogical process. This qualification represents two aspects of preparation: professional and legal (Vašutová, 2001). The professional aspect is oriented at the requirements for the quality of performance, while the legal aspect is given by the legislative qualification requirements. These requirements are governed by the Czech Republic in Act No. 563/2004 Coll.

Pre-primary school teachers can prepare for their future profession within study programmes that include the element of preparation of qualified expert – pre-primary school teacher, as stipulated by the applicable law (Act No. 563/2004 Coll). There are the following opportunities: secondary school study, higher education facility study, university study – bachelor's and master's degree. The multiplicity of the aforementioned possibilities to obtain the prescribed qualification leads to one question: does not respect for the profession suffer as a result? Syslová (2013) comments as follows: “the wide range of possibilities makes one think that the prestige of this category of teachers is still very low, as there is a number of other categories that can do the same job” (Syslová, 2013, p. 21).

Speaking of the possibilities of preparatory education of pre-primary school teachers there is the secondary school study programme, higher education facilities and university programmes. The study programme at secondary schools provides a wide range of possible employment: after-school child care, leisure time centres, day care centres, children homes etc. Study programmes at the higher education facilities resemble those at the universities. The study there is divided into terms, while examination periods take the form of lectures, seminars and exercises. Emphasis is put on the professional preparation linked to the secondary school curriculum. The study at higher education facility as compared to university does not focus that much on reflective practice, and consequently gaining of practical experience takes much lesser share in the curriculum (Syslová, 2013, p. 266). And it is the very combination of theory and practice that makes for one of the most important elements of preparation for future profession of pre-primary school teacher, and with regards to the profile of graduates one can claim: “university preparation corresponds to the requirements for initial systematic education

of pre-primary school children according to ISCED 0. The reason is the realization how the behaviour and conduct of the teacher can influence the developing personality of the child.” (Syslová, 2013, p. 29). The combination of theory and practice can have more shapes in real life: “leading students to the theoretical analysis of pedagogical phenomena, student reflection and self-reflection of the current base of pedagogical experience, continuous discoveries of links between theory and practice” (Burkovičová, 2008, p. 91).

It is clear from the abovementioned possibilities of acquiring necessary qualification for pre-primary school teacher that should the teachers-to-be wish to become professionals in their field, they will need to expand their knowledge by studying at universities. “Personality growth by means of university study is remarkably important for the involvement of an individual in order to motivate her to continuous improvement of her pedagogical work” (Havlík et al., 1998, p. 29).

Within the study programme for pre-primary school teachers, bachelor’s degree at Czech pedagogical faculties Burkovičová (2008) completed a comparison and evaluation research. The objective was to compare and evaluate study plans of the specified major at Czech pedagogical faculties, using selected indicators. The indicators were chosen as follows: “study programme subject”, “credit of the subject”, “exam in the subject”. The research has resulted in findings of equal and different features of the study programmes at pedagogical faculties. As regards the differences, these related to both the numbers of specializations and subjects, names of subjects, proportions of specific subjects by specializations, and varying evaluation of the same scientific area (Burkovičová, 2008).

We will follow the issue of study programme of preparatory education for pre-primary school teachers with another research by Burkovičová (2002), linked to the educational needs of pre-primary school teachers in practice, where the findings were taken into account in the process of development of educational programme for the pre-primary school staff, reflected in the content and structure of subjects. In the first research period Burkovičová was striving to find out whether there is a need for further education among the pedagogical staff of pre-primary schools, and what form it takes:

Is it there at all, and if yes, is there sufficiently instrumental activity aimed at the satisfaction of this educational need by means of institutional education? In what fields do they feel insufficiently prepared? What exactly

do they lack with respect to proper performance, what kind of knowledge, what depth, scope? Are there any tasks connected to the pursuit of their current professional goals with regards to the educational programme content, and do these possibly represent educational needs? What major educational events have they participated in, what had they expected? What are their ideas of study materials, of study organization, what form of study would they welcome in relation to their possibilities – meaning available time, family, work and other aspects – and study conditions, also related to their various compensation educational activities. (Burkovičová, 2002)

Results of the research brought one major finding: the teachers connected their professional objectives to a large extent with university studies. After graduation the teachers and head teachers imagine themselves to be equipped with abilities to solve current educational issues, expressing their view that there is considerable instrumental activity motivating them to enter such study.

Educational needs of teachers within the requested professional qualifications in preparatory education, in practice and further education

The educational needs of teachers in the current teaching profession are derived from the changes of approach to school, this being based on the ever-changing educational conditions. Vašutová (2004) was dealing with the issue, specifically with what teacher's profession should be, and how to outline the preparatory and further education in order to make the teachers expert educationalists able to adjust flexibly and efficiently to the increasing requirements for their performance?

It is necessary to look for answers to these questions and to solve the issues in a complex and systematic manner, within the context of the entire society. Teachers are exactly as the society wants them to be, i.e. according to the trust and moral support they are given, to the legislative and material conditions created for their demanding pedagogical work, to the remuneration they receive. (Vašutová, 2004, p. 21)

Development of educational system as foreseen in the scope of educational policies definitely influences the character of teaching profession, its roles, qualifications and responsibilities, and consequently professionalization,

while school does not stand alone, separated from the society, on the contrary: it is the mirror, the reflected image (Vašutová, 2004, p. 21).

A new approach to teaching profession represents increasing demand on the teachers' activities. Burkovičová (2001) mentions that teacher becomes a manager of class work, diagnostician of learning styles, and consultant in situations related to learning difficulties, leading communication and socialization processes within the ever more heterogeneous groups of pupils (integrated with various disabilities, from a different language, cultural and social backgrounds). The teacher is the caretaker: of social well-being, health and safety of pupils in normal and extraordinary situations, educator and protector of moral, cultural and spiritual values within the difficult relativized environment of post-modern society (Burkovičová, 2001, p. 11). The aforementioned demands for teachers' performance represent preconditions, features the teachers should be equipped with in both theory and practice, incorporated in professional qualifications.

In defining pre-primary school teacher qualifications, today's pre-primary schools have the option of basing their definitions on a number of models (see Nezvalová, 2003; Švec, 1999; Vašutová, 2004), or to create their own model that will focus on the philosophy of the specific pre-primary school, during which it is important to have a foundation in the current definition of education oriented toward the so-called personal development of the child (Syslová, 2013, p. 31). In the Framework Educational Programme for pre-primary schools (hereinafter FEP PPS), e.g. in chapter 1.3 (FEP PPS, 2004) we can find teacher qualifications (pre-primary), which are based on the educational process management and organization/communication abilities, for instance, the definition of pre-primary education principles:

- To accept natural development specifics of pre-primary children, and to project the same consistently into the content, forms and methods of their education;
- To enable development and education of each individual child within the scope of his/her individual possibilities and needs;
- To focus on the creation of basic key competences achievable within pre-primary education. (FEP PPS, 2004)

There is another example in chapter 3.2 FEP PPS (2004), where requirements are formulated regarding the level of pedagogical skills, stating that pedagogical work should be based on:

observation and realization of individual needs and interests of a child, knowledge of current development stage and specific situation, and regular monitoring of the child's development and educational progress... to make sure every child is stimulated, sensibly motivated to learn, positively encouraged to deal with the given tasks in a manner and at the level acceptable for the child. (FEP PPS, 2004)

One more example of pre-primary teacher qualifications model is provided by Syslová: "Pre-primary teacher qualifications model" (Syslová, 2013, pp. 33–34).

1. Educational process management:

- targeted planning focusing on the development of competences;
- planning based on the knowledge of the group and situations the children can find themselves in;
- selection of methods and content of education (activities) complying with the class objectives and structure;
- education process for children is individualized on the basis of knowledge of the children and their family background in order to allow them to achieve maximum results.

2. Communication and organization of the educational process:

- efficient communication with children, parents, colleagues;
- creation of a favourable, open and safe climate;
- creative and constructively critical approach to innovations, teamwork;
- creation of space for mutual cooperation among children, learning from each other;
- selection of organizational forms with regards to class objectives and composition;
- regular and meaningful meetings with parents;
- regular and sophisticated document management.

3. Self-reflection and own development:

- reflection and consequent improvement of own work;
- taking over responsibility for children's results;
- creation of own realistic notion of own qualifications, strengths and weaknesses;
- develop oneself.

Burkovičová (2012) presents the following qualifications in pre-primary school teacher category: specialization/subject and general educational qualifications, personality, pedagogical-psychological, didactic, practical-pedagogical,

social-communicative, managerial and normative qualifications. “Qualifications are characterized at the level of knowledge components, skills, abilities, experience in individual fields of activity in the role of a pre-primary school teacher” (Burkovičová, 2002, p. 35).

Educational needs of teachers in the requested professional qualifications stemming from professional activities at work

Teacher’s job assignment includes mainly their direct pedagogical work, whose implementation follows default educational plan. Here the teacher thinks through a number of activities, games, various tasks for children, who are supposed to enjoy the ideas and creativity. Sometimes these planned activities need to be adjusted to the current situation:

When performing direct pedagogical work with the class throughout the day according to a completed educational project or its part in the kindergarten building, the teacher will definitely include elements of safety and health protection within the premises. When developing an educational project or its part she will analyse and evaluate results of children achieved in the cognitive, emotional and psychomotor fields within direct pedagogical work with the children as part of professional care in the previous period. (Burkovičová, 2012, p. 52)

Teachers can find certain difficulties in their professional activities, related to the very implementation of specific activity. Self-evaluation of the difficulty of implementing specific kind of activity can be rational, i.e. objective, but it can also interfere with the teacher’s elementary preferences, feelings, emotions, and experiences. Burkovičová (2013) mentions that self-evaluation of a teacher is a subjective exercise: “Teacher should be capable of self-reflection as a means of self-development” (Burkovičová, 2013, p. 34). She continues with the notion that self-evaluation and evaluation is not a simple process, as it is affected by the ability to be fair to oneself, to adequately assess the performance of activities and related emotional conditions.

Burkovičová (2013) dealt with the difficulties of pre-primary school teachers’ activities in her research: comments of the teachers, interviews and observations led her to the conclusion that difficulty level is one of the important variables determining what kind of professional activity, which specific tasks will be carried out. In her research, she was looking for an answer to

the core question: “Is there a relation between the evaluation of actually performed professional activities using specific difficulty level by the teachers/respondents, and the length of their work experience?” (Burkovičová, 2013, p. 50). It was found that the length of pedagogical practice is not statistically important for the evaluation of difficulty of actually performed professional activities by the pre-primary school teachers in the research file. “Difficulty is a very subjective matter, influenced by a number of factors. Perception of the difficulty of performing a certain activity change over time as the teacher gains new experience” (Burkovičová, 2013, p. 176). Difficulties of teachers’ professional activities can be a motivating factor to continue further education.

Head teachers’ role of the identifier of educational needs of pre-primary school teachers, determining their professional development plans within the organization of further education

Educational needs of teachers can be expressed by the teacher herself, or monitored by a manager, and meeting the needs is in the teacher’s interest, depending on the achievement of the objectives of pre-primary education or specific organization. Head teacher in this respect performs an inspection of the results of educational process within the teachers’ professional activities, and the inspections are just part of a number of tasks taken care of by a kindergarten head teacher.

Identification of educational needs of teachers can be based on the external and internal evaluation. External evaluation presents namely the results of inspections completed by the Czech School Inspectorate. The internal evaluation takes the form observations, interviews and analyses of various documents. Head teacher evaluates the teachers’ work in relation to the achievement of the organization’s targets in individual fields: educational conditions; educational process; results of education, not only after sitting in on classes but also on the basis of general auto-evaluation of the school’s activities. However, the educational needs of teachers from the viewpoint of kindergarten head teacher can be different in a way, depending on the contemporary situation (economic, political, social, ethnic influences), location or demography.

In connection with the presented topic, we have completed survey among kindergarten head teachers, focusing on their view and perception of the

educational needs of pre-primary school teachers, where and how the same are discovered, what is the head teachers' opinion on the application of new knowledge gained in workshops into practice.

Methodology

The objective of our research was to find out how kindergarten head teachers perceive educational needs of their staff, and if they see differences depending on the length of work experience of individual teachers. We have opted for a case study, where we have completed detailed description and analysis of several cases, assuming we are able to generalise based on this sample.

We have asked the following research questions:

1. In what educational areas do you see educational needs of teachers?
2. Where and how do you discover educational needs of teachers?
3. Do you see any difference in the expressed educational needs of teachers in relation to the length of their work experience?
4. In what way do you arrange for meeting the educational needs of your teachers?
5. Do you see benefits of further education of your teachers?

Case selection

The selected cases are all females – kindergarten head teachers. We have contacted 10 head teachers working in Moravian-Silesian Region, districts Frýdek-Místek, Karviná, and Ostrava. We have chosen “criterion-based” sampling; we had defined the following criteria:

1. Varying length of work experience of kindergarten head teacher.
2. Head teachers from the Moravian-Silesian region, districts Frýdek-Místek, Karviná, Ostrava.

Data processing

To process the data we have chosen a coded analytical method, as this analytical approach allowed us to describe the collected data conveniently, according to the coding system. We have selected the following codes: 1. Educational needs of teachers from the viewpoint of head teacher for practical needs. 2. Educational needs of teachers expressed by themselves. 3. Methods

of identification of educational needs by the head teacher. 4. Possibilities of achievement – meeting the educational needs, organized by the head teacher. 5. Benefits of further education of teachers in practice. To display the data we have chosen transcription technique – *the summary protocol*.

Preliminary summary

In the course of the summary protocol preparation, where we selected and recorded the collected data, we have discovered certain regularity of compared data as regards acceptability preferences.

Acceptability preference – data regularity

Repeated categories were: 1. Head teacher is the main decision-maker as regards further education of teachers in certain areas. 2. Teachers are not interested in further education. 3. Teachers with longer work experience are interested in further education only in specific subject fields. Following these findings, we have formulated three questions we could answer using provided responses, trying to verify their meaning at the same time: Question No. 1: Is the organization and implementation of further education based on the head teacher's decision? Question No. 2: Does the head teacher encounter rejection in the process of organizing further education? Question No. 3: Do the teachers with longer work experience prefer education only in the specific subject fields?

Comparison of cases following the frequency of relations of code occurrence

We have processed the collected data further using the coding method – comparing the frequency of relations of data occurrence. We have processed every code with relevant category separately.

Research results

The responses from the head teachers showed the following results: Teachers express their educational needs and head teachers respond positively, provided these match their own ideas and plans concerning the future direction of teachers' education. Head teachers know their staff pretty well, making

sure the teachers do not stagnate in their development or educate themselves in areas where they are sufficiently skilled, being able to expand their portfolio by other means than institutional education, e.g. from the Internet, books etc. This also includes the aspect of efficient utilisation of the budget, because the resources do not match the head teachers' plans.

Head teachers have established the educational needs of their teachers depending on the length or work experience. This is also due to their long years of service in the profession, living through the changes and needs related to transformations of school legislation. Head teachers expressed their findings informing us of the educational needs of teachers with more years of experience, being interested only in specific subjects. This education is not even currently necessary with regards to the urgent educational fields, where the urgency is based on the legislative changes, meaning they are obligatory in children's education. In contrast, head teachers have noticed greater openness with the teachers with shorter work experience, as regards the willingness for further education in the necessary fields. Head teachers further stated that teachers with university diploma have the knowledge but they lack the work experience, i.e. time to apply everything they learned in practice, improving themselves in the process. This will be a result of experience and skills gained in the course of years. However, according to head teachers, the graduates of secondary schools with more years of work experience dislike the idea of further education, sometimes even rejecting it altogether. These teachers are anxious about new educational fields, sometimes even afraid. They look for further education possibilities rather in the areas that do not represent issues they would need to improve themselves. For these reasons, the head teachers do not let the teachers choose the direction of further education, and make decisions authoritatively. Head teachers request their teachers to present the educational results in the form of presentation in meetings and outputs in practice. In this manner, the teachers within given organization educate each other. Head teachers also expressed the observation that teachers are often satisfied after completion of a course in the certain formerly unwanted area.

Conclusion

The research sample of the head teachers we have interviewed provided us with an in-depth picture of the educational needs of pre-primary school teachers in practice. A positive finding was that the head teachers are not

persuaded by the educational needs as expressed by their teachers when finding the needs not necessary for current practice, and they can see stagnation with some teachers, usually those with longer work experience. Head teachers are interested in the high quality of the educational process in pre-primary facilities, while the quality is derived from the teacher's professional activities. This means the head teachers motivate such teachers to further education that would benefit both the teachers and the institution.

References

- Act No. 563/2004 Coll. On pedagogical staff and amendments to some acts, as amended.
- Burkovičová, R. (2013). *Obtížnost profesních činností v učitelství pro mateřské školy*. Ostrava: University of Ostrava in Ostrava, Pedagogical Faculty.
- Burkovičová, R. (2008). *Přípravné vzdělávání učitelů mateřských škol*. Ostrava: University of Ostrava in Ostrava, Pedagogical Faculty.
- Burkovičová, R. (2012). *Profesní činnosti učitelů mateřských škol a jejich výzkum*. Ostrava: University of Ostrava in Ostrava, Pedagogical Faculty.
- Burkovičová, R. (2001). *Učitelé jako profesní skupina, jejich vzdělávání a podpůrný systém*. Praha: Charles University, Faculty of Education.
- Burkovičová, R. (2002). Výzkum vzdělávacích potřeb učitelek mateřských škol. In: *Výzkum školy a učitele: sborník příspěvků materiálů* (pp. 93–103). Praha: PdF UK.
- Havlík, R. et al. (1998). *Učitelské povolání z pohledu sociálních věd*. Praha: Charles University, Faculty of Education.
- Syslová, Z. (2013). *Profesní kompetence učitele mateřské školy*. Praha: Grada Publishing, a.s.
- Vašutová, J. (2007). *Být učitelem. Co by měl učitel vědět o své profesi*. Praha: PdF UK.
- Vašutová, J. (2001). *Kvalifikační předpoklady pro nové role učitelů. Učitelé jako profesní skupina, jejich vzdělávání a podpůrný systém*. Praha: PedF UK.
- Vašutová, J. (2004). *Profese učitele v českém vzdělávacím kontextu*. Brno: Paido.

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OF PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THEIR HEAD TEACHERS

Summary: Educational needs of teachers and subsequent meeting of the needs are one of the preconditions of high-quality pre-primary education. These can be influenced by several determinants. One determinant can be the very pre-graduate education, which can take three forms in the current preparatory

education, another the length of work experience when teachers often value more their years rather than theoretical knowledge. Support from the head teacher also influences the meeting of further education needs. Teacher herself, his/her personal traits, ongoing interest in the profession and everything taking place in it – these are ever developing and changing features. Necessary preconditions for further education are thus the striving for being creative and not to stagnate. In our research, we have focused on the educational needs of teachers from the viewpoint of kindergarten head teachers.

Keywords: pre-school education, kindergarten head teacher, educational needs of pre-primary school teachers, a further education plan for pre-primary school teachers

POTRZEBY EDUKACYJNE NAUCZYCIELI PRZEDSZKOLNYCH Z PUNKTU WIDZENIA DYREKTORÓW PLACÓWEK PRZEDSZKOLNYCH

Streszczenie: Potrzeby edukacyjne nauczycieli oraz ich zaspokajanie są jednym z ważnych warunków związanych z wysoką jakością edukacji przedszkolnej, na kształt której może mieć wpływ wiele czynników. Jednym z wyznaczników może być kształcenie przeddyplomowe, które może przybierać trzy formy. Innym czynnikiem jest długość doświadczenia zawodowego oraz wsparcie ze strony dyrektora szkoły. Sam nauczyciel, jego cechy osobiste, ciągle zainteresowanie profesją i wszystkim, co się w niej dzieje – to kolejne ważne czynniki, które należy nadmienić. Warunkiem koniecznym do dalszego kształcenia jest zatem dążenie do kreatywności, a nie do stagnacji, co zostało odzwierciedlone w naszych badaniach, w których skupiliśmy się na potrzebach edukacyjnych nauczycieli z punktu widzenia dyrektorów szkół przedszkolnych.

Słowa kluczowe: kształcenie przedszkolne, dyrektorzy przedszkoli, potrzeby edukacyjne nauczycieli przedszkolnych, plan rozwoju zawodowego nauczycieli przedszkolnych