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**FROM PERSONAL COMPETENCE
TO A "COMPETENT SYSTEM."
COMPETENCE OF A PRESCHOOL EDUCATION
TEACHER IN LIGHT OF THE *COMPETENCE
REQUIREMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION AND CARE REPORT (2011)***

OD KOMPETENCJI OSOBOWYCH
DO „KOMPETENTNEGO SYSTEMU”.
KOMPETENCJE NAUCZYCIELA EDUKACJI
PRZEDSZKOLNEJ W ŚWIETLE RAPORTU
*COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATION AND CARE (2011)*

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Summary: The objective of this article is to make the reader better acquainted with the new standpoint regarding the competences of an early education teacher contained in the report entitled *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. This document was based on research into the organisation and the quality of care, upbringing and education provided for the youngest children in selected countries of Europe conducted in the years 2010–2011 by an international team of scientists. The authors of the document in question recommend

a comprehensive presentation of individuals and institutions in charge of children, perceiving them as parts of the so-called competent system. This system is to be composed of traditional nurseries and kindergartens, and also of the institutions of medical care, social care and state administration, possessing knowledge, practical abilities, and also a shared system of values, guaranteeing the highest quality of services with which the youngest and their families are provided. This conception is based upon the conviction that the needs of a child have to be approached in a holistic manner, and that a system-based organisation of services involved in fulfilling these needs to be established. The creators of the competent system of early childhood education also place emphasis upon the significance of a reflective way of thinking in the case of all those involved in the system, taking under consideration a constant improvement of qualifications and occupational competences as well as a constant updating of tasks in accordance with the dynamics of social changes.

Słowa kluczowe:
kompetencje nauczycielskie, edukacja
przedszkolna

Streszczenie: Artykuł przybliży nowe ujęcie kompetencji nauczycieli edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej, przedstawione w raporcie *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Dokument ten powstał w wyniku badań nad organizacją i jakością opieki, wychowania i edukacji dzieci najmłodszych w wybranych krajach europejskich, zrealizowanych w latach 2010–2011 przez międzynarodowy zespół badawczy. Jego autorzy rekomendują holistyczne ujęcie osób i placówek zajmujących się dziećmi, sytuując je w tzw. kompetentnym systemie. Ma on obejmować tradycyjne żłobki i przedszkola, a także instytucje opieki zdrowotnej, pomocy społecznej oraz administracji państwowej wyposażone w wiedzę, umiejętności praktyczne oraz wspólny system wartości gwarantujący najwyższą jakość usług świadczonych na rzecz najmłodszych i ich rodzin. Koncepcja ta bazuje na przekonaniu o potrzebie całościowego ujęcia potrzeb dziecka i systemowej organizacji służb zaangażowanych w ich zaspokajanie. Autorzy kompetentnego systemu edukacji przedszkolnej podkreślają też znaczenie refleksyjności wszystkich uczestników systemu, mając na uwadze stałe podnoszenie kwalifikacji i kompetencji zawodowych oraz ciągłą aktualizację zadań zgodnie z dynamiką zmian społecznych.

Introduction

Teacher competence is one of the most frequently addressed issues in modern pedeutology. This interest results from the dynamics of social, cultural and technological changes which bring with them the necessity of the constant updating of teachers' vocational education. Challenges with regard to qualifications and competences particularly concern preschool education teachers who bear the responsibility for the youngest children. This responsibility covers a wide range of activities, from protecting the child and counteracting risks, through the transfer of knowledge and skills, to stimulating activity and creativity, in the belief that the right balance of these activities will create opportunities for pupils to take an active part in school, family and social life. Early childhood education teachers, therefore, have a real impact on the adult life of future generations.

The quality of preschool education largely depends on the competence of the teachers. To perform their tasks well, they have to master a wide range of competences far beyond strictly pedagogical ones. This conclusion can be drawn from even a cursory review of the literature on the subject. Research on the subject is certainly needed, as it ensures coherence between the teacher's vocational education and social reality. This article, however, looks at a new understanding of competence that was presented in the 2011 report of an international research group led by Mathias Urban, Michel Vandebroeck, Arianna Lazzari, Katrien Van Laere and Jan Peeters entitled *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care*. On the basis of a comparison of the competence requirements in early childhood education and care workers in selected European countries, the authors developed the concept of a "competent system" for the care and education of children from birth to school age. The aim of this article is to present this concept in order to look at the competences of early childhood education teachers from a different perspective.

Understanding the competences of preschool education teachers in light of the subject literature

The term "competence" (Latin *competere*) derives from management theory and practice. It was introduced into academic discourse in the early 1970s by David McClelland who, on the basis of his own research, stated that there is no connection between professional success and the education (intelligence)

of the employee. In his opinion, professional success depends on a set of other factors which he described as competences (Oleksiak, 2010, p. 66).

In the broadly understood studies on education, different meanings are given to competence. A synthetic approach to various pedagogues' perspectives was presented by Astrid Męczkowska in her entry to the *Encyclopedia of pedagogy of the 21st century* (Męczkowska, 2003, pp. 693–696). Such broad understanding of competences points to the root of the word, which, in turn, draws attention to one's ability to act: "Etymology determines a perspective on the understanding of competence, in which its fundamental meaning will refer to the potential of an individual, determining their ability to perform certain types of actions" (Męczkowska, 2003, p. 693). From the pedagogical point of view, there are two currents in understanding competence – first, as the ability of an individual to adapt and second, as the transgressive potential of the subject.

The perception of competence as an adaptive potential of an individual refers to a behaviourist action aimed at achieving a goal. Competence is seen as a set of skills, that is, the well mastered ability to perform a specific type of activity. Being competent, therefore, boils down largely to being effective. As effectiveness can be measured, the expression of competence is evaluation/appraisal. This model of understanding competence includes activities related to determining the position of an individual in the professional hierarchy on the basis of mastered competences and attempts to standardise professional competences. On this basis, the allocation of individuals in the professional structure takes place (Męczkowska, 2003, pp. 694–695).

The definition of competence as a transgressive potential of the subject arises from the conviction that it is the subject's disposition enabling them to integrate mental life with experience and to shape harmonious relations with the environment. Competence is connected with the subject's activity and adaptation as well as with the transformation of acquired skills and abilities under the influence of a changing environment. Competence in this respect is constantly reinterpreted. This type of competence is not subject to measurement, as it is associated with an individual's ability to construct their own cognition, and is unique in nature (Męczkowska, 2003, pp. 695–696).

The approach proposed by Męczkowska corresponds to the division into implementation and interpretation competences, as proposed by Robert Kwaśnica. The former corresponds to Męczkowska's adaptive model, the latter to her transgressional model (after: Męczkowska, 2003, p. 696).

The classifications of competences have also been developed in the work of researchers in early childhood education in the context of teacher training. Individual research concerns different types of education, as a kindergarten teacher acts in various functions (e.g., that of a tutor, didactician, educator, and organizer) and performs diagnostic-prognostic and compensation-improvement tasks (Klim-Klimaszewska, 2005, p. 115). Due to the complex nature and extent of expectations regarding teacher competences, the researchers introduced the concept of key competences, understood to be those of particular importance for the individual and society (Kamińska, 2014).

A broad spectrum of issues related to teaching skills is included in the collective monograph edited by Kazimierz Żegnałek (2008). Apart from several articles introducing the issues of the latest research on teaching competences, it also contains studies on the theoretical and practical aspects of competence in relation to early childhood education teachers. They focus on the issues of educating the teachers as well as their subject, pedagogical-psychological, mathematical, didactic and educational competences, and interpersonal communication. The results of the research discussed show both the expectations of society and those of teachers themselves regarding their qualifications and competences (Żegnałek, 2008).

Education in language, mathematics, natural sciences and arts sets a canon of competences for a kindergarten teacher. In the context of the strongly emphasised need to release creativity in the child, a lot of attention is paid to competences in artistic education. These include mainly skills, supported by talent, knowledge and interests, in the field of broadly understood art and didactics (Just, 2006; Biliński, 2006). However, with the development of technology and cultural changes, other requirements appear, for instance, with regard to IT. As a result of the growing importance of information technology, the role of the teacher is changing; they are not only sources of knowledge but also animators of classes using the computer and the Internet (Puślecka, 2006). Progressive globalisation, increasing population migration and Poland's symbolic opening up to the world, marked by the act of joining the European Union, have also revealed the need to equip preschool education teachers with multicultural competences and the ability to transfer knowledge about the Other along with harmonious modeling of the child's own personality (Kamińska, 2007; Klim-Klimaszewska & Jagiełło, 2013). The phenomenon of multiculturalism also determines another type of competence of preschool teachers, namely, one in teaching foreign languages, mainly English (Miksa,

2017). What is more, due to the importance of the preschool period in the proper physical and mental development of the child and early diagnosis of its condition, early childhood education teachers are also expected to acquire diagnostic and therapeutic competences (Wosik-Kawala & Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2013).

The professional preparation and development of teachers is dominated by pragmatic and technical training aimed at achieving instrumental goals, while humanistic competences, which largely determine the quality of the preschool teacher's work, are often neglected. The pragmatism of competences is emphasised, among others, by Danuta Waloszek, who writes that "competence is, in general, the ability to act" (Waloszek, 2006, p. 78). Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak, on the other hand, sees competence as closely related to the social context; according to her, it is "a particular characteristic that expresses itself in demonstrating the ability to behave adequately at the level set by social standards, in awareness of the need and consequences of such behavior, and in assuming responsibility for it" (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 1997, pp. 87–88). Ewa Kochanowska, conversely, distinguishes interpretative competence (Kochanowska, 2016). The theory and practice of teachers' competence increasingly emphasises the need to develop a model of a reflective teacher who, regardless of their qualifications, employs reflection in action and activity planning. It enables the teacher to gain an insight into themselves and to take a critical look at the didactic and educational situation in which they participate (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 1997; Gołębnik, 1998; Sajdak, 2013). In reference to the previously characterized classification of Męczkowska, the literature on the subject is dominated by the adaptive approach to competences; however, more and more often researchers demand that the formation of transgressive competences be brought to light.

The concept of a "competent system"

From September 2010 to May 2011, a group of educators from the University of East London and the University of Ghent conducted research on the competence and professionalisation of child education and care practice in 15 Member States and EU candidates (England, Ireland, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia and Greece). The expert group cooperating with them consisted of representatives of all the countries participating in the research.

Among them were also Poles – psychologist Olaf Żylicz, pedagogue and social activist Teresa Ogrodzińska (President of the Jan Amos Komeński Foundation for Child Development), and Małgorzata Żytka from the University of Warsaw. On the basis of reports from the countries covered by the study, efforts were made to find out what the requirements for the staff of education and care facilities for young children are and, on this basis, to develop a set of recommendations to improve the level of education and care services provided (Urban, Vandebroek, Lazzari, Van Laere & Peeters, 2011).

A brief explanation of the term *Early Childhood Education and Care* (ECEC) should be provided at this time. It is used by the authors of the report, as well as in international studies and the activities of other entities, including the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), to designate institutions dealing with the education and care of children from 0 to 6 years of age. In some countries, nurseries and kindergartens constitute one institution. For example, in the Scandinavian countries – Sweden, Finland, Norway – there are uniform ECEC institutions providing care and education for children from birth to the age of 6 (they combine the functions of a nursery and kindergarten). On the other hand, in England, the Netherlands, France, Italy and, of course, Poland, there are separate childcare facilities for children up to 2–3 years old (nurseries) and preschool education facilities. In Denmark, we can find both types – uniform ECEC facilities and separate nurseries and kindergartens (Lillvist, Sandberg, Seridan & Williams, 2014, p. 5). However, the merger of the two historically separate institutions should not be understood as adding care to education – the creation of uniform institutions dealing with the youngest children up to the age of school maturity results from the pursuit of a more holistic approach to the child and the comprehensive satisfaction of their needs (both their educational needs and their need to be well cared for).

The authors of the report, therefore, deal with the competences of those employed in ECEC. They note that the term “competences” is most often associated with the quality of an individual’s work, “with something that can be mastered through exercise and professional preparation (integration of knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivation)” (Urban et al., 2011, p. 21). Being competent means having a set of skills and the knowledge to perform specific tasks. This understanding of competence seems too narrow for the authors.

In view of working in complex and unpredictable conditions, they believe that the concept of competence in relation to education and care for the

youngest should be understood as a characteristic of the whole system of early childhood facilities and the people working in them. Instead of individual competences, they use the term “competent system”, which is understood as a network of interlinked relationships between individuals, groups and institutions in a broad socio-political context. The task of this system is to optimally prepare professionals dealing with children aged 0-6 so that their activities fully meet the needs of the youngest and their families in the changing socio-cultural context (Urban et al., 2011, p. 21).

In the opinion of the authors of the report, being or, rather, becoming competent is an ongoing process consisting of acquiring knowledge, practical experience (*practices*) and developing and presenting values related to one’s profession. This sentence is of key importance: the overall efficiency (competence) of the system depends on the knowledge, experience and values of its particular elements. From the traditional understanding of competence as a system of knowledge, skills and attitudes, the authors leave only knowledge. *Skills* have been replaced by the concept of *practices* to emphasise the importance of applying one’s knowledge and skills. Similarly, attitudes have been replaced by *values*, in order to walk away from a personalised approach in favour of objectives recognised by all ECEC users, highlighting their common aspirations.

The terms that make up this triad may function separately, not always in accordance with each other – knowledge may not be correlated with practice, and even if it does, it may fail to notice the axiology of the contact with the youngest. The harmonious combination of knowledge, practices and values is to ensure reflective competences. The authors of the concept of the “competent system” emphasise the need to create a common platform for learning and critical reflection for all elements of the system involved in providing services for the youngest (Urban et al., 2011, p. 21).

The “Competent System” comprises four levels:

1. the individual level,
2. the institutional (group) level,
3. the interinstitutional level,
4. the government level.

Its functioning, therefore, depends on cooperation between individuals and kindergartens, child and family support institutions, including the health service and the police, as well as state administration at local and national levels. This approach goes beyond the traditional understanding of competence as an

individual, learned quality including knowledge and skills. All stakeholders in the system – children, parents, carers, teachers and others involved in ECEC – shape its needs. Competences, therefore, relate to the knowledge, practice and value of all the persons and institutions mentioned above. Reflectivity, according to the authors, allows one to distance oneself from the technical conceptualisation of educational work. Thanks to it, instead of concentrating only on the proper performance of the tasks entrusted to them (expressed by the question: *Do I do things right?*), participants can make the very purpose of their educational activities an object of reflection (*Do I do the right things?*) (Urban et al., 2011, p. 33).

Specific competence in knowledge, practice and values at all levels of ECEC

The authors of the report have developed a framework for the horizontal presentation of competences – knowledge, practice and values – and a vertical one of the different organisational levels from educational and support bodies to government administration. As has already been noted, the basic components of competences – knowledge, practice and values – obtain coherence through reflection at the indicated levels: individual, institutional, inter-institutional and governmental. Table 1 shows the specific competences at the individual level for each of these factors.

Table 1
Individual competencies of ECEC staff

Knowledge	Practices	Values
Knowledge of various developmental aspects of children from a holistic perspective (cognitive, social, emotional, creative...)	Building strong pedagogical relationships with children based on sensitive responsiveness; Observing children in order to identify their developmental needs; Planning and implementing a wide range of educational projects that respond to children's needs supporting their holistic development; Documenting children's progress systematically in order to constantly redefine educational practices; Identifying children with special educational needs and elaborating strategies for their inclusion	Taking into account children's needs in order to promote their full potential and their participation in the life of ECEC institutions; Adopting a holistic vision of education that encompasses learning, care and upbringing; Committing to inclusive educational approaches

Knowledge	Practices	Values
Knowledge of children's different strategies of learning (play-based, social learning, early literacy and numeracy, language acquisition and multilingualism)	<p>Creating and organising effective learning environments;</p> <p>Arranging small-group project work starting from children's interests (inquiry-based learning); Encouraging children's personal initiatives; Supporting children's symbolic play through appropriate provision of structured and unstructured materials;</p> <p>Generating an appropriate curriculum that stimulates emergent literacy, maths and science skills;</p> <p>Promoting language acquisition from a multilingual perspective (recognising children's home language and supporting second language acquisition);</p> <p>Offering more personalised and individual learning support to children with special educational needs</p>	<p>Adopting a child-centred approach that views children as competent, active agents and as protagonists of their own learning;</p> <p>Understanding learning as a co-constructed and open-ended process that ensures children's successful social engagement and encourages further learning;</p> <p>Adopting a cross-disciplinary approach to learning;</p> <p>Adopting a multilingual approach that encourages learning in contexts of diversity</p>
Knowledge of communication with children and participation	<p>Valuing and encouraging children's expression through different languages (painting, dancing, storytelling...);</p> <p>Making the cultural heritage of local communities as well as the cultural heritage of humankind accessible to children (arts, drama, music, dance, sports...); Encouraging children to engage in cultural production as a way to express themselves;</p> <p>Involving children in community-based projects (festivals, cultural events,...) and valuing their contributions (through exhibitions, documentaries...);</p> <p>Co-constructing pedagogical knowledge together with children</p>	<p>Adopting a rights-based approach to ECEC in which children's right to citizenship encompasses their full participation in the social and cultural life of their community;</p> <p>Promoting democracy, solidarity, active citizenship, creativity and personal fulfilment</p>
Knowledge of working with parents and local communities (knowledge about families, poverty and diversity)	<p>Analysing the needs of local communities to work effectively with parents and disadvantaged groups;</p> <p>Establishing relationships with parents based on mutual understanding, trust and cooperation;</p> <p>Enabling open communication and reciprocal dialogue with parents;</p> <p>Creating systematic opportunities fostering dialogue and exchanges (e.g., documentation, but also welcoming practices...);</p> <p>Involving parents in the decision-making processes (collegial bodies, parents-teachers committees,...) and taking their perspectives into account;</p> <p>Co-constructing pedagogical knowledge together with parents and supporting their parental role; Organising initiatives involving parents as well as members of local communities (e.g., workshops, debates and open conferences,...);</p> <p>Building up support for ECEC services within local communities;</p> <p>Establishing collaborative relationships with other professionals (e.g., health and social services);</p>	<p>Adopting a democratic and inclusive approach to the education of young children and families in order to sustain social cohesion;</p> <p>Recognising the educational responsibility of parents as main educators of their children during the early years</p>

Knowledge of team working (interpersonal communication and group-work dynamics)	Continuously reviewing practices individually and collectively; Sharing and exchanging expertise with colleagues in team meetings; Engaging in discussion and learning from disagreement; Developing educational practices together with colleagues through joint work; Co-constructing pedagogical knowledge through documentation and collective evaluation of educational practices	Adopting a democratic and critically reflective approach to the education of young children
Knowledge of working in contexts of diversity (anti-biased approaches, intercultural dialogue, identity..)	Developing inclusive practices that facilitate the socialisation of children and families within a plurality of value systems and proactively address discrimination; Facilitating intercultural dialogue within ECEC services and in the wider community through parents' involvement; Dealing with unpredictability and uncertainty; Elaborating a pedagogical framework that sustains inclusive practices within ECEC services	Adopting a democratic and inclusive approach that values diversity
Knowledge of the situation of ECEC in the broader local, national and international context	Actively engaging with local communities in promoting children's and families' rights and participation; Networking with other professionals (e.g., professional associations, trade unions) and engaging in local political consultation;	Rights-based approach to ECEC that promotes children's and families' active citizenship, solidarity and lifelong learning
Health and care of young children and basic knowledge of social protection	Implementing appropriate practices in relation to children's safety, hygiene and nutrition	Commitment to child welfare and well-being

Source: Urban et al., 2011, pp. 35–38.

The level of knowledge of the individuals employed in ECEC facilities is primarily expected to cover the conditions of the child's development. On the basis of this knowledge, an ECEC staff member should acquire competence in the upbringing and teaching of children. The emphasis is placed on communicative competences in contact with children. The authors of the report took into account the need to get to know the local environment: including parents and organisations, and taking into account social problems such as poverty and unemployment. In the area of social knowledge, multicultural competences also remain, meeting the needs of nationally and culturally diverse communities. Individual competences also include knowledge of the importance of ECEC facilities in the education and social welfare system

throughout the country, as well as health care. Knowledge is understood as a starting point for effective action – practices. The directions of such practices correspond to the key competences of knowledge. Competences in the areas of knowledge and practice are based on the same values, which are an axiological buckle that binds knowledge and practice.

Individual competences of education and care providers are the first component of the system. The second is the competences of institutions as a whole. Table 2 presents the elements distinguished in terms of the competences of ECEC institutions and other institutions indirectly related to the provision of services to the child.

Table 2
Institutional competences

Knowledge	Practices	Values
ECEC institutions		
Pedagogical knowledge with a focus on early childhood and diversity	<p>Elaborating a shared pedagogical framework orienting practitioners' educational work (e.g., ISSA, DECET, "professional profile of the centre");</p> <p>Arrange paid time for all staff to plan, document and review educational work collectively;</p> <p>Adopting systematic procedures for documenting educational practices and for evaluating the outcomes of pedagogical choices on children's and families' experiences; Providing opportunities for joint work (inter-vision and supervision);</p> <p>Offering ongoing pedagogical guidance to all staff;</p> <p>Elaborating an organised framework for the continuous professional development of practitioners, assistants and centre leaders (induction, in-service professionalising initiatives...);</p> <p>Providing continuing professional development programmes strongly rooted in practices and tailored to the needs of practitioners working in local communities;</p> <p>Offering diversified opportunities for continuing professional development (centre-based initiatives, action-research projects, competence portfolio, intergenerational learning initiatives, networking and mobility exchanges); Providing incentives for taking part in continuing professional development activities (credits for career mobility);</p> <p>Offering the possibility to combine work with attendance at training institutes/university courses;</p>	<p>Democracy and respect for diversity;</p> <p>Understanding of professional development as a continuous learning process that encompasses personal and professional growth;</p> <p>Conceiving professional learning as a recursive interaction of practising and theorising that needs to be supported coherently across the different stages of a professional career; Conceiving ECEC institutions as critically reflective communities that reciprocally interact with the changing needs of children, parents and the wider society;</p> <p>Conceiving ECEC institutions as a forum for civil engagement that fosters social cohesion</p>

Pedagogical knowledge with a focus on early childhood and diversity	Providing opportunities for horizontal career mobility through the diversification of roles and responsibilities; Providing opportunities for vertical career mobility of low-qualified staff; Organising regular meetings with colleagues, parents and local communities (open conferences, joint projects,...); Providing additional pedagogical support to practitioners working in disadvantaged areas (specific continuing professional development programmes, counselling...); Recruiting a diverse workforce that reflects the diversity of the communities in which ECEC institutions are operating	
Training and education institutions		
Pedagogical knowledge with a focus on early childhood and diversity; Knowledge of adult learning and reflective approaches (Schön, 1987); Knowledge of situated learning and communities of practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998)	Providing programmes that are based on a well-balanced combination of theory (academic research) and practice (practical experiences in ECEC settings); Providing programmes aimed at developing cultural awareness and expression (e.g., activity & culture subjects); Offering differentiated learning devices: lectures, small-group workshops, project work, work placement...; Providing individualised support through tutoring activities, both in the training centre and on work placement; Providing opportunities for sharing reflections on practical experiences within peer groups; Providing inclusive and flexible professionalising routes that widen access to non-traditional learners and disadvantaged groups; Elaborating strategies for the validation of non-formal and informal learning; Encouraging mobility opportunities; Offering specialised opportunities in inter-cultural education (lectures, small-group workshops, fieldwork,...)	Conceiving professionalisation as a process that encompasses social and cultural promotion to enhance LLL and social inclusion; Understanding professionalisation as a continuous learning process that encompasses personal and professional growth; Understanding professionalisation as a learning process that takes place in interaction; Conceiving professional learning as a recursive interaction of practising and theorising that needs to be supported coherently across the different stages of one's professional career

Source: Urban et al., 2011, pp. 39–41.

Competence at the institutional level places the emphasis on equipping ECEC institutions with the knowledge to enable them to work effectively in organising their work, providing opportunities for further training and the exchange of experience. There is a strong emphasis here on the need to improve the qualifications of those who care for children in ECEC institutions – both nurseries and kindergartens. These measures are aimed at creating a community

of all employees and are to be based on a system of common values founded on the conviction of the need for lifelong professional development.

However, a systematic approach to the professionalisation of services for the youngest requires a broader view, going beyond the walls of individual institutions dealing with the care and education of the youngest. The authors of the report draw attention to the need to develop structures and forms of action which will enable cooperation between different bodies and institutions, depending on local conditions and the current needs of children and families. Table 3 presents the competences that should be acquired by institutions participating in the care and early education of children, so that the services they provide complement each other and optimally meet the needs of children.

Table 3
Interinstitutional competences

Knowledge	Practices	Values
Knowledge of inter-agency cooperation; Knowledge of community development	Promoting networking between ECEC institutions of the same district; Structuring cross-sectoral approaches to care and education services (health care, child protection, social services); Reaching out towards families living in difficult conditions	Democracy and respect for diversity; Assuming a partnership approach to the education and care of young children in order to foster social cohesion
Cross-disciplinary knowledge (health & care, pedagogical and sociological)	Reaching out towards families with special needs children; Fostering close collaboration between ECEC institutions and primary schools to ensure smooth transition through organised forms of interprofessional collaboration; Strengthening partnership between ECEC and training institutes; Promoting cooperation between ECEC institutions and local authorities in charge of educational policymaking through systematic political consultation; Promoting international cooperation through mobility exchanges and transnational projects	Conceiving of care and education as integrated in order to meet all children's needs in a holistic way; Adopting inclusive educational approaches Adopting a cross-disciplinary approach to professional development through partnership

Source: Urban et al., 2011, pp. 42–43.

The authors of the report consider the adoption of democracy, social diversity and partnership as leading ideas in the activities of various institutions involved in the provision of services for the youngest and their families to be the starting point for creating a platform for effective cooperation between

ECEC institutions, primary schools, health and social services. In order for such cooperation to be possible, it is necessary to equip the staff of the aforementioned social service departments with knowledge of the mechanisms of cooperation and community building.

This system of competences of institutions involved in the organisation and implementation of care and education for children aged 0–6 also covers governmental bodies at various levels of administration – from municipal and county authorities to central institutions of social policy-making, education and social assistance. At this level, the authors of the report expect detailed competencies in the area of knowledge, practice and values as presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Competences of governance

Knowledge	Practices	Values
Knowledge of the situation of ECEC in local, regional, national and international contexts; Knowledge of children's and families' rights; Knowledge of diversity in all its forms and anti-discriminatory practices; Knowledge of comprehensive strategies for tackling poverty and socio-cultural inequalities	Adequately resourcing ECEC in order to provide generalised equitable access to high-quality ECEC in particular for children from a socio-economically disadvantaged background or with special educational needs; Designing efficient funding models in the framework of coherent educational public policies; Adopting an integrated approach to ECEC services at the local, regional and national level; Co-constructing with all stakeholders a coherent pedagogical framework that ensures coordination between: ECEC curriculum – Qualification framework for professional preparation of ECEC staff – Quality, monitoring and evaluation framework – Governance framework addressing administrative responsibilities (at local, regional and national level); Ensuring cross-sectoral collaboration between different policy sectors (education, culture, social affairs, employment, health and justice); Supporting professionalisation of ECEC staff through: policies that address coherently initial preparation, induction and continuous professional development of all staff (practitioners, assistants, centre leaders); investments in various forms of pedagogical guidance; policies promoting career mobility of low-qualified staff through flexible qualification pathways; enhancing the prestige of the profession by ensuring favourable working conditions Promoting policies to address the gender gap	Children's right to active participation in society; Children's right to develop their full potential through education and successful learning; Respect and inclusion of diversity; Education as a public good; Democracy, social inclusion and economic development

Source: Urban et al., 2011, pp. 43–44.

A “competent system” of care, education and upbringing of children is not possible without a responsible approach to the institutions of state administration involved. The authorities of municipalities, county offices, voivodeships as well as the state government should be aware of the importance of ECEC institutions and other entities cooperating with them for the benefit of whole of society in the context of solving current social problems and shaping future generations of citizens. The authors of the report recognise that the officials employed by them should demonstrate the appropriate knowledge and skills to act and integrate cooperation between different sectors of public services in the spirit of understanding and in the recognition of children and education as a universal good.

Conclusions

The “competent system” described in the article proposes a new approach to competence. The authors of the report transfer the attention focused so far on teachers to the institutional level, expecting appropriate competences from various participants in the process of the care, education and upbringing of the child, ranging from nurses, teachers, directors and managers of kindergartens, to doctors, police officers, social workers and officials of various levels. The interaction of different social services requires knowledge and skills, but also the recognition of common values. The authors of the report are convinced that the acceptance of universal truths about the child as a social potential and the importance of education for people and any democratic society will make all stakeholders involved responsible participants of the system. Replacing a common goal with common values is a condition for transforming a group of people into a community. This requires reflection, namely, the ability to look critically at oneself and the work being done.

The vision of the “competent system” of people and institutions cooperating harmoniously in the spirit of the welfare of the child and society, presented by the authors of the report, is postulative in nature, sets new directions for research and action, and exposes the need to involve many environments and institutions in the process of the care, upbringing and education of the youngest members of society, as well as to participate more fully in it and to spread educational knowledge among the broad circles of society and power. The starting point should be to raise public awareness of preschool education and the importance of the tasks facing it. Maybe then, referring to the

words of Danuta Waloszek, in conversations about teaching competences and qualifications no one would ask "[...] why should a preschool teacher need philosophy, ethics, psychology, biology, when their task is to care for and play with the child?" (Waloszek, 2006, p. 80).

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