

THE
PRESCHOOL
TEACHER
AS
A REFLECTIVE
PRACTITIONER

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The Preschool Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

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INTRODUCTION

In the last 20 years there has been a growth in discussions across the developed countries all around the world on the quality of preschool education. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to define what quality in preschool education is since it is influenced by political or religious beliefs, values or socio-economic situation in the individual countries. Generally, there has been agreement regarding the fact that quality in educational policy in preschool education is influenced by the quality of the teaching staff. For this reason, the quality of teachers' work and the development thereof has become a priority of educational policy in most of the developed countries of the European Union as well as of the rest of the world, and has also come to the centre of attention of pedagogical theory and research. Frequently, there is a requirement that teachers have a university degree at BA level as well as continuing with life-long professional development. Alongside the discussion on the quality of teaching there are also discussions on the quality of teacher training for preschool teachers, mainly regarding the reflective concepts of pre-service teacher training.

The author of this book *The Preschool Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner*, therefore, tries to contribute to the worldwide discussion on the need to examine college preparation programmes for these teachers. Therefore, the book is targeted mainly at researchers and academics who educate future preschool teachers. It can be beneficial also for in-service or pre-service training, as well as for other people working in the field of early childhood education (Syslová, 2019).

The book is based on the book *Teachers in Preschool Education and their Preparation for their Profession* (Syslová, 2017), and it was amended by further information from the author's habilitation thesis *Aspects of Professionalism of a Preschool Teacher* (Syslová, 2018).

The first chapter introduces the current sociocultural context of preschool education and provides a partial excursion into the history of preschool education in the Czech Republic. It analyses the changes in preschool education, which reflect the critical postmodern thinking influenced by the technological approach of humans to the world as well as economic globalisation. The chapter also comprises a view on the curriculum of Czech preschool education, which corresponds with all the parameters of the progressive concept of preschool

education when compared with international requirements. The chapter ends with an analysis of quality in preschool education in the international context and the conclusion thereof defines the four criteria of quality resulting from the analysis.

In the second chapter, firmly based on the first chapter, we consider the quality of work of a preschool teacher, mainly in connection with the qualification requirements for the profession and their justifiability. We believe that the qualification requirements for the profession in the Czech Republic are currently insufficient, which is why we are attempting to carry out an analytical review on the research studies of teachers in the Czech Republic as well as abroad from the point of view of the said topic. The presented knowledge on the profession of a preschool teacher serves as the starting point for considerations on the forms of pre-service teacher training, which would contribute to making preschool teachers experts with regard to the education of preschool children, capable of flexibly and effectively managing the increasing demands on their teaching performance in the ever-changing educational conditions. The conclusion of the chapter is dedicated to a synthesizing look at the preschool teacher, presenting the prototype view of a preschool teacher. It provides a framework which comprises the qualities that differentiate experts from experienced teachers and non-experts.

The third chapter presents the research, the aim of which was to contribute, as widely as possible, to the contemporary field of the preschool teacher profession, through monitoring self-reflection with regard to professional thinking and behaviour. Studies combined several methods of data gathering and used mainly qualitative content analysis.

The aim of the publication is to present a view on the quality of the work of preschool teachers via the prototype view and contribute to the knowledge of the preschool teachers' profession. It can be considered a certain challenge for rethinking the requirements for the pre-service teacher training on the tertiary level within the context of the current changes in the Czech society.

In the whole text, especially in the research part by preschool teachers we mean the teaching staff of public preschool facilities for children between 3 and 6 years of age; in rare cases there can also be 2-year-old children, which is how the system works in the Czech Republic.

1 Context of Preschool Education in a Postmodern Perspective

If we want to be able to understand the position and role of a preschool, we need to delve into a short historical reflection on the contemporary sociocultural and political context. Contemporary preschool education is influenced primarily by postmodernism (Colom, 2002; Laudo, 2011), which can be understood as a certain paradigm of thinking. This paradigm is characterised by the effort to criticise the modern technicist approach of people to the world (the conception of the truth and the understanding of reality), and, at the same time, it is the typical omnipresent process of economic globalisation. Economic demands and the needs of the global market are shown in the European educational policy (i.e. also in the educational policy in the Czech Republic). The consequence is, for example, the re-definition of the role of school and education in society and in the field of cultivation of a person.

Preschool education is facing many challenges, which result from the social transformations and changes of the pedagogical paradigm. Some requirements regarding preschool education are determined by the circumstances linked to the national tendencies (in the Czech Republic, for example, economy, demography), while others are influenced by wider trends that are being dealt with by all the countries of the developed world (integrating children from socially disadvantaged environments, compulsory preschool education, and so on).

The question of preschool education and the quality thereof has recently been the subject of discussions in all corners of the globe. Significant attention has been paid to the matter within the European Union as well as in global organisations, such as, for example, UNESCO and OECD. Even though it is hard to find criteria for quality of preschool education that would be acceptable across various cultures, the unanimous agreement is that the quality of a school and the education therein is unquestionably and globally influenced by the quality of the teacher (for example Barnett, 2004; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Early et al., 2007; Kelley a Camilli, 2007; Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neumann, 2010; Urban et al., 2011). It is assumed that “professionally better equipped teachers can provide their pupils better educational quality of teaching and learning” (Janík et al., 2013, p. 9).

The following text will deal with the everchanging requirements regarding quality in preschool educational, including the change in the view upon child and childhood. These topics will, subsequently, be used as the starting point for defining the requirements for quality in a teacher.

1.1 Excursion into the History of Preschool Education

Preschool education has a much shorter history when compared with primary education. The first institutions for preschool children appeared as late as in the 19th century. They were of various types. Initially, these institutions fulfilled mainly the social function, i.e. to look after children who were parentless or whose parents, usually mothers, had to work. Gradually the institutions for preschool children became more of an educational type of institution. At the end of the 19th century preschool education facilities were becoming similar to primary schools, against which there was a wide wave of protest, namely against school methods in preschool institutions.

The experience of the representatives of the reform movement showed us the way to demonstrate respect towards the interests and needs of preschool children, whether Czech reformers (Jarníková, 1908, 1911; Süssová, 1912) or reformers from abroad (e.g. Dewey, 1916; Montessori, 1912).

Accepting the requirements of the reform movement meant laying the foundations for the development of an independent person and this was also reflected in the Czech educational programmes which came into existence between the world wars. After the Second World War, the countries of Western and Northern Europe continued in the views of reform pedagogy. However, for most of the countries of the Eastern part of Europe these ideas became unacceptable vis-a-vis a totalitarian regime, which is why in the second half of the 20th century different requirements regarding the education of preschool children were set.

The aims of preschool education in the totalitarian society, of which the Czech Republic was one, were diverted from the child towards the demands of the socialist society and in place of play-based activities from the reform period there was a focus on directed education via mass frontal activities. Preschool education then gradually reflected the increasing influence of Soviet pedagogy. This influenced the approach of teachers towards working with the child (Lacinová, 2002, p. 19). Didactic materials worked out in detail for the individual scientific disciplines, which were based on knowledge from developmental psychology, were the solid foundation for educating children from the point of view of their age, particularly those of preschool age. What was missing was the dimension of the individual particularities upon which it is necessary to focus as well. School was strictly uniform and there was almost no

differentiation in the education. The principle of the uniform school was dropped at the end of 20th century.

Since that time, the countries of Eastern Europe, including the Czech Republic, have been looking for ways to make changes towards a modern democratic system, which would be connected to the educational traditions of the individual countries and, at the same time, in harmony with the fundamental developmental trends and progressive tendencies of, primarily, Western European education.

1.2 Context of Preschool Education in the Postmodern Situation

Nowadays, the majority of the countries of the European Union base the education of preschool children upon theoretical modules such as “constructivist theories, socio-cultural theories, attachment theories, experiential learning theory, social learning theory, or a situational approach” (Sylva, Ereky-Stevens & Aricescu, 2015, p. 37).

Some curricula result from the **cognitive psychological theory** (Piaget, 1999), which is based on the preconceptions of children, and the theory of the cognitive development of the individual. Some curricula result from the **socio-cognitive theory** inspired by the thoughts of Dewey (1916), which states that a child should learn via activities, their own experience, and reality. This approach typically shows the deflection from the traditional concepts of education based on structuring educational content into subjects towards opportunities where the child should be introduced to the world via confrontation with authentic life situations through “cross-curricular” educational activities.

The main representative of the socio-cognitive theory is Vygotsky (1976, p. 313), whose views grew out of the fact that children's learning takes place mainly through their interaction with their social environment. He talked about the zone of proximal development, which means that what the child “can do today with the help of an adult, they will be able to do on their own tomorrow”.

The positive results of this **constructivist approach** are shown in international expert literature as well as research. Children learn best when they are active and engaged, when there are frequent interactions, which are meaningful, and when the curriculum is based

on previous learning (Barnett, 2004; Kagan & Kauerz, 2006). The fact that a curriculum with a high level of child-induced activities can be beneficial in the long term, including leading to an increased level of service to society and a motivation to reach higher levels of education, is shown, for example, by the research of Schweinhart and Weikart (1997).

Further significant theories within the field of preschool education are **humanistic (personalistic) theories**. These are linked to the non-directive approach of the teacher, which respects the uniqueness of the child as well as their freedom (Helus, 2009; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1956). In preschool education, it is important to accept the natural developmental specificities of preschool children, as well as the developmental specificities of the individual child and, subsequently, to reflect these in the content, forms and methods of their education. Knowledge of the age specificities generally, as well as knowledge of the developmental specificities of the individual child, is one of the conditions of individualizing education, i.e. development of each individual child within the range of their individual possibilities and needs (Horká & Syslová, 2011; Krejčová, Kargerová & Syslová, 2015; Opravilová, 2016; Šmelová, 2013).

The Czech Curriculum for preschool education also results from the mentioned theories (for more detail see chapter 1.3). Some authors speak about one of the greatest breakthroughs in the history of Czech school education, including preschool (Porubský et al., 2013; Štech, 2007). Concurrently with the change there is talk about a crisis in education (Lukášová et al., 2012, p. 16) “as a problem with which society cannot deal as the world no longer offers simple clues to formulating definitive decisions and universally valid aims”. Sometimes it is also called a social crisis (Strouhal, 2012, p. 362), which expresses questioning of the usual reliance on the fact that everything will change for the better. on the contrary, the situation shows that the gains of human civilisation, i.e. what humans created, can turn against themselves (disruption of the ecosystem, the collapse of the world economy, and so on).

Teachers find themselves at a crossroad, in a situation that is significantly different from the “modern” education concept. The only certainty is that everything is uncertain and that everything is led by the particular interests of an individual or institutions (Štech, 2007).

The postmodern situation in education, i.e. also for teachers, brings another great challenge, which is diversity (multicultural education, global education, education of children from

bilingual families, children of migrants and immigrants, education of children with special educational needs, etc.), which could be postulated as a value on its own.

The postmodern approach enriches preschool children's education with individualisation and differentiation of their education. For teachers of preschool education, it means not transmitting to children any true/ready-made information but opening their hearts and minds to getting to know the world as widely as possible from the point of view of its diversity.

The postmodern approach also brings a new view upon childhood. The current trends of the sociology of childhood view children as a discrete social group, only as a transitional phase towards adulthood (Corsaro, 2014; Kořátková, 2014; Opravilová, 2016; Opravilová & Kropáčková, 2016). This change in the view of the child can be seen as early as at the beginning of the 20th century (Dewey, 1916; Key, 1900). Children are given the right to talk and influence the situation which they are part of, as well as actively participate in the creation of social and cultural relationships (Mayall, 2000). The summary of children's rights can be found in the *Convention on the rights of the child* (UN, 1989).

James and Prout (1997, p. 8), the greats of the new sociology of childhood, summarize the new postulates of this discipline, such as, (a) recognizing the natural disposition of childhood, being integrated into a social as well as a cultural context; (b) researching children's relationships as a value independent of the perspectives of adult people; (c) the perception of children as actors participating in constructing and creating their own lives in the environment that surrounds them and the society in which they are living.

Childhood cannot be looked at from the passive perception of a child, i.e. an entity that takes in the opinions of the older entities and is subdued to their needs and decisions. Childhood is, today, viewed through the lens of social relationships, where children actively participate in the process of transforming, interpreting and re-interpreting the culture in which they are living (Mayall, 2000), therefore they also become the co-creators of their education.

1.3 Curriculum of Czech Preschool Education

Educational programmes for the education of children of preschool age are traditionally divided into academic and more holistic models. The academic model uses the educational

programme initiated by the teacher with cognitive aims and, especially, aims to prepare children for school. The more complex model, on the other hand, focuses on the child and tries to broaden the content and aims for their holistic development and benefit (Bertrand, 2007; OECD 2006). Both models have their pros and cons.

According to the OECD (2012, p. 16) “arguments say that the early care facilities of high quality usually use curricular practices where the cognitive and social development are two mutually complementary components of equivalent importance. Such integrated educational programme is the element increasing quality and contributing to the development of better social behaviour”. The example of a country where the quality of early education and care is usually evaluated as high and which emphasises social as well as cognitive education is Sweden. The Czech curriculum introduced in the form of the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* (2018)¹ is, in the current conception, very similar to the Swedish model.

The Czech curriculum was compared, by the OECD, with the curricular documents for education and care for children at an early age with reference countries, i.e. New Zealand, Norway and Scotland, and the results are in the material *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care Czech Republic* (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2012).

The OECD (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2012) evaluated the *Educational Programme Framework for Preschool Education* within an international comparison of curricular documents as a generally well-structured material, and described its strengths, such as, namely, **identification of children's needs**. The *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* explicitly states the importance of adaptation activities and accentuates education on the basis of abilities and needs of individual children. It is the only document, when compared with New Zealand, Norway and Scotland, that pays attention to children’s special educational needs. It emphasises disadvantaged children and pays attention also to the needs of talented children.

Another positive trait is its **balanced content covering cognitive as well as social and emotional areas of education**. The *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* comprises, in its integrated conception, the academically oriented fields, such as the knowledge of mother tongue, preparation for future reading as well as first steps to

¹ It is important to state that it was the evaluation of the document and not its implementation in practice.

the basics of mathematical and natural sciences. It also pays attention to the development of social and emotional skills. From an international point of view, there is consensus regarding the importance of preparing children for future reading and counting in the programmes of early education.

Another important and very positive part of the document is the emphasis placed on **free play**. The Czech Republic, like New Zealand, Norway, Scotland and Sweden, defines play as an integral part of the learning and development of children. The *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* emphasizes that the teacher-induced activities should be well balanced with the activities initiated by the children themselves. Child-induced play is considered a very important stimulation of children's curiosity and a natural way of learning.

Parents' involvement is considered another significant part of preschool education. Parents can voluntarily participate in the creation as well as the subsequent modifications of the school educational programme and they can discuss the content of the document. Preschool facilities are to support family education, consult about the child's development with parents, and the teachers are to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and openness.

There are only a few countries that deal in their curricula with the importance of leadership and management and these few, including the Czech Republic, state in the frameworks not only what they expect from the teachers but also from the management.

Based on experience and good practice examples from other countries, the OECD experts (2012a), in the Profile of the National Policy for the Czech Republic, stated the possible areas for improvement of preschool education. These recommendations related mainly to the elaboration of a curricular framework for educating children between 0 and 3 years of age as it is lacking at the moment.

The *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* is an integral part of the general educational system and is based on the same principles and aims as the other levels of the educational system. However, the document does not comprise enough explicit links to primary education. The Scottish *Curriculum for Excellence* (2013) has, for example, a strong link to elementary schools, where the curriculum relates to children between 3 and 18 years of age, unifies all the subjects of the said age categories and, simultaneously, provides that the subjects and areas are adapted to the age of the children. In *Te Whāriki* (New Zealand, 1996) there are explicit links to the curriculum of the elementary school.

The starting points for the majority of the OECD countries that deal with education and the development of children are the experiences that the children have already gained their interests, motivation and desire to gather new knowledge. To be able to build upon these inputs it is important that the teacher is able to prepare activities with reference to the developmental possibilities of the children. According to the OECD (2012a) the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* contains only a few instructions on how to adapt the activities and education to the target age of the children, as not all children between the ages of 3–6 years of age can have the same content and can participate in the same activities.

The OECD generally points to the increasing number of immigrants in some of the countries. Even though the percentage of immigrants in the CR is still relatively small, it is slowly increasing (in 2010 to 4.4 %). The internationalisation of society creates considerable pressure on the abilities of people to live in a culturally diverse environment and to understand its inherent values. Preschool facilities are important social and cultural crossroads which can strengthen the above stated reality and prepare children for life in a constantly more and more international society. Knowledge about the cultural heritage and learning about the values of other/foreign cultures and languages can contribute to the ability of a child to understand and resonate with varied life circumstances and values. The OECD recommends assigning more attention to this area and states that the Czech social and cultural values are well explained as well as being considered to be very important in the Czech *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education*.

As clearly shown from the above text, the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* corresponds to all the parameters of a progressive preschool education in the international context (e.g. Sylva et al., 2016, p. 6). Nevertheless, there are constantly recurring problems in the practice of preschool facilities regarding their efficient implementation, as shown in some of the research studies (Burkovičová, 2009; Syslová, 2017; Šmelová, 2004) as well as results from the Czech school inspection investigations. The real quality of preschool education, therefore, does not correspond with the quality of the planned curriculum as stated in the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education*.

1.4 International View on the Quality of Preschool Education

The perception of the quality of preschool education in various countries can be different, as it can be in various interested groups. According to the European Commission (2011), this perception is influenced mainly by political or religious views, recognised values and socio-economic situation. Therefore, a clear definition of preschool education quality within an international perspective is challenging.

In January 1996, the European Commission published the proposals of the 10-year action plan including 40 quality targets - *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children* (European Commission, 1996). These are defined within areas of indicators of quality, and they give quite clear indications for monitoring and evaluating the quality of early education and care. The targets were revised within the thematic working group *Thematic Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care* (April 2012), which reached a wide-ranging agreement regarding the picture of both the child and childhood. They consider children to be “active participants of their own learning/education and the central element of the processes of education [...] Children are unique, and it is needed to recognize their different emotional, social and cognitive needs” (European Commission, 2014, p. 7).

From the point of view of the mentioned agreement, but also in harmony with the five key tools for the School Policy defined by OECD (2012), the *Thematic Working Group* formulated measures (Fig. 1) which should contribute to creating and ensuring high quality preschool education in the EU (European Commission, 2014).



Figure 1. *Key Principles of the Framework of Quality (Bolla, 2015)*

The European Commission has realised that monitoring the quality indicators provides an incomplete overview of the quality of preschool education (European Commission, 2014). They pointed out that attention had so far been paid primarily to the monitoring of the quantitative indicators and that, now, the measures should be directed towards improving the accessibility of preschool education and ensuring the quality of the services provided. The European Commission also emphasized that the system of preschool education and care played an important role in decreasing the number of the cases of premature dropout from school.

The next criteria of quality of preschool education can be found in one of the American studies (Lewis & Burd-Sharps, 2011); however, even this is directed towards the national system of preschool education and not at the processes of education in preschool facilities. The study suggests the following criteria of quality:

- Education of children must take place based on uniform educational standards.
- Teachers have to have at least a bachelor's degree with a specialisation in education at preschool age.

- Teaching assistants must have a certificate for educating children at preschool age.
- Teachers must attend at least 15 hours of further professional teacher training a year.
- The number of children in the classroom must not exceed 20.
- The ratio of the staff and children must be a maximum of 1:10, and preferably lower.
- The educational programme must also provide health care for the children.
- The programme must serve at least one nutritional meal a day.
- The programme is also to facilitate visits by teachers to the families of children.

This checklist of criteria seems to be ideal; however, fulfilling it entirely has not proven possible in preschool education in the USA or any of the developed countries in Europe or the world. These the criteria are determined by the representatives of the Education Policy.

Research, comprising meta-analyses and longitudinal studies, contributes to our ability to identify the indicators of quality in the processes of education and to clarify their effects upon the development of children. The analysis (details in Syslová, 2017, p. 58–60) of selected studies (e.g. Sylva et al., 2004; Yoshikawa et al., 2013), identified the most important aspects of quality in preschool education, such as (1) **stimulating and supportive interaction** between the teacher and children, which helps children to acquire new knowledge, leads to verbal reactions and supports children's involvement in learning; (2) **balanced targeting of both cognitive and socially emotional development**; and (3) **engaging families** in their children's education. It is considered very important to support the development of professional skills in the teaching staff via coaching and mentoring to achieve the quality of the above stated aspects.

The rating scales focused on monitoring the quality of the processes in education, which have had their reliability and validity verified several times (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2005), are inspirational for the Czech research into quality in preschool education (and defining it). The meta-analysis (Vermeer et al., 2016) of 72 studies from 23 countries (from Europe, America, Asia and Australia), which used the scales, showed that the quality of the educational environment in preschool facilities differed in the individual countries. The lowest quality of the educational environment was measured in Bangladesh and South Korea, and the highest in Australia, the USA and the European countries. The study proved that the data from the application of the rating scales have a higher responsive capability

regarding the quality of the educational environment than structural indicators, which the authors explain by the fact that the scales are based on the monitoring of real action in preschool facilities.

The rating scale focuses on assessing (a) interaction between teachers and children, (b) engaging the family in their children's education, (c) material equipment; (d) everyday rituals (e.g. greeting, hygienic habits, resting), (e) structure of the programme (e.g. time provided for children's work and learning) and (f) the content of the activities.

As stated above, many research studies, as well as reports from the European Commission or the OECD, which often result from research findings, emphasize that the definition of quality is dependent on the cultural values and a wider understanding of childhood. Nevertheless, there is agreement regarding the fact that well-elaborated and well-implemented educational programmes provide appropriate support in the development of a child, which enhances them not only cognitively but also has a positive influence on the later success of the child (Penn, 2009).

We conclude the chapter on quality of preschool education with a summative explanation of what we consider the key traits of quality of preschool education. The following criteria relate to the processes of preschool education in the context of the contemporary requirements stated by the *Framework Educational Programme for preschool Education* (2018), as we consider them consistent with the results of the international comparison (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2012) corresponding with the current parameters in preschool education.

- **Aims of Education with an Emphasis on the Balanced Development of the Personality of a Child**

In the Czech Republic there is wide consensus on the importance of the preparation of children for reading and writing, with an emphasis on the knowledge of their mother tongue and the primary basics of mathematical and natural sciences. Simultaneously, it is necessary to pay attention to the development of their social and emotional skills (e.g. Sylva et al., 2004; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Supporting children to behave in a desirable way helps them to develop their capacity for emotional self-regulation, which is a key aspect for their cognitive development and their success in subsequent phases of education (e.g. Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004, 2008).

Targeted and balanced development of the personality is also linked to the consistency of aims in harmony with the selected contents of education or the selected themes/topics. In other words, the educational plan cannot be written up with a separate focus on movement (Physical Education), the development of the cognitive areas (e.g. mathematical ideas, cognitive education) or aesthetic perception (e.g. music education, arts education). Activities (movement, art etc.) must be prepared in such a way as to develop the whole personality of the child, i.e. simultaneously integrating all the educational areas (see more in Syslová & Chaloupková, 2015).

- **Stimulating and Supporting Interactions between Teachers and Children**

A child's learning is dependent on the ratio of support that the preschool teacher provides in their approach to the child. Stimulation and instigation help the children to gain new knowledge and skills, and induce verbal reactions, which supports their language development, etc. (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). If a teacher does not succeed in creating a quality relationship with a child, they can decrease the child's self-confidence and induce anxiety, fear and stress in the child (see the chapter on *Specifics of a Preschool Teacher's Work*).

- **Openness of Preschools towards Parents**

Cooperation of preschool facilities with families and involving them in the education of children positively influences the whole development of the child and motivates the family to support the education of their children (Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002; Sylva et al., 2004). Therefore, it is necessary for the parents to see the positive interactions with children as well as the practical examples of how the children are stimulated towards learning (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Consultations by teachers with the parents bring important information on the behaviour as well as learning progress of the children to both sides. Teachers are thus assisted by the information gained in the process of individualisation of the education (Krejčová, Kargerová & Syslová, 2015).

- **Constructivist Conception of Education**

The constructivist conception of the teaching job (Piaget, 1999; Vygotsky 1976) assumes that the child does not get to know the world only by "reflecting on" the surrounding reality. Knowledge is not an imprint on the learner but their own creation, the construct of a person as an individual. This construct, however, is not permanent but is subject to development. When

a person is learning and gaining further knowledge and experiences, they constantly verify and reflect on these. Learning is an active process, which takes place in the mutual interaction between the person, the learned reality, and the other people present (Kargerová, Maňourová et al., 2013).

Learning strategies which respect the constructivist conception of teaching use methods of active learning which support the development of children's thinking. This is how they increase the probability that the children will genuinely acquire new knowledge and skills, that the knowledge will not stay merely at surface level but, on the contrary, the children will create their own attitude towards it (Krejčová, Kargerová & Syslová, 2015).

- **Professional development of teachers**

An important part for enhancing the quality of preschool education is to support the professional development of teachers. The most efficient techniques of professional development are coaching and mentoring (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). It is assumed that the most efficient tool is mainly the ability to reflect on one's work via various tools (field notes, video recordings), but also via mutual visits of teachers and sharing experiences (e.g. at teachers' meetings). Reflecting on one's work means contemplating on it in relation to the aims of the school as well as one's own abilities (see more in Syslová & Chaloupková, 2015).

2 Preschool Teacher: State of the Art

The first chapter dealt with the context of preschool education. It can be considered the starting point for the second chapter. First, we will define the term “preschool teacher”, and their professionalism and we will contemplate the quality of their work and the connections with the qualification requirements for this work in the Czech Republic and abroad. We consider the qualification requirements for the profession as they currently stand in the Czech Republic to be insufficient; therefore, we will take an analytical view of the research on teachers in the Czech Republic and abroad using the lens of this topic. At the end of the chapter we will try to submit a comprehensive overview of what makes a professional preschool teacher.

2.1 Who is the Teacher: Defining the Term

The preschool teacher, as can be understood from the attribute, does the direct educational job in public, private or religious preschool facilities or special preschool facilities established according to the School Law of the Czech Republic. Preschool teachers have to obtain a qualification at secondary or tertiary teacher training colleges (see the next chapter) to be able to work at public preschool facilities. This qualification is not required for working in the private sector. *Preschool teacher*, as the official label, was introduced in 1934 by the decree of the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, and prior to this the term governess had been used (since the end of the 19th century).

Until the end of the 20th century only qualified preschool teachers worked in preschool facilities. Recently, there has been a rise in the number of teaching assistants and also in the number of nurses (nannies) for children below three years of age.

Not only is it a comparatively young profession, it is also different in its conception from other teaching professions at the higher levels of education. a fundamental difference is brought about by the age specificities of the children, who are the target group of the education; therefore, there is also a difference in the professional activities that are performed by the preschool teachers.

2.1.1 Preschool Teacher Qualification Requirements

In the Czech Republic, preschool teachers can gain their qualifications in several ways (§ 6 Act No. 198/2012 Coll.). For example, at the secondary level or in extension studies or in university studies, at bachelor's or Masters level. Preschool teachers are the only teachers in the Czech Republic that do not need a university degree for performing their work, even though the recommendation of the OECD (2001) and the White Book² (2001, p. 46) included the requirement, "due to the need to manage a wider spectrum of expertise, special pedagogy as well as social knowledge and skills on the part of the preschool teachers to ensure their university education". This requirement regarding the preschool teaching profession is also formulated in the National system of the professions of the Czech Republic³, in which it is said that "the most suitable preparation for the stated profession is provided by a tertiary Master's programme in the discipline of preschool and after-school pedagogy."

This situation, from the point of the experts in the field (Kropáčková & Janík, 2014; Syslová, 2016; Wiegerová et al., 2015) is slowly becoming equally apparent to the representatives of education policy. It was the reason for starting discussions on the professional qualification of preschool teachers in January 2016 at the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic. It was not the first time that the requirement for a university degree for the preschool teacher had been announced. Already one hundred years ago, preschool teachers themselves were calling for higher education for this profession. The change lies only in the fact that now the higher qualification is required by academic circles.

Developed countries consider preschool education to be a very important factor in both the social as well as the economic areas, therefore, they require educational staff to have a Bachelor's degree as well as to continue in continuous professional development (EACEA, 2014, p. 14). "However, as shown in Figure 2, only one third of European education systems require that at least one of the team members caring for a group of children, regardless of age,

² Ministry of Education (2001). The National Programme for Development of Education in the Czech Republic. Praha: Ministry of Education.

³ Creation and updates of the National system of professions as defined in the Act on employment No. 435/2004 Sb. § 6, which states the following: "The Ministry determines and controls the execution of the State administration as well as compliance with the legal position in securing the state policy of employment. Simultaneously, it secures creation and, in accordance with the development at the job market, updates of the National system of employment and publishes it electronically in a way that provides long-distance access. The creation and updates are co-worked on with the authorities as well as self-governing units and the opinions of people working in the job market are considered."

is highly educated⁴. In another third of the education systems, a high qualification level is considered essential during the second phase of ECEC (pre-primary education), but not during the first phase (childcare or early childhood educational development)⁵. Eight education systems have a lower qualification requirement (Czech, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and the United Kingdom (Scotland)). In Denmark and Sweden⁶, there are no top-level regulations on this matter” (European Commission, 2019, p. 11).

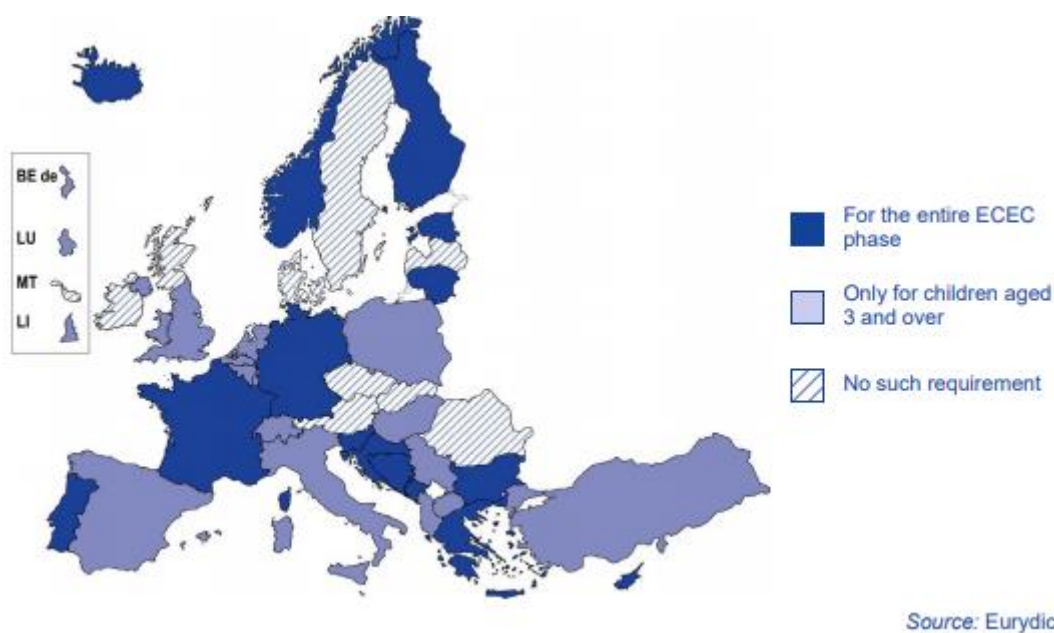


Figure 2. *Staff with a minimum of a Bachelor's level qualification (ISCED 6), 2018/19* (European Commission, 2019, p. 11)

Explanatory note:

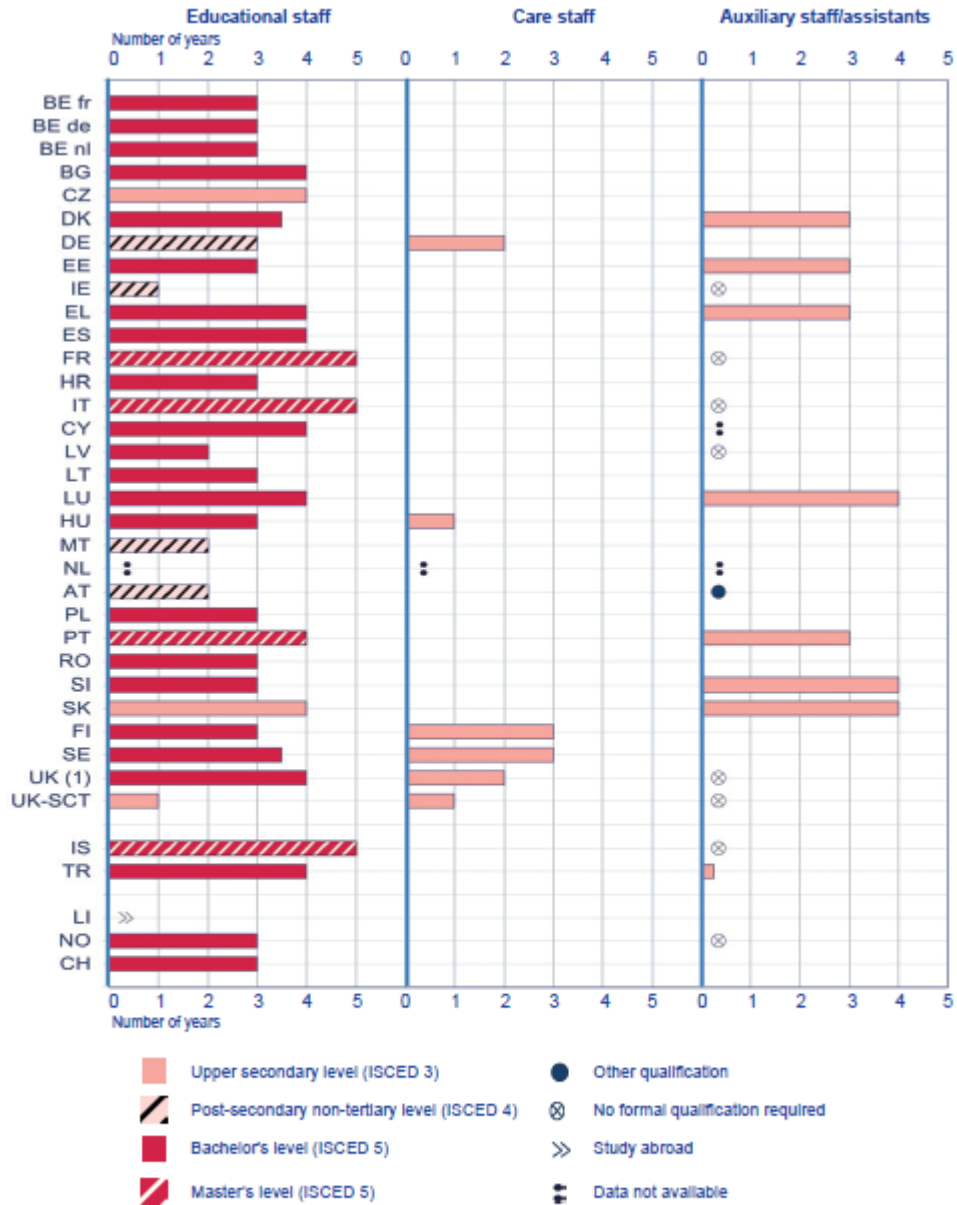
The Figure shows whether at least one staff member per group of children in centre-based ECEC must have a Bachelor's level (ISCED 6) qualification or higher related to ECEC (or education) according to top-level regulations.

⁴ The minimum is at Bachelor's level (ISCED 6) in Bulgaria, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Lithuania, Slovenia, Finland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Norway. It is at Master's level (ISCED 7) in Portugal and Iceland. In France, it is at ISCED 6 in teams working with younger children and at ISCED 7 for those working with older ones. As of 2019/20, it will be at Bachelor's level for all core practitioners in Italy.

⁵ This is the case in Belgium (all three Communities), Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Hungary, Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), Albania, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Serbia, North Macedonia and Turkey.

⁶ In Sweden, in order to work with 6-year-olds in pre-primary classes, staff need to be qualified at ISCED level 6 or 7.

Non-university training of preschool teachers as well as teacher training at secondary schools assistant pedagogical workers (e.g. assistants and carers, who work mainly in the private sector and non-institutional preschool facilities).



Source: Eurydice.

UK (1) = UK-ENG/WLS/NIR

Explanatory note

See National System Information Sheets for what 'younger' and 'older' correspond to in the context of each country. Additional or specialist staff for special educational needs and/or disadvantaged children are not considered in the Figure (see Figures E6 and G2).

Figure 3. Required qualification for care and education of children between 0 and 6 years of age in EU countries (EACEA, 2014, p. 103)

The qualification requirements differ according to the categories of workers as stated in Fig. 3. Some countries also differentiate their qualification requirements based on the age of children with whom the person works. This factor is used mainly in the countries with a so-called divided system: children from the earliest age to 3 or 4 years of age usually attend services designated as “day care” and children between 3 or 4 years of age up to their basic school starting age most frequently receive the services of preschool education. In the countries where the integrated system is used, i.e. all the children from birth until school age attend the same facilities for the preschool phase, all the teachers must usually meet the same requirements for qualification (European commission, 2019; Eurydice, 2009; OECD, 2006). The second mentioned system supports the continuous development of a child during their early education and secures higher professionalism of the staff working with younger as well as older children (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

2.1.2 Some Specificities of Preschool Children as the Starting Point for the Approaches of Preschool Teachers

Even though the development of each individual proceeds in a certain order and has a sequence that is common to all the individuals in a given population, every child will be **unique** and will not only look but also behave and act very specifically. The uniqueness of each child is shaped by their age, sex, needs, temper, abilities, learning style and interests. Besides the age specificities, attention must be paid to the needs, temperament, abilities and interests of the children. This, however, must be done by teachers at all levels of education. The specificity of preschool children, which is completely different from the approach required of other teachers at other levels of education, is the need to create an **emotional bond with the children**, as children are learning to understand the world around them as well as themselves assisted by an adult. They are learning to appreciate others as well as themselves, they are learning to learn (Brotherson, 2005). It is the early symbiotic bond that determines the development of the **self-concept of a child**, which emerges intensively between 2–3 years of age.

The self-concept is, in short, the creation of an image of self. The image of “myself” is created and developed through interaction with the outer social world, i.e. in the process of socialisation. It is formed under the influence of the so-called looking glass “self” (Colley, 1902). This means that the child completely takes on the opinions of adults regarding

the child as presented to them. If attachment is lacking, the further development of the child is limited and inhibited, including the emerging self-concept (Ainsworth, 1967; Bowlby, 1969; Langmeier & Matějček, 2011; Main & Solomon, 1986).

The quality of attachment is reflected mainly in communicative interactions. These are dynamic interactions, when the impulse of one of the actors causes the reaction of the other. The basis of any interaction is the initiation and reception of this impulse. It is not only the response to the initiation, but tuned in interactions, where there are emotional responses both on the non-verbal level as well as on the cognitive verbal level (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Pianta et al., 2005).

Preschool teachers work with children who come to the preschool facility with various experiences, differing capabilities as well as cultural backgrounds. Preschool is often the first very important social environment in which the child meets the world outside their family. Children bring their own personal characteristic traits and various aspects of behaviour that they have acquired at home. They often meet their first social and emotional difficulties, in which they need efficient support from the teacher. If the preschool environment is hostile to individual differences, the children can be exposed to the risk of exclusion from the group, as well as of other negative aspects of socialisation such as bullying, discrimination and stigmatisation (Campbell & Ewing, 1990; Patterson et al., 1998; Rutter et al., 1975).

Preschool teachers must operate with an awareness of these **individual differences**, but also with an awareness of the **developmental particularities** typical for preschool children. The developmental characteristics of preschool children (usually 3–6 years of age), according to psychologists (Bednářová & Šmardová, 2008; Langmeier & Krejčířová, 2006; Šulová, 2005; Vágnerová, 2008), are especially in their specific thinking and reasoning.

The preschool age is characterised by the transfer of thinking level (Piaget, 1999, pp. 117–118) from symbolic and pre-conceptual thinking (3–4 years of age) to the level of concrete thinking (4–8 years of age). The period of symbolic and pre-conceptual thinking operations is shown in the emerging wider understanding of the temporal background. The child insists on repetition, rituals (washing, food, etc.). The representative/symbol of the real world is their idea of it. It is not only a memory imprint, but a processed experience. The idea does not comprise the characteristics of the object, but usually completely insignificant characteristics/traits of the objects that are important for the child. The real symbol comes when, for example, a stone represents a car for a child. The awareness of the permanence

of an object is the basis for the creation of pre-concepts. In this period symbolic play emerges as a way to cope with the pressures of reality and accommodation thereof to children's needs (to be the master of a situation at least temporarily).

Thinking in the period of concrete thinking operations is characterised by **egocentrism**, i.e., the children's thinking is shaped by their subjective approach. Another typical trait is **phenomenism**, which means that the child perceives the world according to the phenomena significant for them. In the area of cognitive functions, the development is determined by the gradual differentiation of perception and maturation of the nervous system in the process of socialisation and learning in the widest sense of the word.

What dominates the period is imagination and vivid fantasy, concrete thinking and high creative potential. The coordination of these as well as other elements creates and develops abstract thinking not only in preschool but also in later school and adolescence periods. If imagination, fantasy and creativity are not fully developed in the preschool period, we can expect that even the potential for abstract thinking will not be fully developed later. There is another characteristic of children's thinking linked with the preceding state and this is **magic**, which is their conviction that they can influence what is happening around them by their words or ideas. Another typical characteristic of children's thinking is, for example, **physiognomism**, which is frequently transferred to **personification**, or **anthropomorphism** (e.g. Langmeier & Krejčířová, 2006; Vágnerová, 2008).

2.1.3 Interaction between Preschool Teachers and Children

Nowadays it is obvious that interactive processes not only influence the development of children's thinking but they are also the basis for a child's development in all the areas, i.e. cognitive, emotional, social and motoric. The nature of the interaction can be successful and efficient or the opposite. The foundation stone of a successful interaction (Fig. 4) is the ability of the teacher to tune in to the children, understand their state of mind, keep contact with the child and, simultaneously, encourage them towards further initiatives. This is the way the teacher can help the child in discovering the surrounding world as well as their feelings and thoughts.

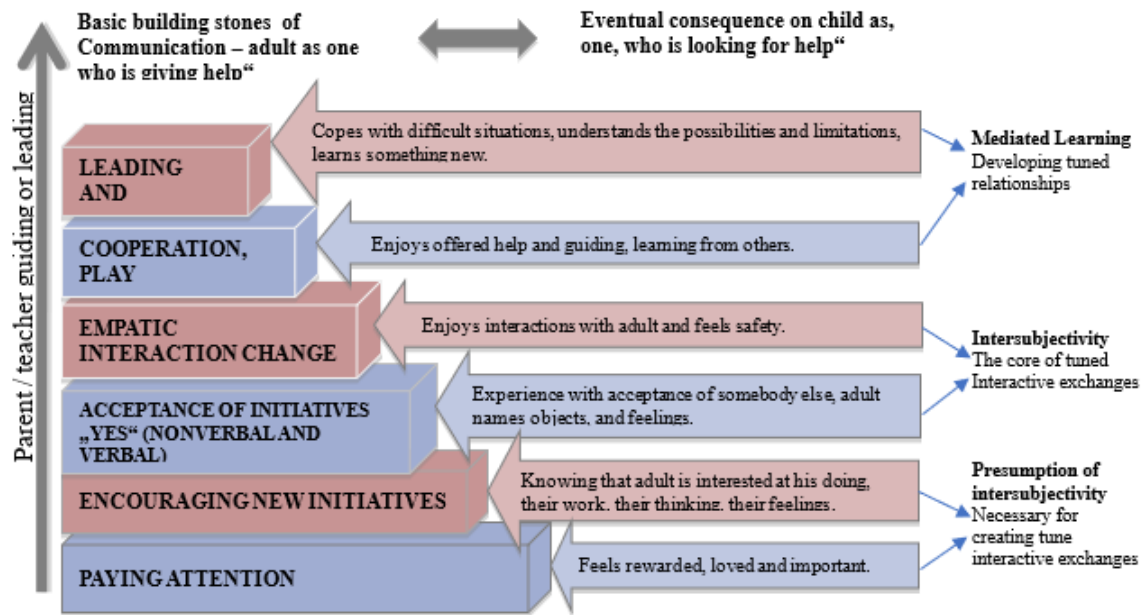


Figure 4. *The basic building blocks of communication (Šilhánová, 2012)*

Bruner states that it is as late as the third or fourth interaction of a child with their teacher which leads to working out their thoughts, i.e. to a cognitive grasp of a topic by the child (1980). Many research studies unfortunately show that teachers tend to ask questions however, they do not encourage the child to work out, deepen and think over the answers or to widen the vocabulary of the child (Hargreaves, 2003; Šilhánová, 2019; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). Other research studies illustrate that effective learning takes place through using effective interactive teaching styles (Mercer, 2000; Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003). Matusov (2001) claims that to make learning effective teachers have to focus on the intersubjective processes not only in the dyad of the teacher and the child but also within a group of children, where knowledge and understanding are constructed together.

Trevarthen (2011), who is considered to be one of the fathers of the theory of intersubjectivity, states that people are born not only motivated to learn from other people, but in fact they learn constantly from others. Šilhánová, together with many others (Vygotsky, Bruner, Feuerstein, Stern), holds the view that the most important factor of learning is the nature and development of interaction thanks to which the learning process takes place (2019). Thinking is presented as a social process, where knowledge and understanding are created mutually among the participants and where language supports the co-construction of knowledge as a common thought process which leads to new understanding (Bruner, 1996; Mercer, 2000; Rogoff, 1990).

An intersubjective relationship is a mutually conditioned and responsive relationship, which enables both partners to discover what is unique and particular about the other and to share the understanding mutually. Such a relationship is present and immediate, and every response is conditioned by the activity of the other, and not by one's own agenda and intentions (Hughes, 2011). **Intersubjectivity** is "a process, whereby the subjective experience of each member of a pair influences the subjective experience of the other" (Hughes, 2009, p. 15). According to Trevarthena (1998) intersubjective communication is about sharing experiences, where every participant of such an interaction is open to influence and to being influenced by the experience of the other.

If the preschool teacher doesn't succeed in creating a quality relationship with the children, the child's self-confidence can be stunted, and the teacher can induce anxiety, fear and stress in the child. These defence mechanisms can, subsequently, prevent the discovery of new things, exploration by the child, and block new learning as well as social and emotional development (Šilhánová, 2019).

A child's learning efficiency seems to be directly dependent on the aid intensity that is provided by an adult or preschool teacher through their attitude. The approach of the preschool teacher increases the self-confidence of the child, and the child becomes less dependent on an adult, even though they have a positive relationship with each other. Therefore the teacher needs to have deep, expert knowledge, on the basis of which they will be able to perform many specific activities to enable the children to have more frequent interactions with their peers, and to participate in cooperative behaviour (offering help, cooperating in tasks, sharing things etc.).

2.1.4 Preschool Teachers' Role in Contemporary Education

The preschool teacher's role is a social one and usually reflects the expectation of a wide spectrum of social groups (*expectation*); however, it can also be the conception of the role, the way the teachers create their *own conception/self-conception*. The roles of a preschool teacher result from the activities that the teacher implements, but some authors claim that it should be the other way around and the activities should result from the roles of the preschool teacher.

In the Czech Republic, Burkovičová created the so-called “Professiogram” (2012). She used in her “professiography” two mutually complementing methods: (1) written responses of preschool teachers regarding their professional activities, (2) video-recorded observations of the professional activities of preschool teachers. “The Professiogram” of a preschool teacher includes about a hundred different activities.

Burkovičová categorised the identified types of activities into two main groups of activities, i.e. – **preparatory** and **implementing**, both main groups containing five subgroups (Fig. 5).

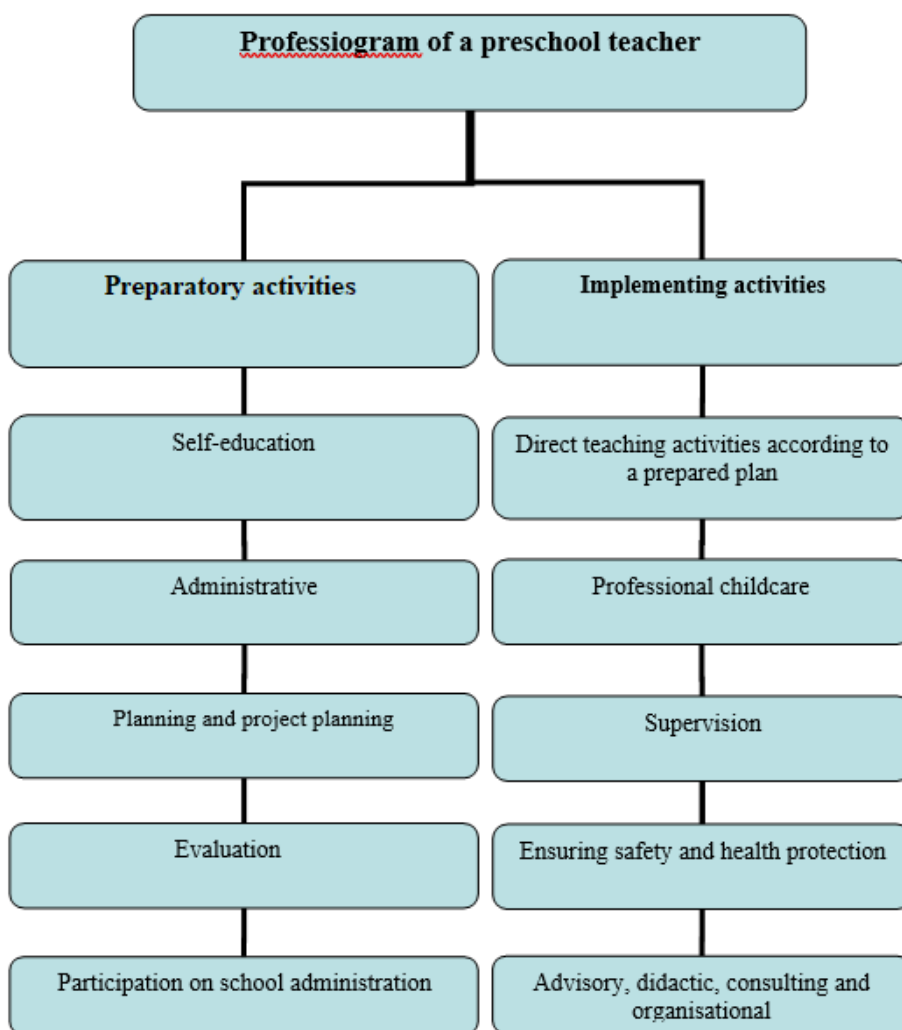


Figure 5. *Professiogram of a preschool teacher*

Preschool teachers' activities are typically variable as preschool teachers have to react to the very frequently changing circumstances caused by the emotional instability of preschool children, and their inexperience socially, which is the reason why they cannot simply learn certain procedures, which could be used uniformly for educating preschool children, which makes the children co-creators of preschool education (see chapter 1.2).

The preschool teachers' roles were formed in connection with the "professiogram" of preschool teachers, but also regarding the changes brought about by the new educational context and the new requirements for the form of preschool education (see more in chapter 1). Socialisation and Cultivation role – the teacher personifies the model of values of our society and provides the model of cultivated and ethical behaviour and interpersonal relationships (advisory, methodological, consultation and organisation, self-educating activities).

1. **Engaged personality role** – the teacher has a social obligation, which is connected with their performance in public, involvement in cultural life, in professional discussions, lecturing activities, etc. (advisory, methodological, consultative and organisational, self-education activities as well as activities falling into the category of school management).
2. **Diagnostic and evaluation role** – the teacher diagnoses needs, interests, age-related and individual particularities of the children, relationships in the group, their self-conception as well as professional skills. He or she assesses the efficacy of the educational processes, the conditions as well as the results of the children (evaluating and assessing activities).
3. **Planning role** – teachers can, based on the information gathered from the diagnostic and assessing activities, plan differentiated activities which originate from the children's previous knowledge and their thoughts and interests, and suit the needs of individual children, and purposefully develop their potential (planning and project designing activities).
4. **Facilitating role** – the teacher is the guide regarding the children's learning through educational strategies; s/he creates optimal conditions for spontaneous as well as directed learning on the part of children and supports learning as well as resolution of social problems (all groups of implementing activities).
5. **Consultancy role** – the teacher can articulate aims and processes, which they use for the development of children; the teacher listens, but also substantiates the knowledge about a child as well as about preschool education with experts and other colleagues,

and likewise with the parents and general public (advisory, methodological, consultative and organisational activities).

6. **Administrative role** – the teacher keeps the required documentation, as well as the high quality documentation formally as well as content-wise from the diagnostic and evaluation activities, as they are aware that they document the professional performance and quality of education that they provide (administrative activities).

The above stated roles are considerably differentiated in keeping with the new paradigm of the school and its functions.

2.1.5 Preschool Teachers' Professionalism

In the light of the above stated specificities of preschool teachers' work, it is necessary to also consider the professionalism of the performance of this vocation. We understand professionalism in accordance with the generally accepted socio-pedagogic discourse as a performance of an individual representative of this professional group or as the “ideological, attitude-wise, intellectual and epistemologically-anchored attitude of an individual, which is linked to the practices of the profession and which influences their professional practice” (Evans, 2008, p. 28). The professional group in this case is preschool teachers and the term professionalism is perceived as an individualised concept, i.e. linked to a concrete (one) representative of the profession.

The term professionalism goes hand in hand with the terms of profession or professionalisation. Our conception does not result from the sociological definition of the profession based on the structural attributes (e.g. Lieberman, 1970; Parsons, 1939), but more the pedagogical-psychological conception. The profession is understood as work activity, where the emphasis is based on responsibility and results, and which requires a deep knowledge resulting from proper university teacher training. Likewise, it is a highly socially beneficial work or “service in the sense of meeting significant needs of the society” (Štech, 2008, p. 142).

Similarly, we may consider the term professionalisation. This can be understood as a way to reach the parameters of recognised professions (Lukášová, 2003; Spilková, Vašutová et al., 2008; Štech, 2007; Wiegerová et al., 2015) or a way of becoming a professional.

Some authors highlight the unclear boundaries between the terms of profession, professionalism or professionalisation. Janík et al. (2016) in keeping with other authors (e.g. Berliner, 2005 or Píšová et al., 2011, 2013) dealt with these terms through the concept of expertness. a member of the profession is anybody with the required qualification who performs the appropriate activity. an expert is then the “person widely acknowledged as a reliable source of skills or techniques, whose opinion has authority and status with both the general public as well as the experts in the field. [...] Expertness is, subsequently, linked to excellent performances of representative tasks, which substitute core activities in the field, i.e. expert performance” (Ericsson, 2006, pp. 3–4).

Signs of expertise can help when defining the dimensions of professionalism and “setting direction and goal of professional (teaching) education, the professional development of teachers and professionalisation of the teaching profession” (Janík et al., 2016, p. 12). Professionalism, therefore, in our conception, covers all the aspects which a preschool teacher needs for performing their profession. These aspects are linked with the processes of professionalisation of this occupation as well as the individual.

The boundaries of the above stated terms are shifting in meaning, together with changes in paradigms and social context. In the last 20 years, there have been talks in the Czech Republic on the teaching profession (on the general level) and wide discussions in connection with the postmodern situation and the neo-liberal pressures penetrating the field of education. Currently, we can see the effort (especially in academic circles and representatives of school practice) to strengthen the professional status of the teaching profession on the one hand, and the need for deep knowledge and special skills, which require proper and lengthy university teacher training and questioning on the other hand (see more details in, for example, Janík, 2017 or Štech, 2007). In professional groups of preschool teachers, the discussion is brought about by the fact that they belong to the only teaching profession in the Czech Republic for which university pre-service teacher training is not required (see more in chapter 2.1.1).

Postmodern pedagogical thinking is now heading towards a new perspective upon the individual in society, human dignity, justice and freedom, without any kind of stigmatisation (see more in chapter 1). Children are no longer considered to be passive receivers of information and opinions from their elders, to whom they are subjugated, but, on the contrary, active participants in their own life path in the environment that surrounds them and in the society in which they live. Education and teaching take place in a reality that does

not have a permanent, fundamental nature. The internal plurality of pedagogic discourses (academic, neo-liberal, but also conservative, progressive, individualistic, collectivist, etc.) shows that there is no universal theory that can definitively say how to educate and teach children, but rather there is a need to accept the reality that the same pedagogical questions and problems can be thought over and researched in many varying ways.

A preschool teacher, to be able to manage all the demands of this profession in the postmodern age and to become a professional, cannot learn only a set of actions that would be easy to manage routinely, to which the rather didactics-oriented teacher training at secondary teacher training colleges may be inclined. They will be facing *unique cases* in their practice – pedagogical situations that will demand immediate creative decision making in action and will be subject to their reflective experience. Therefore, the preparation for the profession requires also creation of a foundation for the process of further development.

An interesting part in light of the qualification requirements for the work of a preschool teacher and the definition of the key terms is the text on “profession and professional” in the publication *Teachers' professional vision and its development through videoclubs* (Janík et al., 2016, p. 12). Profession, in the case of preschool children, could be the thinking and acting of all the members of the profession (with differing levels of qualification), as they are qualified for the work. Professional could be the performance of only those members of the profession who reach a higher level of pedagogical performance. We assume that they will, simultaneously, be those members of the profession with the higher level of qualification (university degree), as historically (in the acknowledged professions) professionalisation and academicism go hand in hand. The label of a professional, therefore, cannot be applied to any person who is a member of the acknowledged profession (i.e. the designation of state), but we perceive them, like Hoyle (1974), rather in connection with the quality of the performance.

2.2 Quality in the Work of a Preschool Teacher

Teachers play the key role in the quality of education, irrespective of whether we speak about the quality of work at the higher levels of education (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Crone & Teddlie, 1995), or at the preschool level (Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2011; Sheridan, 2009), where they, by their abilities to select effective educational strategies, aim at the development of the children.

Many research studies have emerged trying to identify the signs of quality and efficient teachers. The criteria for high quality of a preschool teacher include, for example, the knowledge of the content of the educational programme (Sommer et al., 2010), the ability to create a multidisciplinary learning environment (Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2011), integrating play and learning (Johansson & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009; Pramling Samuelsson & Asplund Carlsson, 2008), being a leading partner and supporting interaction with children (Howes et al., 2003), but also among teachers themselves (Elliott, 2006; Sheridan et al., 2009).

There is not much data on the quality of preschool teachers in the Czech Republic as there is only a limited number of research studies. The Czech School Inspection closely monitors the fulfilment of the formal legal requirements (McKinsey & Company, 2010, p. 17). In this chapter we are presenting the detailed review of these research studies, which is based on two review studies (Syslová, 2017; Syslová & Najvarová, 2012). This part is complemented by an overview of the paradigms and trends of international research on preschool teachers. We draw from only a selection of texts focused on preschool teachers that were presented in accessible relevant journals,⁷ anthologies and monographs.

Additionally, we present some quality models that came into being in the Czech Republic, but also in selected countries in Europe.

2.2.1 Research on Preschool teachers

Research on preschool teachers in the Czech Republic has been going through a change of focus as well as methodology used over time. Research studies show two prevailing directions, i.e. behaviouristic and holistic. Some research studies are directed rather to the **behaviouristic conception** with a prevailing normative and positivist approach to the research of teachers, which has been appearing in the theory and research of teachers since the mid-20th century. Research studies of this type monitor the personal characteristics of teachers in an attempt to define the desirable skills, properties, behaviour, and so on which the teacher should have at their disposal. Frequently, the teacher's quality is measured by means of indicators, i.e., selected aspects of behaviour are researched (Arnett, 1989;

⁷ These are mainly the following journals *Early Child Development and Care*, *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*.

Broekhuizen et al., 2016). The research studies focus on the *teacher's behaviour*, for example, on the interaction and communication (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Hindman, Pendergast, & Gooze, 2016; Sheridan, Williams, & Sandberg, 2012).

Some of the research studies could be designated as looking at the paradigm *process-product*. For example, Garner and Mahatmay (2015) researched the influence of the relationship between a preschool teacher and a child upon the development of affective competencies of the child. Teaching quality and its influence upon the socio-emotional development of children was dealt with in the research study by Hestenes et al. (2015). Further research studies are focused on the influence of a teacher's behaviour on the behaviour of children in the classroom (Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 2001; Pianta, 1999).

These behavioural approaches have often been criticized and the opinion started to prevail that “the real nature of the teaching job is more correspondent to the integrative, **holistic approach**, which results from the complex picture of the work of a teacher“ (Spilková & Tomková, 2010, p. 23).

A frequent topic, which is specific only to the profession of a preschool teacher, is exploring the differences between those teachers who completed only secondary education and university graduates (e.g. Early et al., 2007; Jeon, Buettner & Hur, 2016; Oberhuemer, Schreyer & Neumann, 2010; Sammons et al., 2007); this unearthed the information that children taught by university graduates (BA or higher degree) reach higher scores in reading, mathematics and social behaviour when compared with children taught by teachers with a lower qualification level.

In recent years, there has been more attention paid to the specific nature of the processes of education, with a focus on the individual disciplines. Preschool education, for example, put a focus on the development of mathematical skills (Lehrl, Kluczniok & Rossbach, 2016; Opperman, Anders & Hachfeld, 2016), the preparedness of preschool teachers for including motor activities into curriculum (Gregorc et al., 2012), and preschool teacher's roles in art activities (Novakovič, 2014).

Integrated methodological conceptions, which may enable us to see teaching and learning as an integrated whole with various contexts of education having been considered, is moving into the foreground of the preschool classroom. Finnish study dealt with the possibilities of facilitating preschool children's participation in the educational activities (Kangas,

Venninen, & Ojala, 2016), or a Russian study researched the preparedness of preschool teachers for the approaching inclusion (Biktagirova & Khitryuk, 2016). More and more often, the research is focused on observing the teacher's view of the educational reality through their *reflective skills* (e.g. Hsueh & Tobin, 2003; Pihlaja & Holst, 2013).

Regarding research studies in the Czech Republic, preschool teachers were the subject of only ten studies between 2000 and 2010 (Syslová & Najvarová, 2012). The results from these studies showed that preschool teachers had problems implementing the new requirements of preschool education brought about by the reform of education. These problems are emerging, for example, in the area of understanding new terms (Šmelová, 2009), in planning class educational programmes (Burkovičová, 2009; Šmelová, 2004) as well as understanding preschool educational programmes (Šmelová, 2008), including their evaluation (Syslová, 2010). The research studies implied that individualisation of education and autonomy given by the two-level curriculum had not been understood or implemented well.

The studies conducted between 2011 and 2017 (Syslová, 2017) brought a dramatic shift in the research aims as well as research methods. The prevailing quantitative character with the frequently used method of a questionnaire survey from the Noughties has been changing in most of the studies into a qualitative design. Recently, there has also been the use of video studies (Burkovičová, 2012; Feldmanová, 2014; Navrátilová, 2015; Syslová, 2015; Syslová & Hornáčková, 2014).

Most research studies focused on the professional activities of teachers and their professional thinking. They show that preschool teachers perform many very specific professional activities. The demands of the activities (subjectively felt by the teacher) subsequently influence how often the teacher implements them. The results indicate that the real time requirement of the performed professional activities of the teachers exceeds the framework of the legally determined working hours, and it is much longer than in the case of teachers in Slovakia and in Poland (Kasáčová et al., 2011).

Further research studies focused on the self-efficacy of preschool teachers in cooperating with the families (Majerčíková & Syslová, 2014, 2014a). Self-efficacy, i.e. confidence in one's abilities in cooperating with the families, is comparatively high, which brings good presumptions for the performance. Some other findings, however, imply that the cooperation

with families, not solely in the Czech Republic, is implemented only as a formality (Syslová, Borkovcová & Průcha, 2014).

Similarly, as abroad, some Czech studies compared two samples in the monitored aims – teachers with secondary and teachers with tertiary education (Burkovičová, 2014; Syslová & Hornáčková, 2014; Syslová, 2017). These were comparatively small samples of respondents, which is why the results cannot be safely generalised. It was shown that teachers with a university degree reached critical, i.e. a higher level of reflection and that there was a direct correlation between reflection and pedagogical performance. This means that teachers with a higher level of quality of reflection also achieved a higher level of pedagogical performance (Syslová, 2017).

2.2.2 *Model of Quality Preschool Teachers*

Many expert studies tried, based on empirical research, to identify the signs which characterize quality and efficient teachers, which in many countries often became the foundation for creating models of a quality teacher, or professional standards.

A holistic model of a preschool teacher has been developed in the Czech Republic, which resulted from the complex picture of the work of preschool teachers. It is the evaluation tool *Framework for Professional Qualities of a Preschool Teacher* (Syslová, 2013; Syslová & Chaloupková, 2015). The quality of a teacher is understood here as the mutual interconnection of various aspects of their work, of which some elements are difficult to observe and evaluate. Therefore, the aspects were divided into individual areas based on the professional activities of a preschool teacher.

These activities show the professional competences of a teacher, understood as a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values as well as personal characteristics. They can be seen in the tool in the form of **criteria of quality** in eight areas – planning of the educational offer for children, environment for learning, processes of learning, evaluating the progress of children, reflection on education, development of preschools and cooperation with colleagues, cooperation with parents and professional development of a teacher.

A prerequisite for the quality of a teacher's professional activities is their behaviour in accordance with the **ethical principles** of the teaching profession. That means that the teacher:

- Respects human rights, does not discriminate against children, their parents, or their colleagues, can positively work with differences that result from the origin, religion and sex of the child.
- Uses the binding legal standards valid for their profession.
- Acts in keeping with the protection of personal data of the children, their families and their colleagues.
- Follows ethical values of altruistic behaviour (respects every human and their development, protects life, helps the weak, values solidarity, loves people ...).
- In their professional decisions, starts from the concept of a child as a developing personality.
- Brings the democratic principles of acting and learning together into the classroom.
- Is willing and able to clarify their decisions related to teaching and educating children – is responsible for the tools which they use to instruct and educate children.
- Includes in the classroom curriculum suitable ethical topics, which are/may be linked to their class (violence, addiction etc.).

An integral part of the tool *Framework for Professional Qualities of Preschool teachers* is educational videos, which came into being through *Development of Personal and Professional Competences of Preschool and Elementary School Teachers to Higher Quality in Education* (CZ.1.07/1.3.00/48.0022).⁸ The video recordings represent a good example of reality, as required also by the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* (2018), e.g. differentiate teaching, provide feedback to children, behave in an accepted/partner way, ask open questions, support experiential and cooperative learning, reflect on one's work and so on. These are examples of activities that present teachers as experts on teaching and education of preschool children, in keeping with the children's

⁸ Retrieved from <https://munispace.muni.cz/library/catalog/book/551>.

potential, individual particularities and age specificities (Syslová & Chaloupková, 2015, p. 65).

Models of quality have frequently become the basis for creating standards, i.e. a kind of norm, which was spoken about by Schön (1983): “School education is to have, like any other professional activity, a normative character. That means that it must be based on explicitly formulated norms of quality” (in Spilková, Tomková et al., 2010, p. 25).

Professional standards are formulated in close connection to the conception of the teaching profession in each country. They can have the form of professional competences or key professional activities. They are frequently considered the starting point for the teaching profession, professional development, evaluation and self-evaluation of teachers.

An important European trend is the emphasis placed on the democratic process of standard creation from below, i.e. in cooperation with the school's practice, pedagogical research and educational policy. In some countries critical voices can be heard concerning the creation and implementation of standards, e.g. concerns about uniformity or suppressing teachers' creativity (Crebbin, 1999; Graham, 1997; Spilková, 2010).

2.3 Model of the Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner

As the model of the teacher as a reflective practitioner has gradually become the dominant model in the developed countries during the last 20 years, reflection and self-reflection have been considered to be the foundation stones of professional development (Goodman, 1984; Kasáčová, 2005; Píšová, 2005; Schön, 1987; Spilková et al., 2015; Syslová, 2017; Wubbels & Korthagen, 1990). The main reason for accepting this model is the character of the profession, where teachers frequently find themselves in ill-defined situations, when it is necessary to make quick decisions. The contemporary education of preschool children is shaped by many factors such as the uniqueness of every child, differing approaches to the education of children in families, including the social and cultural differences in families, integrating children with various special needs, postponement of school attendance, etc. These factors put increasing demands on preschool teachers, namely, on their professional skills. a teacher, as a professional, cannot act only intuitively or routinely apply learned procedures. It is necessary for a professional teaching performance to result both from a deep broad knowledge of educational phenomena and from the context, based on their reflection on their

experience. Reflection helps in evaluating the effects of their approaches, as well as discovering new ways, how to approach the education of specific children, and how to communicate with them successfully and efficiently.

2.3.1 Reflection in Contemporary Pedagogical Discourse

Reflection has recently become a frequently used term in many theoretical as well as applied scientific disciplines linked with the professional, and equally personal, development of humans and it has become a common element of pedagogical theory as well as practice. In the field of education of teachers, the term has become so common that many authors use it as frequently as the term teaching, or they consider reflection to be a necessary part of teaching and professional development, a designation which is becoming the target of criticism (Višňovský, Pupala, & Kaščák, 2012). In connection with reflection, we can come across the following: **experiential** (Kolb, 1984; Korthagen et al., 2001), **reflective** (Gibbs, 1988; Schön, 1983), **professional** or **life-long learning** (Finlay, 2008; Hatton & Smith, 1995; La Boskey, 1994; Shulman, 1987).

Many authors have been pointing to overuse of the term reflection for a long time, as well as the inadequate consensus regarding its definition (Nehyba et al., 2014; Luttenberg & Bergen, 2008; Píšová et al., 2011). If anybody delved deeply into researching the meaning of reflection, they would probably soon encounter an inexhaustible quantity of various concepts, equivalents, similar terms or word connections – **reflective thinking** (Dewey, 1916), **experiential learning** (Kolb, 1984; Moon, 2004), **reflective teaching** (Pollard et al., 2008), **reflective education** (Korthagen, 2011), **concept of reflective practice** (Schön, 1983). More and more authors try to define the term reflection and distinguish it from other cognates or near cognate terms/processes (e.g. thinking, awareness, analysis of experience, feedback and so on). If we turn our attention back to existing definitions of the term reflection, in the pedagogical discourse, we discover a terminological mess of terms, words and metaphors that are linked to it.

This disunity in the approach to reflection was first pointed out by Zeichner (1992, pp. 161–162). Then Fendler followed up on his work (2003), when she, in her genealogical study, identified four sources of the conceptualisation of reflection – Cartesian rationality, Dewey's

concept of reflection, Schön's concept of professional reflection and the socially critical approach of cultural feminism.

Our ambition is not to befuddle the reader with the main line of this tangle of considerations on the term of reflection, but only to define our views upon the term. We adhere to Dewey's concept and draw from what the definitions of reflection have in common, i.e. extracting meanings, focusing on experience, acting and focusing on content as an important attribute of reflection. The core categories of reflection are aim, content and process (Svojanovský, 2017). We perceive intentional reflection as a tool which supports learning and, at the same time, cultivates non-intentional reflections, as, for example, in the case of expert teachers (Pířová et al., 2013) and thus develops skills we could label as reflective. Simultaneously, it is also a way of learning, which can interconnect practical experiences with theory – either using the path from experience to deduct a theory, or the other way around, from a theory to its comparison with experience. Reflection structures thinking, learning and getting to know oneself as a learning being.

We perceive intentional and non-intentional reflection as complementary to each other in the sense that they influence one another mutually. The quality of non-intentional reflection is influenced by cultivation of intentional reflection, and, on the other hand, the experiences with non-intentional reflection can reflect themselves in the intentional reflection.

Reflection as a phenomenon is also frequently researched. There are many approaches available for such research. a frequent focus is the temporal and spatial orientation of reflection. Research on the quality of reflection mostly mentions the following three levels – technical, practical and critical (Day et al., 2007; Farrell, 2004; Van Manen, 1977). In the case of the technical level, there is usually a description of work, which relates to the answer to the question, “What is happening?”. at the second, practical level, there are the initial evaluations of what is or is not right. at this level, answers are sought to the questions of “What and How is it happening?”. at the critical level, the answers to the questions of “What, How, and Why is it happening?” are acquired. It is the analysis of the phenomena linked with the social context or with scientific theories. We can also find further ways of dividing reflection, e.g. Larrivee (2008, p. 342) states four levels – pre-reflection, surface, pedagogical and critical.

It has been demonstrated that the ability to reach critical reflection takes time and effort. It is not only a matter of undertaking training in the technique, but it is necessary to interconnect practical experiences and to be aware of the personal attitudes as well as social, institutional and political context (Fook & Askeland, 2006, p. 53; Pollard et al., 2006, pp. 36–40).

Marcos and Tillema (2006, 2011) carried out a meta-analysis of texts focused on researching reflection and they pointed out that the majority of the studies were oriented towards determining the level or type of reflection (e.g. Farrell, 2004; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Mezirow, 1997; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), or the ways of thinking (Baxter, 2004; King & Kitchener, 1994). Only a few studies provided information on the processes and techniques of reflection and their use for improving the quality of teaching.

There are not many research studies focused on monitoring the reflective skills in preschool teachers. Some are focused on self-reflection, i.e. the view of oneself as an actor in the educational process in their classroom (Syslová, 2017; Syslová & Hornáčková, 2014), and sometimes upon reflection from the point of view of an external evaluator of the educational process of another teacher (e.g. Hsueh & Tobin, 2003). Some studies focus on the level of reflection, for example Pihlaja and Holst (2013, p. 188), who reached the conclusion that pedagogical staff⁹ working in preschool facilities think about their work mainly at the technical level, and only 1 % at the critical level. Further studies monitored the possibilities to develop reflective abilities in teachers (e.g. Griffin, 2003).

Some research studies deal with the development of reflective skills in students of pedagogy. These showed that directed reflection helps students to move their priority focus from themselves to paying attention to the activities of the children (e.g. Husu et al., 2008, p. 49; Leijen et al., 2014, p. 320; Syslová, 2017, p. 156).

2.3.2 The Role of Reflection in Professional Development and Learning

The development of reflection has gradually become an integral part of pre-service teacher training. Since the 1970s, (see more details in e.g. Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 12, Svojanovský, 2017, p. 15) teacher educators have been looking for ways to change the academic approach

⁹ The researched sample comprised 54 % preschool teachers, a quarter of the sample were special education teachers, and the rest social education teachers or unqualified workers, most of them had secondary education (Pihlaja & Holst, 2013).

based on theoretical knowledge, which should be applied in practice in a manner more closely linking theory with practice. Many studies keep endorsing the knowledge that teaching practice is the key element of professional pre-service teacher training. Pure volume of practice, i.e. quantity, is not the guarantee of developing professional skills. It is all about the quality thereof. “Many opportunities for learning how to teach others from practical experience do not guarantee these opportunities will be transformed into valuable teaching as such” (Svojanovský, 2017, p. 8). The quality of teaching practice, as well as transformation of experience into professional learning and development, is enabled by reflection (e.g. Day et al., 2007; Korthagen et al., 2011; Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Discussion on reflectively conceived pre-service teacher training led to the formulation of new conceptions in the Czech (Nezvalová, 2000; Píšová, 2005; Spilková et al., 2015; Švec, 2005), as well as international environment (e.g. Korthagen et al., 2001; Kosová & Tomengová et al., 2015; Pollard et al., 2006). Our conception is in keeping with Tomková (2018) as turning towards the students, which enables development of their whole person, not merely their cognitive area. Reflectively conceived pre-service teacher training resulted from socio-constructivist theories, as it is closely linked with cooperative learning. Reflectively conceived pre-service teacher training develops reflectivity, which we understand to be the underlying principle of professionalism. The teacher as a reflective practitioner performs actively, independently, creatively and responsibly in complex pedagogical situations, on the basis of a deep and broad knowledge of the educational phenomena and context, experience, critical reflection and self-reflection.

The reflective approach to pre-service teacher training integrates reflection into the educational programme as well as into procedures through functional strategies, methods, techniques and tools, so that the students are gradually capable of autonomous evaluation of their progress and results of learning and of further guiding their own professional learning and professional development.

Direct support of reflection is described in the educational texts as facilitation of reflection (e.g. Hmelo-Silver & Barrows, 2006), coaching reflection (e.g. Schön, 1987) or mentoring (Syslová, Horká, & Lazarová, 2014; Lazarová, 2001) and supervision (e.g. Korthagen et al., 2001).

From the many proposals of modelling reflection (see the review e.g. in Pířová et al., 2011, pp. 45–46), our conception is closest to the model of the process of reflection called ALACT, proposed by Korthagen et al. (2001, p. 58), which is clear from their formulation of the aims of reflection: “Reflect on your own behaviour, improve your own behaviour, but also improve your own learning.” The designation ALACT is based on the first letters of its 5 phases:

- Action
- Looking back
- Awareness
- Creation of alternative procedures
- Trial

This model of the process of reflection presents the cyclically running phases of thinking (Fig. 7). We have added to these phases in accordance with Pířová (2005) thinking operations (Fig. 6), since they better describe the development of professional thinking towards metacognition. We consider metacognition to be the ability to get to know oneself, one's way of thinking, problem solving, own reactions, decision making, etc. The knowledge of oneself leads, via autoregulation processes, to higher performance. We could also describe metacognition as the ability to predict the possible **mistakes and** limits of the human mind with the aim of avoiding them or finding ways to overcome them.

As stated in the previous chapter, reaching the level of metacognition is a long-term process. Research studies show that students usually do not reach “critical reflection” (e.g. Syslová, 2015) and that preschool teachers reach it only rarely (e.g. Pihlaja & Holst, 2013). The cyclical process of reflection refers not only to pre-service teacher training but also to their further professional practice. Teachers should continue reflecting on their work even after finishing their teacher training. at the start of their work, they should be helped by an experienced teacher/mentor.

The cyclic reflection model may be mediated using a portfolio (see more e.g. in Syslová et al., 2018 or Tomková, 2018), which enables students to attain core reflection. According to Korthagen and Vasalos (2005), a portfolio enables students to focus not only on the reflection of the professional knowledge, i.e. theory, and the observable aspects of the professional performance (skills, concrete behaviour in a certain situation), but also to look deeper and consider their own professional identity and its building, over their own beliefs and attitudes.

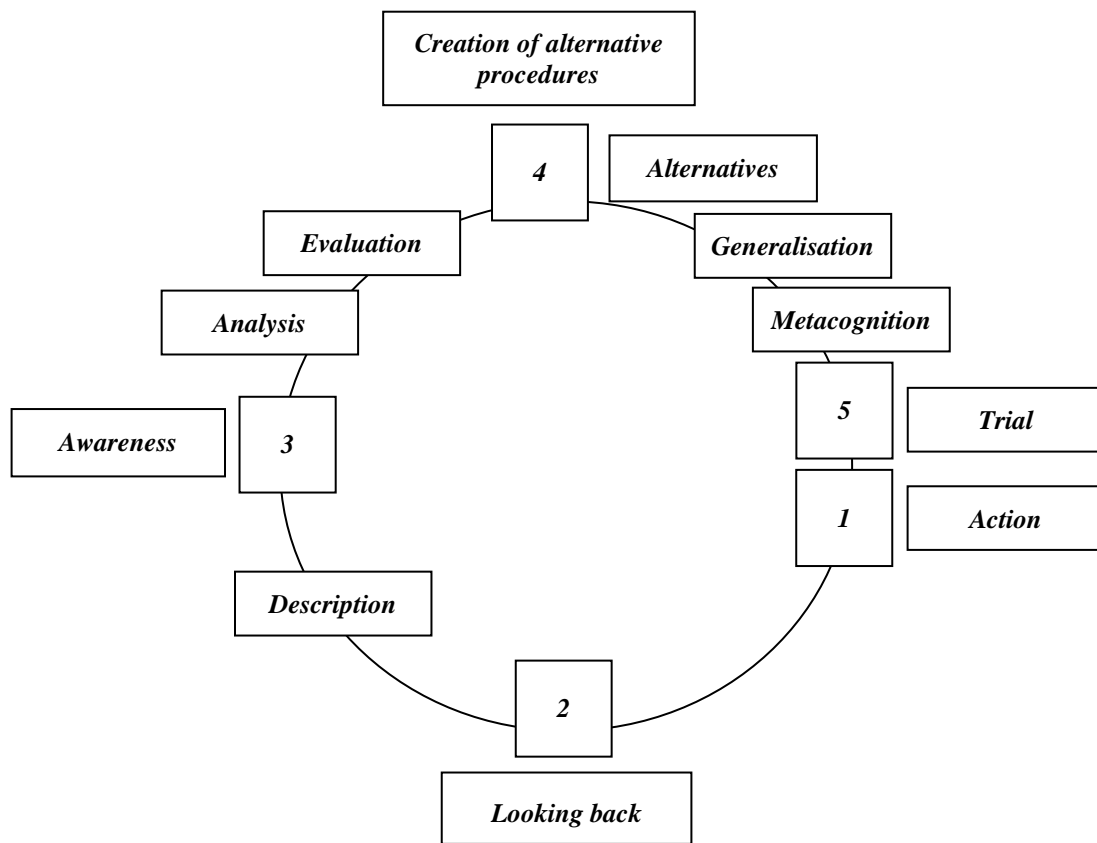


Figure 6. Model ALACT complemented by thinking operations (Syslová & Hornáčková, 2014)

The first step is action, where a student or teacher implements a prepared activity with the children; however, it can also be a completely spontaneous experience of children's reactions or an experience gained through observed reality in a preschool facility.

The next step is awareness when looking back at the observed reality, when the teacher “plays” the reality back. as an assumption for the targeted development of higher thinking operations, it is necessary to also develop the descriptive language and field relevant vocabulary. Some research studies (Syslová, 2016) show that both students and teachers are prone to inaccuracies and superficiality in describing the observed reality. For example, “The teacher was very kind. The children were incredibly good”.

These general comments as a rule do not allow the students/teachers to realize the fundamental aspects of education (awareness), which is the third step in the ALACT model. This step is already grounded in thinking operations, i.e. on analysis and evaluation.

The fourth step leads to searching for alternative procedures, where the students/teachers submit proposals on how to make the education more efficient or how to implement the educational activities in different ways.

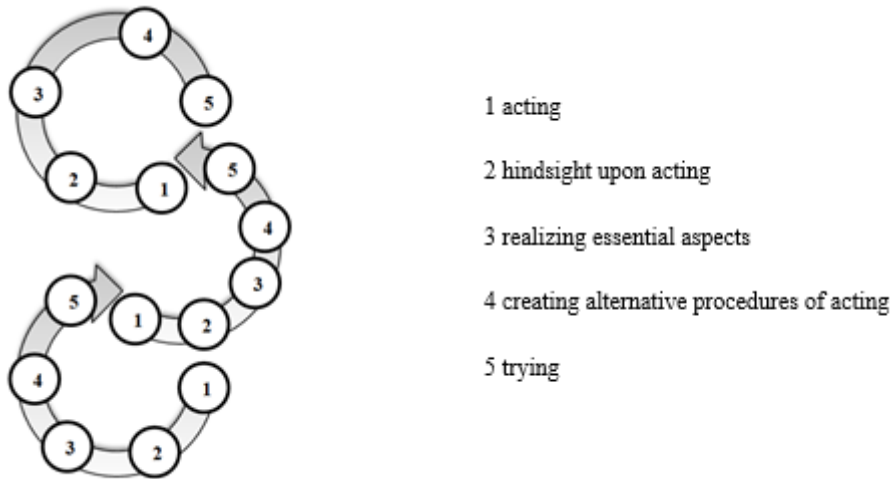


Figure 7. *Cyclic Reflection Model* (see Korthagen et al., 2001, p. 58)

The constantly repeated individual steps, (Fig. 7), enables the student to gradually move from the level of pre-concepts to creating concepts of the educational reality and their own acting. The constant repetition of the different phases develops the thinking operations in the student, which we label generalisation and metacognition.

Basically, these thinking operations represent the ability to confront one's own opinions with the opinions of experts, regardless of whether they are authors of professional texts or university teachers. It is the ability to formulate more general principles based on their own experiences with the educational reality. In metacognition, we are talking about thinking leading to considering one's own thinking processes. It is the ability to recognize how we react in stressful situations, in which we give priority to emotions over sense.

2.4 Prototype View of a Preschool Teacher

Determining what an ideal teacher should be like is not simple. In the following text, we will try to offer a prototype view of the preschool teacher's quality in keeping with Sternberg and Horvath (1995). It is not an empirically verified model, which would characterise the quality of a teacher via a set of criterial attributes (in the sense of Aristotelian logic). It is a synthetic framework, which comprises characteristics, distinguishing experts from

experienced teachers who are not experts. The expert teacher is perceived to be an expert who can achieve long-term and consistent quality in professional activities.

The core of preschool teacher performance is interaction with children (chapter 2.1.3), but also mediating educational contents to children. The nature of communication and the processes of constructing the content influence the quality of the educational processes and learning, which take place in the preschool classroom and which characterise the expert performance of a quality preschool teacher.

The prototype view results from the idea of so-called family resemblance. The authors of the prototype view assume that “the higher the similarity, the higher the subjective probability that the object belongs to the category” (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995, p. 10). The essence of the model is the diversity in the skills of the expert teacher, i.e. that different teachers can be labelled experts and yet each teacher can show a different level of quality or representation within the individual domains of the model, where there are no “sharp” boundaries. These domains are: (1) knowledge, (2) efficiency and (3) insight. In other words, two expert teachers can resemble one another, but each of them can conform to the prototype individually. The aim of creating the prototype view of a preschool teacher does not mean submitting exhaustive characteristics, but rather offering a framework, which can stimulate research, discussion and perspective upon the pre-service teacher training of preschool teachers.

There are not many research studies that would verify the prototype model, but the team in the Czech Republic reached the same conclusions as the group of authors researching the expertise of foreign language teachers (Píšová et al., 2013, chapter 2). Even though it is not research on preschool teachers, we found inspiration in their view and merged it with our evaluation tool. When formulating the characteristics of the key elements of the quality of teachers, we drew from the evaluation tool *Framework for Professional Qualities of Preschool Teachers* (Syslová, 2013).

The potentialities of the prototype view are discussed in the results of the research described in the following chapter.

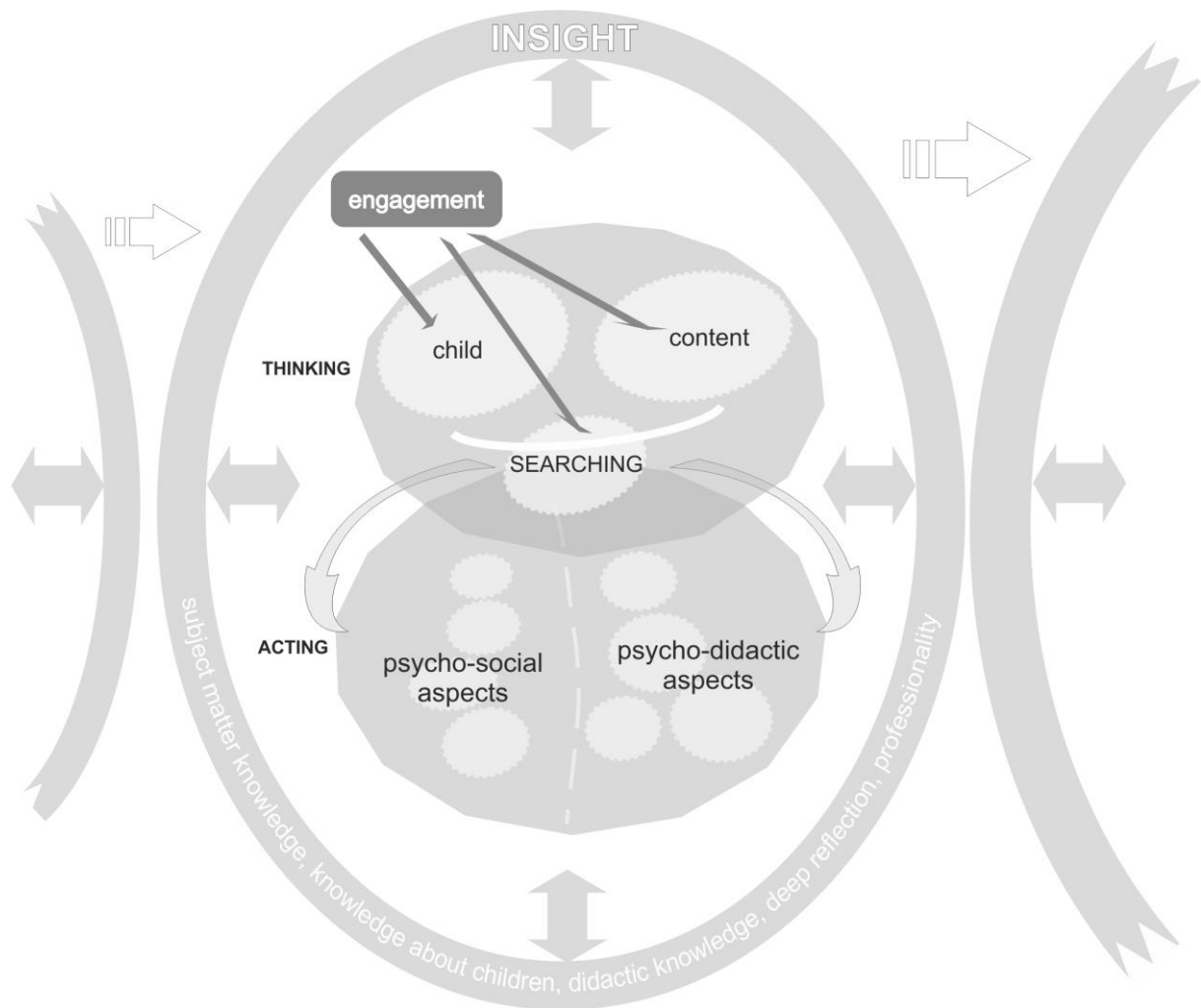


Figure 8. *A prototype view of the quality of a pre-school teacher in an educational situation (adapted according to Pířov et al., 2013, p. 46)*

The graphically illustrated prototype view of the quality of a pre-school teacher (Fig. 8) shows the mentioned three dimensions as a framework which influences the thinking and behaviour of a preschool teacher.

The first domain, defined by Sternberg and Horvath (1995, p. 10), comprises the knowledge of the content, which must go hand in hand with the pedagogical knowledge, i.e. with the knowledge of how to teach. The expert teacher needs to know how to motivate the children, how to set tasks, how to provide feedback, how to achieve the aims of education, and so on. Besides the knowledge of the content and pedagogical knowledge, the expert teacher needs knowledge of the social context in which the learning is happening. an integral part of the practical knowledge, aside from the explicit knowledge, is also tacit knowledge,

which used to be overlooked in the past (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995; Sternberg et al., 1995), and which is now considered an important part of the professional thinking of teachers (Janík et al., 2016; Švec, 2012).

Efficiency in the work of a teacher and their expert/quality performance, as the second category, is given by the ability to teach by reflecting on one's own experiences. Reflection enables expert teachers to automate well-learned procedures with a lower level of cognitive load and increases the efficiency in planning, implementation, but also evaluation of the educational process. "Reflective teachers are considered to be those who use new problems as opportunities to expand their knowledge and competence" (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995, p. 13). If we summarize the above, the expert teacher is characterized in the prototype view by how efficiently s/he solves problems in education, because of the wide knowledge, and the ability to perform many educational activities quickly with little or no cognitive effort.

The third domain, labelled **insight**, is meant to represent creative problem solving. The authors of the prototype view talk about the ability of expert teachers regarding selecting, coding or researching the analogies between two problems. "Selective encoding involves distinguishing information that is relevant to a problem solution from information that is irrelevant to a problem solution" (Sternberg & Horvath, 1995, p. 14).

Every situation that takes place in a preschool facility, whether it is an interaction with a child in spontaneous play or an interaction in didactically targeted, directed activities (Krejčová, Kargerová & Syslová, 2015, p. 95), is always defined by the professional insight of the teacher, which means by the understanding of the general as well as specific aspects of teaching. These are the knowledge of the discipline, knowledge of the children, didactic knowledge, professionalism and deep reflection (compare with Píšová et al., 2013, pp. 40–44). Quality teachers show a high level of concord between the outputs from **professional insight** (theoretical and practical knowledge) and the outputs in the form of **behaving** in educational situations and **considering** educational situations.

Their behaviour, which is ideal for reaching intersubjectivity (see chapter 2.1.3 in detail), shows in quality teachers the typical capability of *engagement* with children, as well as with the contents, and searching for optimal approaches, by which the teacher is enabled to be with *the child* in a certain *content*. When searching for the optimal approach, teachers use their

experiences (selecting from their “mental database”), but also experiments, which means that they are not afraid of trying new approaches in educating children.

The way the teacher thinks about children is reflected in the content, the educational strategies and in themselves as reflected in their acting. With the support of the identifiable areas in the performances of the expert teachers we assume that, due to the specificity of preschool education, the quality of a teacher lies mainly in the psycho-didactic and psychosocial aspects of behaving. From the point of view of the variability of the pedagogical situations (see e.g. Doyle, 1986), we offer only a limited list of selected aspects that were used in the research investigation.

The psycho-didactic aspect is, for example, the ability of a teacher to manifest the aims in such a way that the education integrates as many educational areas as possible. Concretisation of the aims means adapting them not only to the needs of the children but also to the selected content of education. The education is planned and implemented in the prevailing socio-constructivist conception, in which the “active participation and individual decision-making of the child” is welcome (*Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education hereinafter referred*, 2018, p. 32) and in harmony with the knowledge of Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1999). Directed activities prepared by the teacher are usually implemented in small groups. This enables the children to see things from different angles, to learn to substantiate their decisions, etc. The methods used by the teacher are activating methods. This means a diversion from whole class activities, where the children were frequently only in passive roles (listening, working out the tasks). Activisation of children means enabling them to state their opinions mutually, letting them negotiate the way they work, etc. Activities are prepared in such a way that the children solve the task on their own, developing a form that has not been given in advance. This leads children to greater creativity, and it develops their imagination along with other competences.

The psychosocial aspect is connected mainly with creating the intersubjectivity. The teacher should be the model of respectful behaviour (Kopřiva et al., 2008). The teacher uses descriptive language, which enables the children to better orient themselves as well as to grasp the environment in the classroom. The communication of the teacher does not predominate, with opinions, experiences and demands on children, but, rather, they frequently turn to the children with questions regarding their opinions and experiences. They use active listening and positive non-verbal communication (e.g. smile) and show an interest in

the children. The teacher becomes the observer of what is happening in the classroom. They focus on appreciating mutual help and make use of it, for example, when a child does not know how to solve a situation; they challenge the child to try to ask his/her friends for help. That means they do not give the children advice, do not explain, but challenge the others to help. The teachers frequently describe their own as well as the children's emotions, i.e. they devote their time to the topic on purpose. Open questions prevail in the teacher's communication, by which they challenge the children to express their opinions. They wait for the answer of the child, even though some formulations may take a long time. Their speech (appreciation) is an example for the children and they prepare games in which the children share positive information about one another.

3 The Relation between Reflection and the Quality of a Preschool Teacher's Performance

The basis for professional development is to understand the profession, to know the risks surrounding it, to understand oneself, to identify oneself with the profession, and to expand it by improving oneself based on reflection and self-reflection. This chapter will present studies focused on tracking the quality of a preschool teacher's education performance in selected areas and, simultaneously, monitoring the quality of cognitive operations of their reflection.

3.1 Methods of Research

The following text presents a pragmatic research design (Švaříček & Šed'ová et al., 2014, p. 83), which combines several methods of gathering data and uses qualitative content analysis.

3.1.1 Research Sample

The process of participant selection went through several stages. First, in 2013 we sent an initial offer of cooperation by e-mail to all the preschool facilities in the Czech Republic, asking them to enable contact with teachers with up to five years of teaching experience¹⁰ (the number of contacts we received was 178 teachers). Subsequently, the teachers were asked to participate in the research. 47 teachers from seven regions of the Czech Republic agreed to participate in the research. The final eight teachers were selected from three regions – five from the South-Moravian region, two from the Moravian-Silesian region and one from the Highlands. The selection was based on achieving the consent of the teacher, the head teacher and from the parents of the preschool, including recording using a camcorder, and the applicability for the author of the research. 24 teachers did not agree to being video-recorded and 15 teachers were from distant places within the Czech Republic and commuting would mean about three hours of time for them. Half of the respondents had completed their secondary education (hereafter referred to as teachers 1–4) and the other half had a BA university degree (hereafter referred to as teachers 5–8), and in all cases their classroom experience was between one and five years (Table 1).

¹⁰ The reason for choosing 5 years of in-service practice was the effort to have enough preschool teachers with a university degree as university programmes preparing future preschool teachers in Czechia started as late as the first decade of the 21st century.

Table 1

Researched sample

	Qualification	Years of experience	Region	Number of children in the classroom
Teacher 1	Secondary	3	Moravian-Silesian	23
Teacher 2	Secondary	5	South-Moravian	17
Teacher 3	Secondary	5	Moravian-Silesian	22
Teacher 4	Secondary	5	Highlands	23
Teacher 5	University	4	South-Moravian	24
Teacher 6	University	5	South-Moravian	23
Teacher 7	University	1	South-Moravian	24
Teacher 8	University	3	South-Moravian	22

3.1.2 Research Objectives

The research aimed to explore if teachers with higher levels of reflective skills demonstrate higher quality in their teaching performance in selected areas. The first phase of the research focused on investigating the quality of the teaching performance in specified areas. The selected areas were the psycho-didactic aspects and the psycho-social aspects of teaching performance (for details see the chapter *Prototype View of a Preschool Teacher*). In order to better focus the research, we developed the following research questions:

- What aims are formulated by preschool teachers in planning their educational work?
- What qualities do the individual performances of teachers demonstrate in the selected psycho-didactic and psycho-social aspects?

The second phase of the research focused on researching the quality of reflection among preschool teachers. In order to more accurately target the research, we came up with the following research questions:

- What cognitive operations can be identified in the reflection of the teachers?
- What levels of reflection (Farell, 2004) are achieved by individual teachers?

In the third step, we were comparing the results from both studies of individual teachers, and we formulated the following research questions:

- Is there a relationship between the quality in the selected aspects of teaching performance and the level of reflective skills?
- Are there differences between the teachers educated at secondary school level and the university graduates?

3.1.3 Data collection and data analysis

In the academic year of 2013/2014, we recorded eight video accounts. The average length of the recording was approximately 100 minutes. The length of the recordings depended on the duration of the morning activities, i.e. the recording was terminated when the children were going to the cloak room to change their clothes for going out. The recordings were gathered using one movable camcorder, focusing on specific actions. The recording was undertaken by the researcher, focusing on the interactions of the teacher with the children. The camcorder was frequently repositioned, since the classroom comprises several play areas that were used by the teacher during the morning.

Methodology discussions frequently point to the fact that the recorded sessions do not have to correspond with typical sessions, which is to say sessions without the presence of a camcorder. The problem of the representative nature of the recorded sessions was monitored by the use of questionnaires used in the video studies (for more information see Janík & Miková, 2006, pp. 85–87), which were filled in by the teachers after the recorded session (Table 2).

Table 2

Authenticity of the recorded sessions

Was this morning typical when compared with other days?	Absolute frequency (n = 8)	Relative frequency (%)
Typical	3	38
Generally typical	4	50
Often atypical	1	12
Atypical		
How did the children behave on that day?	Absolute frequency (n = 8)	Relative frequency (%)
Better than usual		
Like usual	7	88
Worse than usual	1	12
How did you feel during the session?	Absolute frequency (n = 8)	Relative frequency (%)
Very good	3	38
Mildly nervous	3	38
Nervous	2	24
Extremely nervous		

The answers showed that most of the teachers assessed the course of the morning as typical or generally typical. Also, in 88% of the sessions the behaviour of the children was seen by the teachers as typical. There were two cases when the teacher felt nervous. The above stated facts showed that the presence of the camcorder and a stranger did not discernibly disrupt the education.

The video recordings were digitalised and saved onto a computer in the mpeg format and then they were transcribed in a standardised way (for details see Janík & Miková, 2006, pp. 50–53), in the programme Videograph (Rimmele, 2002). The gathered data were collated from the point of view of the extent to which they fulfilled the selected criteria of the quality of a teaching performance in the following areas; *psycho-didactic aspects* (does not transmit finished information, presents the educational content as a problem, creates opportunities for thinking, confronts various opinions and ideas; links learning to real-life situations). The fourth category “formulates educational aims” was discovered only later, during the interviews. Further areas were *psycho-social aspects* (asks open questions supporting the development of higher levels of thinking; gives the children space to express their own experience, opinions and ideas; supports the efforts of a child, encourages them; seeks and praises mutual help among children) (Table 3).

Table 3

System of Categories for Evaluating the Quality of a Teacher's Performance

Category	Content	Example
1¹¹ Problem learning	The teacher enables the children to investigate and search for information on the selected topics, offers activities in such a way that the children analyse, compare, evaluate, create hypotheses, solve problems, and so on.	Within the topic “My book” one of the cooperative activities was creating one's own book. After dividing the children into groups, the teacher set the following task: <i>Talk together and create your own group book. Think about what the book will be about, how you will create it – draw, paint or glue it, bind it together And do not forget that you will then have to present it to the others.</i>
2 Opportunities for expressing one's own opinions	Activities prepared by the teacher are usually implemented in small groups, which enables the children to work out the tasks in a form that has not been set before. The methods used are “activating”, i.e. the children present their opinions, negotiate the means of working, argue their decisions, etc. The environment of the classroom enables the children to play in groups.	The classroom has “defined corners”, the teacher offers “semi-directed activities” which are organised in small groups as cooperative activities. She uses instructions such as, for example: <i>You have to talk. Tell each other in your group.</i>

¹¹ In the following test you will find that the designation of some of the categories is shortened or missing, which is why it is also designated by numbers.

3 Linking learning with real life	Children’s learning takes place in harmony with the developmental stages of the pre-school age and its specificities, i.e. the teacher uses situations which enable the children to be learning “here and now” (see Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education, 2018, p. 8).	The topics in the content of the class educational programmes (e.g. Christmas, Olympic games, Birds in spring) and their linking to experiential learning (e.g. using a stethoscope for listening to the activity of the heart in the context of the topic of “My body”).
4 Formulates educational aims	This category was monitored in the interviews and has its own categorial system, which can be found in Table 6.	
5 Supporting children’s thinking	The teacher uses “descriptive language”, which enables the children to orientate themselves within themselves as well as within the environment of the classroom. Open questions are paramount in communication and give the children opportunities to express their opinions. The teacher waits for the children’s answers even though some can take a long period of time.	These are, for example, cooperative activities in which the children have to negotiate. There are also questions supporting lower levels of cognitive operations, usually knowledge, e.g.: <i>What is it? What do you call it? But generally? What colour is it?</i> Furthermore, the questions support a higher level of cognitive operations, e.g.: <i>What were you doing there? What have you learnt? What does it mean? How shall we solve it?</i>
6 Children’s opinions	What is predominant in the teacher’s communication is not her opinions, experience and demands upon the children, but rather, she frequently asks the children questions to elicit their opinions and experiences. She uses active listening and positive non-verbal communication.	An example is using the joint circle-time with the question what the children liked most during the morning, and what they succeeded in. There are follow-up questions like: <i>What have you thought up? Why do you think so? What would help you?</i>
7 Supporting the children’s efforts, praising	The teacher supports the children in their independent attempts at discovering, supports them. She evaluates individual behaviours as well as the performance of a child and she avoids general praise. She focuses on the strong points, i.e., she praises what the child managed, and she does not pay attention to what the child is not successful at.	These are examples of encouragement and appraisal like: <i>Good idea. Wow, that looks like the beginning of a tall chimney. Maybe, try it another way. You can do it. I have faith in you.</i>
8 Mutual help among children	The teacher focuses on appreciating mutual help and makes use of it e.g. when a child does not know they should try to ask their friends for help. She does not give advice to the children, she does not explain, but encourages other children to step in and help.	These were usually statements directed to individual children, when the teacher noticed that they were in difficulties or when she reacted to requests of children who came to ask her for help, e.g.: <i>Ask a friend to give you advice. Luke, ask a friend to explain that. And will you try to ask a friend? It is very good to give advice. That was a great piece of advice you gave him.</i>

To ensure an appropriate level of objectivity (or reliability) the categorial system was verified by two researchers on 10% of the gathered data. Both the researchers reached a consensus on conformity at 87%.

The quality of the performance of the individual teachers was, subsequently, recorded on a four-point scale (1–4). The individual points reflect the level of the relevant quality in the individual categories. One point means that the required performance was non-existent or that it occurred only rarely. Two points mean a performance that showed only a minimal level of the quality. Three points mean a performance of an acceptable standard. Four points were allotted to an above average performance in the monitored category, relative to what was typical for the teacher, i.e. used in her teaching.

In the second phase of the research we used semi-structured interviews linked with stimulated recall over selected sequences of the video-recordings. The interview took place about a week after the video was recorded. The interview was focused on reflection on the video recording and was amended by questions related to the context of the professional development of a preschool teacher. For example, questions like who or what helped the teacher at the beginning of her in-service teaching in the preschool facility. What influenced the choice of preschool facility, and so on. This part of the interview focused more on ascertaining the problems of novice teachers. The analysis of these parts of the interviews is not part of this text. During the interview, the teacher was played a selected part of the video recording with a directed activity and she was asked what the aim of the activity was. The objective was to find out if the teacher is able to formulate aims, assess the effects of the selected activities towards the aims, evaluate the results of education and reflect on their professional abilities. The interviews were recorded on Dictaphones and transcribed. The statements of the teachers were analysed in the ATLAS.ti programme from the reference position given by the research questions.

The first part of the data coding focused on ascertaining the aims (intentions) which the teacher set within the implementation of the recorded educational activities. The manner of coding was taken from the model of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbinová, 1999); however, it did not build a theory as such. The texts (transcription of the interviews) were first read by the author of the research and she designated the thinking units (excerpts) by codes. Then she grouped all the codes according to their resemblances and she created sub-categories. They were more abstract and expressed a certain concept range to make it clear which codes or groups of codes belonged to which category (Table 6).

Also, in researching the formulation of aims and evaluation of their fulfilment we used a four-point scale (1–4). The points in this phase were allocated according to the level of fulfilment

of the individual sub-categories (the hierarchy of aims, grounds for their determination and evaluation of fulfilment of the aims): two points could be obtained by the teachers in the first of the subcategories. One point was designated for manifesting the general aims of the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* and one point for distinguishing the target categories “intentions” and “outcomes”. The results of the evaluation of this phase became an integral part of the evaluation of the quality of the teachers’ performance and it was reflected in the overall evaluation of the quality of the teaching performance of the respondents (see table 7).

Further coding used the Píšová categorial system (2005, p. 145), where the categories are based on the thinking operations (Bloom, 1956), which were shown in connection with the reflections of the teachers (table 4).

Table 4

Categorical system of thinking operations of self-reflection in teachers

Category	Content	Example
Description	Objective recording of phenomena. A phenomenon is meant to represent the educational reality, the basis of which is the interaction between a teacher and child/ren, and which can be further divided into areas like aims, content of education, methods and forms, and so on. It is the basic thinking operation, the quality of which determines all the further phases of reflection. In other words, if the description is not of an adequate quality, there cannot be the recognition of the real level of one’s own professional skills.	<i>And because we were beginning, the children were creating skeletons based on a book. I gave them sticks from ice lollies, dark paper to make it easy to be seen. They had books on the human body at their disposal as well as encyclopaedias and they were trying to create a human body.</i>
Analysis	This means breaking down complicated realities into simpler ones and investigating them. In our case, it is the ability to divide educational reality into simpler tasks or, using questions like what I was doing and why and how the child/ren was/were reacting and what the situation and the aims were, etc. However, that means being able to identify undeniable facts.	<i>For example, as I was walking around I suddenly realized that I would have to focus on lowering my body posture that when I am talking with a child on my level, i.e. when I am standing, it must be kind of unnatural for the children that they have to look up at me from below.</i>

Assessment	<p>It is the sign of realisation of the causes of the identified phenomena or explanation of the problems or successes uncovered. Assessment is a sign of understanding the educational reality, which presumes extensive knowledge as well as personal qualities enabling the expert to be honest with themselves. If we are talking about the teacher being able to assess their professional skills, it means that they adopt a stance on themselves – positive or negative - and that they are looking for answers to the question “Why”. For example, why was I acting like that or why were the children reacting in a certain way.</p>	<p><i>We had a feeling the whole time that there would be a problem and at one moment I started saying to myself it would be alright. And now I have spotted on the video that maybe we have become used to her behaviour and told ourselves that it was OK. And on the video, I saw that it was not OK.</i></p>
Proposing alternative procedures	<p>Proposing alternative procedures presupposes that the student has managed the previous levels of mental operations and that he/she has had enough theoretical knowledge as well as practical experience to be aware what action might be more effective, or what changes might support educational results of a higher quality.</p>	<p><i>Then I realized that maybe it was something new for them and that maybe I should have reversed the procedure, first they should have tried it and then made the skeleton.</i></p>
Generalisation	<p>It is a confrontation of one's own opinions with the opinions of experts, either authors of educational texts or (in our case) university tutors. In other words, we could designate generalisation as an ability to formulate more general principles based on one's own experience with educational reality.</p>	<p><i>I have a problem in communication with the children, for example, when there is a problem, and I tend to solve the problem for the children. I do not give them the opportunity to express themselves. I have noticed one section when they were playing with building blocks and there was a conflict and I immediately had the impulse to sort it out, to calm the disturbance. So, I was the one who solved it once again, even though I know, when I manage to hold my tongue, to ask him how he would solve it himself. However, I know that this kind of communication has been my problem.</i></p>
Metacognition	<p>It is contemplating one's own thinking processes. It is also the ability to recognize how we react in stressful situations when we prefer emotional to rational thinking. Metacognition is focused on evaluating the decision-making processes, which means that the teacher is learning via a certain thinking operation to recognize how they solve problems, how they react, how they tend to decide. Knowing oneself leads to higher performance via the auto-regulative processes. Metacognition could be described as an ability to predict possible mistakes and limits of the human brain with the aim to eliminate them or to find ways to overcome them. It can be also designated as self-reflection.</p>	<p><i>When I was beginning with efficient communication or we were introduced it here (i.e. at the university). We tried it at the practice sessions, however, I have to say that sometimes I had a feeling that it could not be realistically implemented. In some situations, I was telling myself that it was not possible. So I think that I have really made progress in this area, as I have been using this efficient communication much more than at the beginning, also because I have frequently been thinking backwards about it, how I could have said that in another way.</i></p>

Both the categorical systems were verified by two researchers on 10% of the research sample, until both achieved a direct correlation in excess of 80%.

Subsequently, there was axial coding, in which we were creating hypotheses on the relationships between the individual sub-categories and categories. We were trying to verify them within each individual interview (and search for the typology of reflection by the individual teachers); however, we were also looking for the relationship of reflection to the quality of the teaching performance through analysis of the video-recordings.

To minimize the influence of emotions upon the observed reality, the teachers had the possibility to watch the video recording prior to the interview.

3.2 Results of the Investigation Focused on the Quality of Education in Selected Aspects

The results of the research presented are shown (A) from the point of view of the selected aspects of a teaching performance, (B) from the point of view of aims and assessment of their fulfilment and, (C) we considered the gathered data from the point of view of the characteristics of the teaching performance of the individual teachers.

3.2.1 Overview of Selected Aspects of a Teaching Performance

In the prototype view of the quality of a preschool teacher, we defined two aspects of action for assessing quality behaviour of a teacher – *psycho-didactic* and *psycho-social*. In the research investigation we used seven categories, supplemented by an eighth category that was identified in the second phase of the research, i.e. through the interviews.

Table 5 summarizes the quality of the individual aspects of the teaching performance by the monitored preschool teachers on a four-point scale. Each item has a minimum and maximum observed value and the usual level of central tendency: mean value, mode, average and standard deviation.

Table 5

Summary of the Results of the Analysis of the Selected Aspects of Teaching Performance

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean value	Mode	Average	Standard deviation
1 Problem learning	1.000	4.000	1.000	3.000	2.750	1.165
2 Opportunities for expressing one's own opinions	1.000	4.000	1.000	1.000	2.000	1.195
3 Linking learning with real life	2.000	4.000	4.000	4.000	3.375	0.744
4 Formulates educational aims	1.000	4.000	1.000	3.000	2.375	1.061
5 Supporting children's thinking	2.000	4.000	3.000	3.000	2.750	0.707
6 Children's opinions	1.000	4.000	2.000	2.000	2.125	0.991
7 Supporting the children's efforts, praising	1.000	4.000	3.000	3.000	2.750	1.035
8 Mutual help among children	1.000	4.000	2.500	3.000	2.375	1.061

The table shows that the researched sample reached the highest level of quality in *linking learning with real life*. Moreover, highly rated categories were *problem learning* and *supporting children's thinking*. The lowest rated category was *opportunities for expressing one's own opinion and children's opinions*.

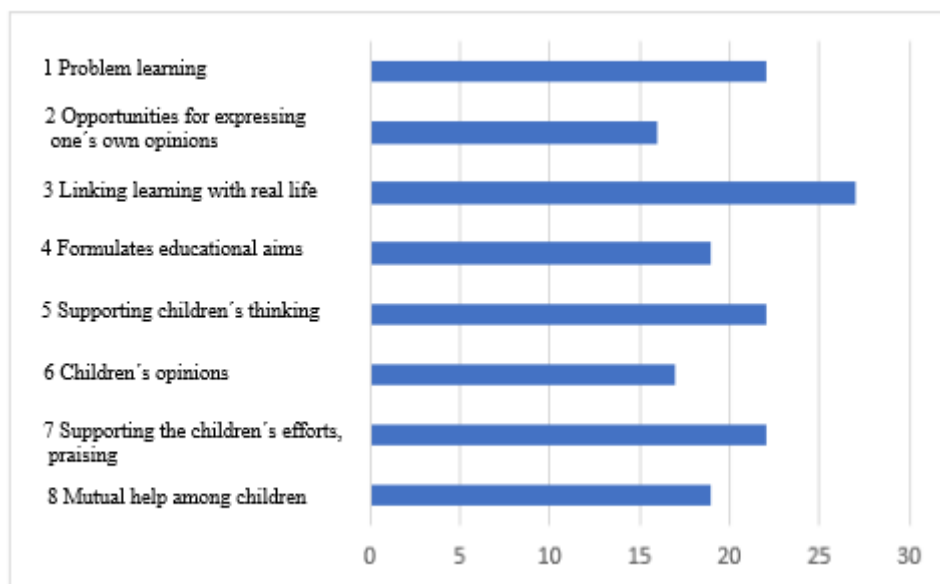


Figure 9. *Summary of the results of assessing the teaching performance in the individual categories*

Similar information can be also read from Fig. 9, which, in the absolute frequency of points allocated to the individual teachers in the individual categories, shows that the best “scored” category is *Linking learning with reality* vs. the lowest scored category *opportunities for confronting one’s ideas*.

In the following text we describe the perspective on the quality of teaching performance in the field of the psycho-didactic aspects and then in the field of the psycho-social aspects.

Psycho-didactic aspects

The psycho-didactic aspects created the categories of *problem learning*, *opportunities for confronting one’s opinions and linking learning with reality*. The fourth category of *formulating aims* will be evaluated on its own. This was ascertained in the interview based on its own categorial system.

The educational content was mediated by most of the teachers as a *problem to be solved*. Problem teaching/learning was usually took place the character of the activities implemented indirectly or semi-directed by the teacher (Krejčová, Kargerová & Syslová, 2015, p. 153). These activities were usually organised as group activities (teachers 1, 3, 5, 7 and 8), where 2–5 children worked together. alongside the group activities, teacher 6 also organised cooperative activities, in which the children had to cooperate for a result of the activity. By that she simultaneously *created opportunities for thinking and for confronting one’s opinions*.

Another organisation form fulfilling the above stated requirement was the joint circle-time organised by teacher 5. In the joint circle-time, the children shared their opinions and feelings from the morning activities. an example of verbal support for sharing among children was the frequent statements of teacher 7: *Kristýnka, did you say something to the boys? Kristy, if you do not like something, what you need to say about it? Or: What shall we do with the peg, how can this be solved? or what about asking other friends if they had any ideas?*

The contents of the class educational programme in the individually observed preschool facilities frequently reflected current events. For example, *Christmas* (December), *Olympic games* (February), *Birds in spring* (March) for teachers 2, 3, 4. The choice of the topic corresponded with the recommendation of the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* to use the “situations which provide the children with understandable practical samples of life context in such a way that the child learns skills as well as knowledge

at the moment when they need it and better understand the meaning”, known as situational learning (*Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education*, 2018, p. 8). Further topics selected by the teachers were, for example, *Family* (1), *My body* (7), *Animals* (5 and 8), *Books* (7), in which we did not succeed in identifying why they were selected for the given period. The topics of *Family*, *My body* and *Books* used activities that were based on the children's experiences and were implemented using “experiential learning”.¹² Most of the teachers linked their teaching with *real-life situations*. The topic of Christmas corresponded with the time of Advent and the children had the opportunity to observe the Christmas atmosphere in the media as well as in shopping centres. This topic, together with the topics of *Animals* and *Birds in spring*, however, were not based on the direct experiences of the children.

Formulating the educational aims

The data analysis of the interviews with the teachers focusing on their ability to formulate educational aims was carried out inductively. Three sub-categories came into being:¹³ (1) hierarchy of aims, (2) background of aims and (3) assessment of their fulfilment, which were further evaluated on a four-point scale (table 6).

Table 6

Categorical system for evaluating aims of education

Category	Content	Example
Hierarchy of aims	Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education formulates aims on a general (child's competence) and area level (aims of educational areas) and, concurrently, as the intentions of a teacher and the expected outcomes of the children that are used by the teacher, especially, to assess the results of the education. The teacher has to integrate the aims in such a way that the teaching is focused on the complex development of the child's personality.	The aim of the group activities was introduction of letters and then it was cooperation among the children who were practising fine motorics while putting the letters together as well as speaking as they had to negotiate and think up words starting with the letter they had chosen.

¹² Experiential learning is described in detail in the *Curriculum for Health in Kindergarten* (Havlíková et al., 2006, p. 200).

¹³ The designation of the sub-category was selected in order to differentiate the term of category, which was used for identifying the teaching performance. One of the categories of the teaching performance is the category of teaching *aim*. The following text, therefore, uses the term sub-category to differentiate the level of the results of the carried-out analyses.

The grounds for determining the aims	The teacher, when determining the aims for short term plans of the class educational programme, manifests the aims according to the needs of the individual children as well as according to the selected content of education.	This week was focused on getting to know the human body. We selected the competences or SuK (in English “grouped indicator”) ¹⁴ which focused mainly on the knowledge of the human body and the senses. However, we started getting to know the body from the beginning, i.e. from the skeleton, muscles.
Evaluation of the aims being fulfilled	The teacher evaluates if the selected education and strategies led to fulfilment of the educational aims or not.	When the children are in a group, all of them must communicate, and when they, for example, need to choose a captain, they must agree. This is how they develop the competences that are required.

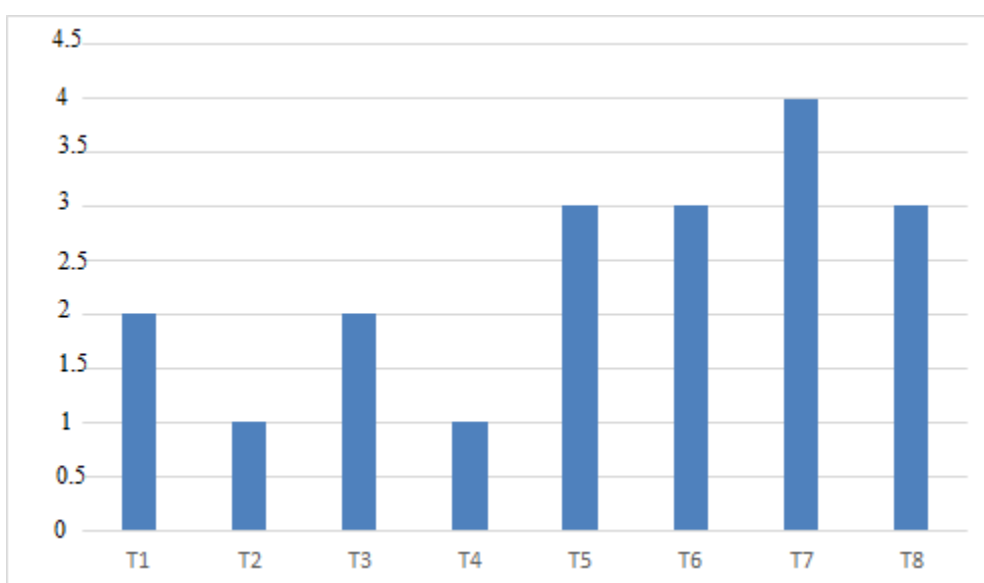


Figure 10. Assessment of the category of aim in the work of individual teachers

As you can see in Fig. 10, the highest level of quality in the category of *aim* was reached by teacher 7. She gained two points in the first sub-category of the hierarchy of aims, due to the fact that she was the only one who was working not only on the partial educational aims, but also with the evaluation indicators, according to which preschool education evaluates achievement of partial educational aims: *This week was focused on getting to know the human body. We selected the competence or SuK (see above), which dealt with getting to know the human body as well as the senses. We started by getting to know the human body from the very building blocks, from the skeleton, the muscles. And because we were really at*

¹⁴ The abbreviation SuK is used by kindergartens that work according to the Programme *Supporting Health in Kindergarten*, and it is a grouped indicator. a grouped indicator is a descriptor of skills in children that helps the teacher evaluate the results of education in developing competences.

the start, the children made skeletons according to a book. I gave them sticks (from ice lollies) and dark sheets of paper, so that it would be easy to see. They had books about the human body at their disposal as well as encyclopaedias; and they were trying to create a human body. However, it is true that I left it there on Monday and on Tuesday I gave them the opportunity to create them themselves, on their own). Also, the other two categories (*background for selecting the aims and their evaluation*) were evaluated by allocating one point. The reason was the compatibility of the teacher's statements with the given characteristics of the subcategories in table 6. It means that the aims that the teacher determined were based on the content of education and she evaluated the extent to which the individual children fulfilled them based on the expected outcomes.

The opposite extreme was seen with teacher 4, who had not worked with any of the target categories and in her intentions was focused only on activities i.e., what she would be doing with the children. The video-recording of the teacher showed that all the activities she had prepared for the children were led frontally without any possibility of choice by the children (who did not want to take part in the activity as could be seen in the video), and none of the key competences was developed. It could be said that teacher 4 had not intentionally planned the development of the children, and moreover, she was not able to discover, retrospectively, which skills were developed in the children through the activities.

In the subcategory of *hierarchy of aims* we could see that there were significant differences between the individual teachers. In their answers some teachers named both the general aim categories directed at developing competences as well as the partial educational aims included in the individual educational areas. The general aim categories were presented mainly with a focus on developing social skills. However, the analysis of the video recordings clearly showed that the education usually had not led towards these skills, only in the case of teachers 6 and 7.

The operationalisation of the general aims to the level of the partial educational aims was identified only with teachers 6 and 7. Most of the teachers had been directing the partial aims towards the development of concrete cognitive skills (train memory, pronunciation), and linked it narrowly with a concrete activity. Teachers 6, 7 and 8 defined their aims in a more general way and targeted more general aims (speech, getting to know the human body, creativity) usually in accordance with the selected topic, i.e. all the activities that they had planned for the given period.

A number of the teachers oriented their reflection upon what (what activities) they wanted to do with the children and what activities they implemented (e.g. teacher 2: *The aim was to create a wish card using various techniques that the children would choose on the own..., so that we could wish their parents Merry Christmas.* Teacher 4: *Introduce the Olympic games.* Teacher 5: *In a part of the studio the children could make a giraffe, which we had in the topic*). Thus, the formulated aims were labelled “pseudo-aims” and the teachers were not allocated any points in this subcategory. By the term pseudo-aims we mean the intentions of the teacher to introduce the children to a kind of environment, relationships or traditions in their surroundings, which, however, have no substantiation at the level of educational aims or discipline didactics.

The background for the determined aims was mainly the contents of education, i.e. the topics which the teacher was implementing within a given week. All the teachers were allocated points in this subcategory. In the case of teachers 2 and 4 these were the only points allocated in the category of *aims*.

When searching to see whether the implementation of the teaching and the selected strategies facilitated the achievement of the selected aims (third subcategory), teachers 1–4 described what the children were doing (*they were building houses for animals, they were making angels...*) rather than evaluating if the children had achieved anything from the planned aims. Teachers 5–8 usually evaluated the impact of the concrete activities upon the development of the children; some evaluated on a more general level what helped in fulfilling the selected aims, or they assessed the impact of the selected strategies on the development of a child without the aims having been formulated. For example, teacher 6 evaluated social development in the children, when she realized the impact of the selected strategies also upon the children’s other skills: *“Yes, the aims were fulfilled, in fact in all the children. I liked that within the activity, even though I had not selected the competence, we were dealing with the problem-solving competence, because there were problems to be solved and the children had to negotiate that. And, actually, all the aims were achieved by the fact that during the activity, the words that the children were thinking up, starting with a specific letter, I had planned that we would say that together in the circle, however, I realized that in the group it was better...*

In this subcategory teachers 5–8 were each allocated one point.

Psycho-social aspects

The area of the psycho-social aspects was shown in the categories of *supporting the child's thinking, finding out children's opinions, supporting the efforts of the children and appreciating/praising them and requesting mutual help among the children*. In the area of the psycho-social aspects, the best in quality with regard to the teaching performance were *supporting the efforts of the children and appreciating/praising them* and *supporting children's thinking*. In the first mentioned category we identified that the most frequently used phrase was *Try it!* (Give it a go!) This phrase had not been used by teachers 4 and 6. Teacher 4 used only general praising terms, *super* and *great*. These were frequently used also by respondent 1. Further frequently occurring general appraisals of the children were, for example, *excellent* (3, 5, 6, 7 and 8). Teacher 6 did not use the phrase: *try it*; however, she frequently used, e.g.: *You will manage that. I believe that you will succeed. Next time you will succeed. Let's succeed*. Teacher 7 often refined the statement *try it*, e.g.: *Try it another way. Try to think. Try it once more*. She encouraged the children by using further statements of the following type: *Good idea. Wow, it looks like there will be a tall chimney!* Teachers 6 and 7 encouraged the children the most. on the other hand, teacher 2 only used the following statement once: *Try to stick it there*.

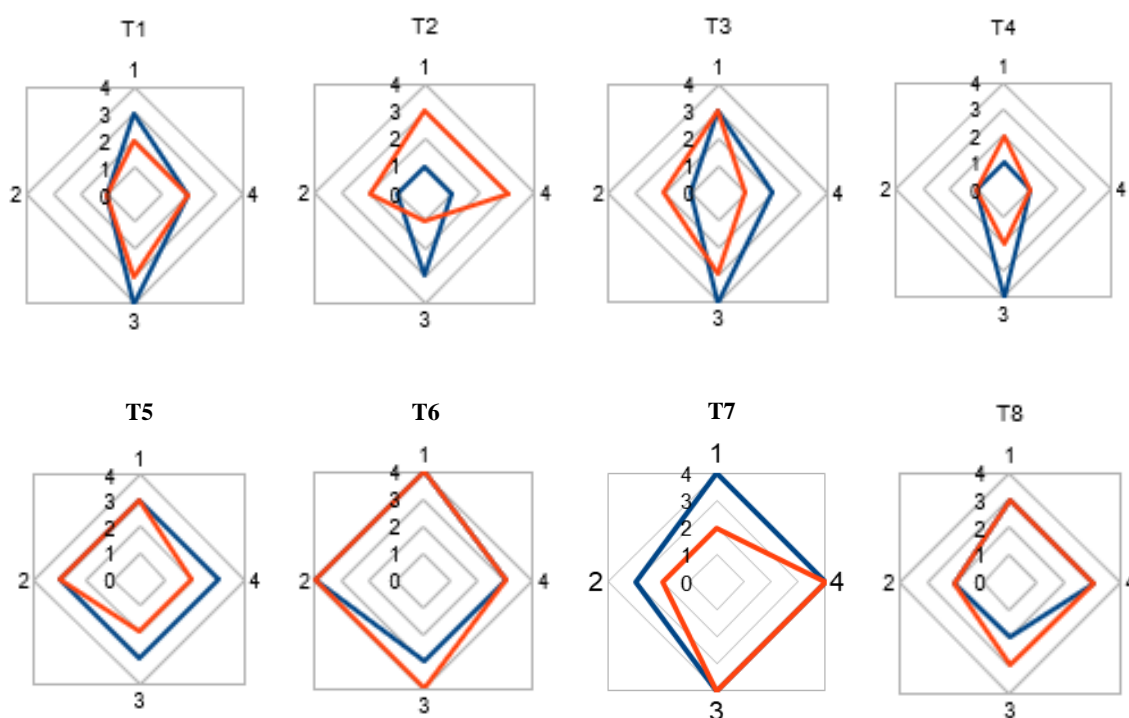
The thinking of the children was supported by the teachers through cooperative activities (6) and problem teaching/learning (1, 3, 5, 7 and 8). Their statements either supported the children's thinking or were used with the purpose of eliciting the right answer (e.g. *How many starlings would fit in here?* – 3; *What is it?* – 4; *Where could he live?* – 5), or as a prompt for more complex answers using higher thinking operations (e.g. *How will you solve it?* – 2; *What do you think?* – 5, 6).

The least encouraged area of the psycho-social aspects by the teachers was the area of *sharing children's opinions*. The most efficient in this category were teachers 5 and 6. The latter supported the children in expressing their own opinions as well as experiences in the discussion circle, in which she encouraged them towards self-evaluation by asking questions like: *What did you succeed in? Are you content? What have you come up with?* Teacher 5 encouraged the children to share their opinions in the joint circle-time by the following question: *Which activity did you like the most?*

Mutual help was supported mainly by teacher 7, for example, by her statements like: *It is fine to give advice. So, give him one more piece of advice. Filip, have you asked your friends if you could borrow the toys? and we could certainly give Kiki a piece of advice.* She was the only one among the eight teachers who praised the children who helped another child, e.g.: *Well, I like to hear that you gave him that piece of advice, that I did not have to come. You did a good job giving him that piece of advice.* She, herself, was the role model for the children by stating things like: *Can I share with someone? Maybe also ask the others?*

3.2.2 The View upon the Teaching Performance of the Selected Teachers

The perspective of the teaching performance of the individual teachers is summarized in Fig. 11. We can see that the individual teachers received varied assessments of the quality of their performance in the area of psycho-social aspects (red graph), as well as in the area of psycho-didactic aspects (blue graph).



Red – Psycho-social aspects: (1) child's thinking, (2) finding out children's opinions, (3) supporting efforts of a child and (4) appraising and requesting mutual help among the children.

Blue – Psycho-didactic aspects: (1) problem learning, (2) opportunities for confronting one's opinion, (3) linking learning with reality and (4) formulating aims.

Figure 11. View on the Selected Aspects of the Individual Preschool Teacher's Performance

The graphs show that the level of fulfilment of the categories in both monitored areas (psycho-social and psycho-didactic) differed individually between the teachers. a higher level of fulfilment was seen with teachers 5–8. a significant difference in fulfilling the categories between the two areas could be seen with teacher 2.

Comparing the teaching performance among the individual teachers enabled us to set up the order (table 7), which we used when measuring them against the findings from the reflective skills of the teachers. The highest level of quality in the monitored aspects was seen with teacher 6, while the lowest was seen with teacher 4.

Table 7

Comparison of the result of the analyses of selected aspects of the teaching performance of the individual teachers

Teacher	Psycho-didactic aspects				Psycho-social aspects				Total	Position
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
1	3	1	4	2	2	1	3	2	18	6.
2	1	1	3	1	3	2	1	3	15	7.
3	3	1	4	2	3	2	3	1	19	5.
4	1	1	4	1	2	1	2	1	13	8.
5	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	22	3.
6	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	29	1.
7	4	3	4	4	2	2	4	4	27	2.
8	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	3	21	4.

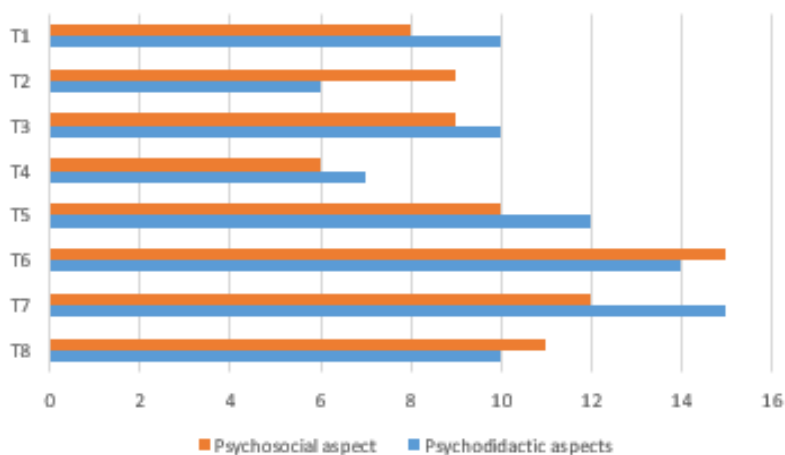


Figure 12. *The view of the selected aspects of preschool teachers' performance*

For a comparison of the teaching performance of the individual teachers in both monitored areas (psycho-social and psycho-didactic) we can use Fig. 12, which shows the summary results of the fulfilment in the individual categories. In the psycho-social area the highest level of quality was found for teacher 6, and the lowest level of quality for teacher 4. In the psycho-didactic area we could see the highest level of quality for teacher 7 and the lowest for teacher 2.

3.3 Results of the Research Aimed at Finding out the Level of Reflective Skills

The following text intends to offer insights into the thinking of preschool teachers as this was analysed from the point of view of cognitive operations according to Bloom's taxonomy (see Píšová, 2005). These operations include description, analysis, evaluation, proposing alternatives, generalisation, and metacognition, described in detail in Table 8. By regularly looking back at one's own experience (initially with support), the teacher (student) learns to think about his/her actions, to identify the educational reality, analyse his/her approaches, evaluate his/her intentions, their implementations as well as his/her own results. In this constantly repeating process, the teacher's reflective skills develop to the level of metacognition, which we consider to be qualitatively the highest. Likewise, we assume that we can designate it as self-reflection as both phenomena have a common denominator, which is auto-regulation. In other words, metacognition (Krykorková & Chvál, 2001), as well as self-reflection (Řehulka, 1997), enable teachers to regulate their thinking and actions towards the prior set aims.

For better clarity the results are recorded in Table 8.

Table 8

The quality of reflection from the point of view of thinking operations

Teacher	Description	Analysis	Evaluation	Alternatives	Generalisation	Metacognition
T 1	X		X			
T 2	X	X		X		
T 3	X	X	X	X		
T 4	X		X			
T 5	X	X	X	X	X	
T 6	X	X	X	X		X
T 7	X	X	X	X	X	X
T 8	X		X	X		

If we look at the table in the horizontal direction, we can see that only one teacher fulfilled all the categories and two teachers reached the threshold of metacognition. Teachers 1 and 4 both operated only in the description and evaluation categories. Their evaluation typically shows the absence of an analysis phase and, when making an assessment on the basis of the video recording, they offered unconscious, intuitive evaluations of the educational situation.

From the vertical point of view, it was positive that most of the teachers were able to propose more effective strategies for reaching the educational aim. However, we could not determine to what extent the teachers would use these strategies in their everyday practice, because the interviewer's questions led them to a deeper insight into their actions and analysis of their approaches, and in some cases, the discovery of a new connection was noticeable.

Sometimes, however, even the research questions did not lead the respondents to a deeper analysis or new proposals or strategies. An example can be found with teacher 4, who described a conflict that had taken place during the video recording: *Fany, yes, he was misbehaving, he was running the car on the table and hurting other children, so I made him sit down at the table.* Nonetheless, when asked by the researcher to describe the feelings of the child, the teacher reacted: *Well, he always cries... I did not have time to deal with it because I had to pay attention to the children at the table...* This example shows the level of action and looking back at the action without adequate analysis. Concurrently, the teacher's direct work with children is a signal that individualisation of education is not sufficiently supported.

In some statements we noticed the presence of several categories simultaneously, for example, description linked with analysis or evaluation or evaluation linked with a proposal for an alternative solution.

We found that some of the teachers used hierarchically higher cognitive operations without using the lower ones (e.g. teachers 1, 4 and 8 were evaluating without any prior analysis). This finding can be interpreted in several ways. One possibility is that the teachers just did not verbalize some thought processes, i.e. they did not express them out loud. Another reason may be that previous levels of cognitive operations, especially the first (description), did not meet the required characteristics (Slavík & Janík, 2007). We assumed that this was the case when the statement of the higher thought operation (evaluation) was very subjective.

When reflecting upon the video recordings, we frequently encountered evaluative statements from the teachers which had either a positive or negative value. The positive evaluation statements by the teachers expressed their satisfaction with their work (e.g. teacher 4: *Everything that I had planned was done successfully*), satisfaction with the behaviour of the children (e.g. teacher 2: *All the children showed interest*; or teacher 7: *I was pleasantly surprised due to the fact that I had thought there would be many negatives, that I would see that the children would behave differently behind my back. And I saw that the children were reacting normally, the way I think they do*) and contentment with the interaction with the children (e.g. teacher 6: *the children reacted wonderfully to me*; or teacher 7: *I used effective communication*; or teacher 8: *I entered the game as their game partner*).

Teachers 5–8 were aware of their strength and their progress in the development of their professional skills. For example, teacher 7 improved her communication by using designated “I statements” when giving feedback to the children and in the change of the organisation of education from whole-class activities to group-activities. They all used theoretical language and its terminology much more frequently, such as pedagogical diagnostics, evaluation, effective communication, competence, etc.

There were also words of dissatisfaction, which in teachers 5–8 related to the realisation that the children were not developing skills in accordance with the target categories. For example, teacher 5: *So, when there is a problem, I try to solve the problem for the children. do not give the children the opportunity to express themselves. I noticed one sequence where they were sort of playing with building blocks, they were putting them together, and there was a disagreement, and I had the tendency to go and settle it too fast...*

The interviews showed that the teachers who have encountered (e.g. in their pre-service teacher training, during their visits to preschool facilities) targeted reflection and some techniques of self-reflection (work with video recordings) showed much greater use of higher levels of cognitive thinking. Pířová (2005) came to the same conclusions in her research.

The results of the analysis of the semi-structured interviews revealed that the reflection level oscillated in teachers 3 and 8 primarily at the practical level, and in teachers 1, 2 and 4 at the lower technical level (Farell, 2004). The critical level was reached by teachers 5, 6 and 7. In the case of teacher 6, we attributed the achievement of the highest level of reflection to her initial teacher education, as she mentioned that she had already used video recordings for self-

reflection while she was at the university. She used three of the levels and she evaluated the efficiency of frontal and group activities: *One really realizes it when you see it on the recording.* In the case of teacher 7, her high level of reflection was attributable partly to her initial teacher education, but also her working environment. In the preschool facility where she works, reflection is promoted and teachers are constantly encouraged to improve the quality of their professional performance through observations (*When she comes to observe, first she wants us to self-evaluate. How we see ourselves. And after that she adds her opinion, or what she liked, or what space for improvement there is. But overall, in everything we talk about she wants to know our opinions, our feelings*).

3.4 Comparing Both Phases of the Research

At this stage of the research, we posed two research questions: (A) whether there is a relationship between the quality of the selected aspects of teacher performance and the level of reflective skills, and (B) whether there are differences in teaching performance and the level of reflection between the teachers who had completed only secondary education and the university graduates.

The following text is structured in accordance with the research questions. In the first step, we will introduce the results of the comparison of the relationship between the quality of the selected aspects of teacher performance and the results of the research focused on the quality of reflection. After this, we will compare the research results between the teachers who had completed secondary teacher education and those who had completed university teacher education.

3.4.1 The Relationship between the Quality of Selected Aspects of Teacher Performance and the Level of Reflective Skills

The nature of an in-depth study is typically associated with a smaller research sample. That is true in this study, which is why it is not possible to compare the results of research focused on the quality of teacher performance and the results of research focused on the quality of reflection quantitatively. Therefore, we compared the results only in the case of the teachers who fulfilled the examined categories of teacher performance to the highest and lowest extent, i.e. teachers 6 and 4. The characteristics of these two teachers were measured against

the characteristics of teachers 7 and 2, so that we could better demonstrate the variability of teacher performance of the individual teachers with the prototype view of quality of a preschool teacher. The reason for selecting these teachers was also the validity of the finding due to the fact that the performance of teacher 7 was likewise extremely high quality, while the performance of teacher 2 was close to the performance of teacher 4.

Teacher 6

Teacher 6 reached the highest level of quality in both monitored areas of teacher performance (see Table 8 and Fig. 12), even though in the categories of *linking learning with reality*, *aims* and *mutual children's help* she did not reach the highest number of points. Her teacher performance was characterized by a high level of support for children in expressing their opinions and experience. She was the only one of the participating teachers who supported children in self-evaluation (*What have you learned? How did you resolve it? What did you succeed in?*). She preferred cooperative group activities and frequently asked children to negotiate with one another (*You have to tell each other*).

Asking open questions, cooperative forms of education and assigning tasks as problem-solving encourages children to use a higher level of cognitive operations and led them to greater autonomy and mutual respect and consideration, as clearly shown in the video recording of the morning activities. The teacher used active listening and positive non-verbal communication. She expressed trust in children (*I feel confident that you will succeed*) and appreciated their performances. Her approach could be described as socio-constructivist.

When reflecting on the video recording, she was able to operationalize the more general aims (*the aim of the group activities was to introduce letters, and, furthermore, there was cooperation among the children and they practised fine motor skills in the context of putting the letters together, and also speech production, as they had to talk it through and also think up the word using a letter they had chosen*).

Her self-reflection reached the critical level (Farell, 2004). as she stated, she used specific techniques of self-reflection, such as, for example, video recordings, which served to verify the effectiveness of the organisation forms, e.g.: *When I take them to the circle, and we are in the circle together, I have twenty-five children, then two children respond and the rest are staring at something. When they are in a smaller group, then all of them have to communicate and when they have to choose their leader, for example, then they have to negotiate. So they*

develop the competences that are needed for that. Video recordings also help her track the development of her own communication over time, e.g.: The first¹⁵ is different, I have to say, I consider it an improvement. I consider it to be a success and even the communication is completely different. So, I think that there I said about a thousand times “excellent” and “you have real skills” and not even once you are succeeding. So, this is where I see the difference, in the communication.

She also uses reflection in action, when it serves to quickly evaluate the situation and to decide to apply a more appropriate alternative approach (*I had planned it in a way, let's say all together in the circle, and then I realized that it is better in a smaller group, so I left them in the smaller group. I realized that the other four groups would not care what words they came up with, and that the activity was much more important in the group than in the class as a whole*).

Teacher 6 achieved the highest score in both the monitored areas (psycho-social as well as psycho-didactic) of teacher performance. Moreover, her reflection proved to be at the highest, critical level. The teacher demonstrated a high level of quality in both her teaching performance and in reflective skills.

Teacher 7

Teacher 7 achieved the highest level of quality of all the monitored teachers in the psycho-didactic area, namely in the category of *aim*. as stated above, she operationalized general educational aims and was the only one who used the evaluation indicators in her work as well. Overall, the level of quality of her teaching performance was evaluated as the second best (see Table 8 and Fig. 12).

What was characteristic for her teaching performance was encouraging the children to help each other (*Here you have Eliška, or there is, for example, Ríša, so try to go to them and ask for advice*). She was the only one who noticed and appreciated the implemented help among the children (*That was a great piece of advice you gave him*). She was also the only teacher who had not used any frontal organisational form of education during the whole course of the morning session. Her teaching included only semi-directed group activities. The children who chose some of the offered activities, did so either on their own or with their friends. In the second case, the activities had the character of cooperative activities.

¹⁵ Note: video recording.

Even though the teaching had not been intentionally planned as cooperative, the teacher frequently encouraged the children to share and to confront their opinions (*Kristýnka, have you said anything to the boys? What about asking Filip?*). She encouraged the children a lot (*Try it one more time.*), but she was also asking them to think and share their opinions and needs (*What would help you?*).

The self-reflection of this teacher reached the critical level. She frequently based the evaluation of strengths upon expert argumentation and she used professional terminology (*I really am using much more effective communication now than in the beginning. The planning is already proper as well as the evaluation*) and she has been thinking about her further development (*I would like to go on a course of diagnostics with Bednářová and Šmardová.*).

Teacher 7 reached the second highest total of point evaluation in both monitored areas (psycho-social as well as psycho-didactic) of her teaching performance. Her reflection reached the highest, critical level. The teacher showed a high level of quality in her teacher performance as well as in her reflective skills.

Teacher 4

Teacher 4 reached the lowest level of quality in both monitored areas of teacher performance (see Table 8 and Fig. 12). Five criteria out of eight were marked as a single point, i.e., she showed very low quality in those aspects of her teaching performance.

A characteristic feature of her performance was whole-class teaching. The children spent most of the time in their morning activities with their teacher in their preschool facility. Even the self-service activities linked with the organisation of their morning snacks were teacher-controlled, as illustrated in the communication of the teacher (*We will go to the toilet and wash our hands. Slowly, and form a queue. Is it clear?*). In her communication, instructions and requirements prevailed (*So, children, sit down.*) with an absence of space for the children to express their own opinions and needs. The questions that the teacher posed were mostly directed towards finding out children's knowledge (*What is it? What do you call it? But mainly what?*). In her interactions with the children, general statements such as *great* and *super* appeared abundantly.

Neither the organisation of the learning/teaching processes nor the communication skills of the teacher invited the children to help each other, cooperate, or share opinions, nor did they encourage the use of higher levels of cognitive operations. Her approach may be described as prevalingly transmissive.

The highest level of quality, which received a score of four points, was achieved in the category of linking learning to real life. The topic in the recorded session was about the then-ongoing Olympic games in Sochi. The interview revealed that she had chosen the topic not only for its topicality, but also based on her knowledge of the children (*I was surprised that the children were watching the Olympic games, and even at night! And how much they knew about it*).

The reflection of the teacher remained at the technical, i.e. the lowest, level, for which the description corresponding with the question of what is happening is typical. Although her reflection included evaluative statements, they were usually only intuitive opinions, unsupported by a quality analysis of the pedagogical phenomena.

Teacher 4 achieved the lowest scores in both the monitored areas (psycho-social and psycho-didactic) of the teacher performance. Also, her reflection oscillated at the lowest, i.e. technical, level. The teacher showed a very low level in both her teaching performance as well as reflective skills.

Teacher 2

The teacher performance of teacher 2 was assessed in half of the categories as the lowest evaluation on the scale, i.e. only one point. Three categories were, on the other hand, allocated three points each on the scale (see Table 8 and Fig. 12). She showed a higher level in the psycho-social area, especially in the support of children's decision-making, that is to say using the higher levels of thinking operations. The support was noticeable, especially in those situations when the children did not know what to do with the set task (create a Christmas wish card), for example. *What more could be there? So, when it does not hold up here, what more, how can you help? What more could you do?* In the course of the monitored morning activities, we could see the teacher's efforts to encourage the children in their mutual interactions (*So you have to give him some advice. Maybe he does not know what the rules are, so, you have to ask*).

The selected content for the teaching or the organisation thereof had not enabled any discovery or creative processing of the tasks into a shape that would have been decided in advance, i.e. which would lead the children to greater creativity and develop their imagination in tandem with other competences. Part of the teaching was dedicated to a whole-class activity that was focused on rehearsing carols with a piano accompaniment.

The reflection of the teacher oscillated at the technical level, as she was lacking in the analysis of the pedagogical situation, and in the evaluation of its efficacy. This teacher showed a high level of uncertainty in reflection, even in one of the first questions: *What have I learned about myself from the video recording? After a short, significantly vague description (So, I can sort of say, that, for example, the approach to the children, that I was really trying to lower my position, that I was trying to talk to them in that way), she said that it was different in front of the camera than in reality, and then she said: I don't know what to tell you.*

On the other hand, she was one of just a few teachers who talked about what was going on inside her, what she was thinking about within the stimulated recall: *I said to myself, it would be right to let him say what he, himself, wanted. However, on the other hand there was the plan or aim to make the Christmas wish card, so I was hesitating about what would be right and how.* Clearly, the question of the “rightness” was the reason why the teacher was not able to evaluate her strengths and professional development. She kept coming back to the topic of what was right (*Well, I have been fighting with that all the time, to properly fulfil the aim or if it is right to let the children be*). This lack of professional self-confidence, demonstrated in the desire for unambiguous instructions or recipes, is usually typical for novice teachers. Teacher 2, however, was, in the research sample, one of the most senior teachers, professionally speaking, i.e. with five-year experience.

At the end of the interview the teacher mentioned that she should free herself of her strict insistence on “her plan” and give the children more space for independence and creativity. This statement was classified as a proposal for an alternative, however, there was no preceding objective recording of the phenomena of the educational reality with analysis and evaluation, which would signify understanding of what had happened.

In the case of teacher 2, the results of both the monitored variables, teacher performance and reflection, were of a very low level of quality.

3.4.2 *Differences in the Teaching Performance and the Level of Reflection between the Teachers who had Completed Only Secondary Education and the University Graduates*

The findings on the quality of teaching performance suggest that teachers 1-4, who had completed only secondary teacher education, showed lower overall category fulfilment (see Table 8 and Fig. 12). Due to the small research sample, the findings cannot be safely extrapolated into a generalisation, as the level of the individual teachers in the selected aspects (categories) differed significantly. For example, in the category *linking learning with real life* three teachers with secondary teacher education achieved the highest score.

However, the four teachers who had completed only secondary education hardly ever demonstrated achievement in two categories, i.e. *the opinions of the children and confronting opinions among the children*. These teachers, in favouring whole-class organisation and individual fulfilment of the tasks, did not enable children to share their opinions, negotiate or argue regarding their decisions, etc.; moreover, the teachers' communication skills did not support the children in sharing their own opinions or needs.

More marked differences between the two groups of teachers were observed at the level of reflection (see Table 8). Half of the secondary school educated teachers oscillated at the technical level, and the second half at the practical level. Their reflections showed lower levels of cognitive operations when compared with the university graduates. as a rule, what was lacking were proposals of new options and strategies that could be used to educate children, and they also showed a certain sense of quandary regarding how to interpret what they saw in the video recording.

In the case of the secondary school educated teachers, a significant phenomenon appeared on the surface, which we called *uncertainty*. For example: *Maybe something can be done in another way* (1); *I did not know how to react* (2); *I do not know, but I think that I have a nice relationship with the children* (3); *I was searching for what was right* (4).

In both groups, the teachers showed an effort to explain why they could not fully meet the requirements of contemporary preschool education as it pertains to the personal development of a child. For example,: *The right thing is to let children create on their own but I had an aim...* (2); *We cannot do it because we have a lot of children...* (3); *I know that*

there is a trend to eat snacks gradually but I do not find it convenient... (5); I cannot do it another way, the children cannot be left alone... (7).

Both groups, i.e. the teachers who had completed only secondary education as well as the university graduates related the criticism of their work to their professional skills, for example, the criticism of problem-solving (7), or the criticism of prioritizing themselves over the children (5: *I sometimes have quick reactions in the sense of advising the child, explaining, by which I do not enable them to discover, create, solve...*) or the criticism of their communication skills (1: *I do not speak as I should*, 3: *I keep using the same words*). The teachers who had completed only secondary education were more concerned with themselves (*I see myself differently, I am static, nothing much...*). Teacher 1 was also critical of the children (*The children were horribly noisy*).

Suggestions for improvement that the teachers thought about were interesting. Usually, they were not based on the identified shortcomings. This finding was observed in both the groups. Teachers 1–3 expressed their desire to motivate the children better, to lower their posture, to be more positive and to give the children feedback. Teacher 7 wanted to lower her posture more to the children (*it must be unpleasant for them*), teacher 6 wanted to use description more and teacher 8 wanted to broaden her theoretical knowledge in the field of educational diagnostics and evaluation.

3.5 Summary and Discussion

The research focused on monitoring the quality of teaching of preschool teachers in the selected areas and profiling the quality of their cognitive operations within their reflection. Its aim was to ascertain whether there is a relationship between these variables and whether there are differences between those who had completed only secondary education and the university graduates.

When summarizing and interpreting the results, we worked with the information in tables 5, 7 and 8 and the related figures 9–12. First, we dealt with the findings related to the quality of teaching performance and then with the quality of reflection. After that, we moved on to comparing them. All the results were looked at from the point of view of comparing the teachers who had completed only secondary education and the university graduates.

The results focusing on the **quality of the teaching performance** brought findings on the selected psycho-social and psycho-didactic aspects of the work of a preschool teacher. The nature of the communication and the processes of constructing the content influence the quality of the processes of educating children. Learning which takes place in a preschool classroom is characterized by the level of quality of a teacher's performance (e.g. Janík et al., 2013, p. 162; Píšová et al., 2013, p. 27). That is why these phenomena became our subject of investigation.

The best performance in both the groups (the teachers who had completed only secondary education and the university graduates) was achieved in the **psycho-didactic area** in the category *linking learning with real life* (No. 3) (see fig. 12). We considered this finding very positive, as it is in accordance with the specifics of teaching/learning of preschool children (see chapter 3.1.1) as well as with the requirements of *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education* (2018, p. 8), which the teacher uses in situations that enable the children to be learning "here and now".

Another positive outcome was that most of the teachers (except for teacher 4) deflect from whole-class activities and create opportunities for learning in smaller groups. A less positive finding was that especially the teachers who had completed only secondary education had problems supporting children in mutual sharing of opinions as well as confronting opinions, which is the core of the socio-constructivist approaches. In this aspect, we found the greatest differences between the two groups of the teachers (see tab. 7). All the teachers who had completed only secondary education received only one point each in the category of *confronting opinions* (No. 2). Even though teachers 1–3 were offering activities during the monitored morning programme to both individuals as well as groups (i.e., they deflected from the frontal way of work), they were not able to motivate the children to such a level of cooperation that would develop their communication, social, problem solving and other competences. The problems in cooperative learning/teaching are also highlighted by the school inspectorate (Czech School Inspection 2015, p. 20) in their annual report: *The negative finding was the reality of the lingering stagnation in using cooperative teaching/learning. [...] Cooperation in a group is based on mutual cooperation of children in fulfilling a common task and it was represented in the teaching only by 2.6% of the activities.*

The positives that the aforementioned interaction and cooperative learning bring to children have been proved by international research studies. For example, Shonkoff and Philips (2000,

in Litjens & Taguma, 2010, p. 32) claim that “interacting with peers and stimulation of independent thinking and self-regulation have been found to positively impact on children’s IQ and language competences as well as their social skills.”

We have recorded significant differences also in the ability of the teachers to formulate the aims, i.e. manifest the aims in keeping with the needs of the children and the selected content of education in such a way that the teaching would encompass as many educational areas as possible. In the case of the teachers who had completed university education, we recorded skills leading towards the anticipation of the events in the classroom, as well as supporting more long-term planning (in wider contexts). Their planning as well as implementation of the plan was, as a rule, directed intentionally towards developing the personality of the children. Characteristic for the teachers who had completed only secondary education was aiming the activities at the content rather than the objectives of education.

Another situation was monitored in the **psycho-social area**. In the categories of this area, the level of quality in both the groups of the teachers was closer to parity (see tab. 8). More obvious differences were visible between the individual teachers than across the groups (secondary school and university graduates). These findings led us to consider to what level social skills are influenced by the personality traits of the individual teachers. These reflections are strengthened by the results of the study focused on the motivation for becoming a preschool teacher (Wiegerová & Gavora, 2014, p. 522). Results showed that the students of the programme for preschool teachers usually have a strong emotional relationship to children. Emotionality brings sensitivity and empathy, which is the condition for understanding the perspectives and needs of children”. The authors also claim that the less positive aspect is the fact that “strong emotionality can displace control over rationality” (Wiegerová & Gavora, 2014, p. 531). The above stated suggests the need for more intuitive thinking, which is contrary to the concept of a preschool teacher as a professional (see details in chapter 1.4.2).

The results imply that the teachers who had completed university education achieved in their teaching performance a higher level of quality in almost all aspects. It seems that better preparedness in the psycho-didactic area could provide more confidence to the teachers who had completed university education, and thus release their mental capacity towards a greater focus upon the child, empathy, etc. The findings are consistent with some international research studies, which provided information on the fact that teachers who had completed

university education are more perceptive towards the children and have more positive interactions with them (e.g. Howes et al., 2003), but can also create a rich, stimulating environment, which leads to better educational results (e.g. Litjens & Taguma, 2010).

The researched **quality of reflection** was assessed based on the sequence of cognitive operations, which were identified in the statements of the preschool teachers. We are fully aware of the fact that it was difficult for the teachers to reflect on their performances; in some of them we identified problems with realizing their strengths and weaknesses (e.g. teacher 2). The higher level of quality, designated as a critical level of reflection, was identified in those teachers who had completed university education.

They were able to argue their professional outcomes as demonstrated by the performances of the children, based on the *Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education*. The teachers who had completed only secondary education usually did not get to the level of proposing alternative solutions, and none of them achieved the level of generalisation and metacognition. Three of them oscillated on the technical level, and only teacher 3 achieved a higher level, i.e. practical reflection.

Even though it was a small research sample, the results were in keeping with other studies, e.g. the study by Pihlaja and Holst, who reached the conclusion that pedagogical employees¹⁶ who work in preschool facilities think about their work mainly at the technical level, and only 1% at the critical level (Pihlaja & Holst, 2013, p. 188).

The mutual comparison of the results of the individual teachers was assessed from the point of view of the prototype understanding of the quality of a preschool facility, and it was demonstrated in the profiles of the teachers (2, 4, 6, and 7). These teachers were selected based on the divergent results of their teaching performance. The results showed that in the cases of the teachers whose performance showed high quality, a high level of reflective competence was also present, and, in contrast, in the case of the teachers with the low teaching performance, we identified reflection at the lowest level.

The area of the relationship of the teaching performance and the level of reflection is a currently under-researched phenomenon, and therefore it is difficult to find support for this

¹⁶ The research sample was comprised of 54 % preschool teachers, a quarter of whom were special education teachers, and the rest were social teachers, or unqualified workers, most of them with only secondary education (Pihlaja & Holst, 2013).

claim in an adequate number of studies. Contrary to this, Ripley (2010) reached the opposite conclusions, that it is not reflection but stamina/grit that is decisive for high teaching performance. The results of the research suffered due to the selected procedures and aims, which could have been the reason for the differences in the conclusions.

The conclusions were consistent with the results of the research in the field (see Pířová et al., 2013, pp. 40–44), or they corresponded with the prototype view, in the sense of how a teacher thinks about children, contents, educational strategies as well as him/herself, which is then reflected in their actions. In other words, in high level quality teachers, there is a high level of conformity/concordance between the outcomes of the professional insight, which includes also deep reflection, and the outcomes in the form of actions in educational situations.

It can be stated that the results signal differences in the “professional” and “non-professional” thinking of preschool teachers, which can be seen (a) in the planning of their future actions, i.e., the anticipation of the events in the classroom, which differs from a layperson's approach to situations when they occur, on the basis of intuition or according to recommendations from others, (b) in the ability to make conscious decisions regarding the approach to and concerning educational procedures, which are targeted towards developing the personality of the child and for which the teacher has his/her personal responsibility and (c) the skill of reflection, i.e. awareness, naming and explaining practical experience via terminology shared in the professional circuit (*lege artis*), in other words sharing how the teachers understand what they do and how they reinforce their actions.

It is clear, regarding reflection, that with mere self-awareness which is not underpinned by a deeper analysis, i.e. is based on only subjective theories, we cannot assume that there would be more significant changes in the actions of the teacher, especially in more complex situations linked with the individualisation of education.

CONCLUSION

This publication came into being with the intent to contribute to the international discussion on the professionalism of preschool teachers and their preparation for the profession. This intention also partially influenced the content as well as the structure of the whole book. It reflects experience with the situation in the Czech preschool education blended with the outline of the international situation.

The analysis of the state-of-the-art of Czech research in the field of the work of preschool teachers showed shifts in the paradigms, especially in the aims and the selected methods of research. When compared to the international situation, Czech research into the profession of preschool teachers is sporadic and does not provide a complex picture of the quality of teaching performance and the implementation of curricular reform. The book presents various models of teacher quality and compares various concepts, as well as incorporating empirical findings, mainly from abroad.

The theoretical position resulted in developing a theoretical prototype view of a preschool teacher. The model was taken with minor adaptations from Czech authors, who created it on the basis of their research with English language teachers (Píšová et al., 2013). The model offers a set of certain aspects of quality, which can be achieved by individual teachers to a differing, personal extent. This model is, therefore, not based upon the normative approach of monitoring a teacher's quality, which is usually built on a precisely defined set of professional activities or skills. The model helped us to discover the variability of a preschool teacher's performance, albeit only in selected aspects. Our point of view has been influenced to a great extent by the socio-constructivist form of preschool education. Concurrently, we have shown that there are individual differences among the teaching performances of teachers, which is in keeping with the prototype view of a preschool teacher. The subsequent comparison illustrated that the quality of performance as well as the level of reflection was higher among teachers who had completed university education.

The prototype view of quality of a preschool teacher can be considered as one benefit of this publication, and we assume that it could be further developed towards its application in preschool education, empirically verified and used in the discussion surrounding preparatory education for preschool teachers.

The greatest benefit of this text is, in our opinion, in the finding of the relationship between the level of reflection and the level of professional performance. It therefore contributes to the support of the reflective model of pre-service teacher training for preschool teachers.

This study has its limitations, mainly the restrictively small research sample. The number of teachers was low, which is why it was not possible to safely draw more general conclusions. Another limitation could be the analysis of the video recording from only one day of the morning activities in a preschool. More recorded sessions could have shown the characteristics of the teaching performance of the individual teachers better.

Even though there are certain limitations in the work, we trust that the book will be beneficial for the discussion on the professionalism of a preschool teacher and on tertiary education as a prerequisite for quality teaching performance. The stated results signal that it would be important to speak in the research discourse about the extent to which the development of self-reflection as well as teaching performance are influenced by the institutional context, including the support thereof. The research indicated that the quality of the teaching performance is linked with the quality of self-reflection, and that the institutional context influences both. One of the fundamental topics which should be dealt with empirically is the concept and quality of preparatory education at the tertiary level – its aims and contents as well as processes.

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SUMMARY

The attention of school policy has turned in the recent years more frequently to pre-school education and, naturally, also to the profession connected with the pre-school education, i.e. pre-school teacher. The heart of this publication is, therefore, the theme of the pre-school teacher profession and questions regarding the conception of the pre-service training in this profession.

The first chapter analyses mainly the changes in Czech pre-school education in connection with the socio-political and cultural changes, which reflect the postmodern thinking influenced by the technicist approach of humans to the world and the economic globalization. The presented knowledge on the profession of the pre-school teacher is dealt with in the second chapter.

The third chapter presents an empirical study. The results point out that there are individual differences among the teaching performance of teachers, which corresponded with the prototype model of a pre-school teacher introduced in the theoretical part. The subsequent comparison indicates that the quality of performance, as well as the level of reflection, is higher in the university educated teachers. The findings brought suggestions for further research, however, also opened discussion on the professionalism of a pre-school teacher and the need for tertiary education as a necessary pre-requisite for a quality teaching performance.

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