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Preschool teacher in modern educational strategy

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PRESCHOOL TEACHER IN MODERN EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, we deal with a huge educational change also in the education of teachers. Teacher, whose role is to support the child's development so that it can function productively and creatively in a rapidly changing world, faces many new tasks which require modern methods and pedagogical strategies.

Realization of those mottos in preschool education is based on teacher's acceptance of reflective and open thinking in terms of understanding the purposes and the course of education processes through the use of innovative strategies and parenting styles. The main strategy of kindergarten is playful activity. Under the concept of teaching strategy, we mean "general objectives, tools and methods prepared by the teacher in order to achieve the best educational effects" (Krzyżewska, 1998, p. 9). It is a more specific concept than teaching model, however it includes many learning methods, grouping specific techniques (Krzyżewska, 1998, p. 20).

According to Gołębnik, teaching strategy is consciously directed by a teacher as it involves psychology-based learning methods for children. **Strategy** is a concept aimed at searching for an answer "why?," while **method** is a concrete indication addressing the question "how?" (Gołębnik, 2004, p. 172–187).

In the light of modern psychology, one indicates four models of human learning and the resulting teaching strategies:

- Behavioral model of learning through the use of external reinforcements (conditioning mechanisms, punishment and awards, modeling) – is an essence of the so-called direct, programmable learning through simulations.
- Learning based on active processing of information (assimilation, generation) is stimulated by such learning resources as: providing and explaining information, lecture, talk, description, narration, inductive learning model, mnemotechniques, cognitive maps, asking questions, synectics and metaphors, evaluation and troubleshooting.
- Learning in collaboration or synergy (collective intelligence and peer learn-

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ing) is used in such learning strategies as working in pairs, learning in small groups, productions.

- Holistic, comprehensive learning (integration of emotional and mental sides of personality) – the use of imagination and experiment, “media transposition”, conscious perception of the situation and its active processing, and therapy-based forms such as learning with advisor (Gołębniak, 2004, p. 173).

In pedagogical practice, these strategies are not mutually exclusive, quite the opposite they often occur in parallel.

THE WORKING METHODS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Opinion provided by Kotarbiński states that

this is an idea considered in advance for the application in numerous and similar cases. The concept of the method is therefore inherently associated with the idea of the plan, and simultaneously – with the concept of the goal of action (Kotarbiński, 1957, p. 430).

Modernized concept of teaching method is presented by Krzyżewska, for whom the method is

objectively and systematically used method of working with a pupil enabling assimilation of knowledge, development of skills, and use them in practice (Krzyżewska, 1998, p. 39).

According to Okoń, the method is

tried and systematically used subset of teachers’ and pupils’ actions consciously realized in order to induce complex changes in pupils’ “personality” (Okoń, 2003, p. 246).

Basic methods of work in preschool pedagogy consider the characteristics of psyche of a young child and its developmental regularity, and cover both the education and training process.

In the seventies, taking into account multilateral concept of teaching Mystkowska (1976) proposed the division of learning methods into: handing, problem-based, valorization and practical methods. Since this concept is based on diverse methods, it affects child’s personality in a multilateral direction. The division mainly includes the degree of activity of pupils and teachers, impact on particular senses and different methods of gaining the knowledge.

In many kindergartens, methods described widely in pedagogic literature by M. Kwiatowska (1985), Z. Topińska (1978), I. Dudzińska (1983), M. Dunin-Wąsowicz (1980), are commonly used taking into account the division into active methods, verbal and review.

THE ASSUMPTIONS OF A MODERN EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY IN KINDERGARTEN

The need to adapt pedagogic teaching practice to changing economic conditions and development of societies, has led to many changes in teaching.

The experience of teachers and the possibility of exchanging experiences faster than ever (thanks to information technology) resulted in a new quality of the teaching–learning process. Currently, pedagogy is concentrated on individuality of a pupil, and one of the trend of changes is wider inclusion of exercise sets into the teaching programs, aimed at creative spotting, identifying and solving problems, which promote constant learning (Denek, 1998, p. 71). Currently, modern Europe is aimed at such education in which pupils will have time for:

- work – as a source and the price of success;
- thinking – being a source of strength;
- party – which is the secret of youth;
- reading – which is a base of knowledge;
- courtesy – which is a gateway to happiness;
- dreams – paving a way to the stars;
- love – which is the true beauty of life;
- joy – the music of the soul (Denek, 1998, p. 42–43).

The modern concept of preschool education is therefore aimed at comprehensive development of the child's personality, manifested in the intellectual, emotional, volitional, physical, social, cognitive sphere, in the artistic creativity and aesthetic sensibility, finding of appropriate ways to fulfill individual needs of the child. One should emphasize the need to acknowledge the natural tendency of development, expressed in self-activity of child.

As previously mentioned, a natural form of child's activity, its need and driving force behind the development of personality, is fun. In addition to fun, self-activity is also manifested in the independent, spontaneous fulfilling of cognitive curiosity, observing the environment, asking questions, responding to nature, literature and art (Klim-Klimaszewska, 2010, p. 22–23).

In the latest concept of preschool education, the issue of creative education is increasingly appearing. In constantly changing world, it is a need and challenge – to educate human creativity, activate and support mechanisms of creative thinking of pupil, develop creative optics of looking at the world as something which can be changed and transformed, through different education activities. This one can develop individuals “open to multidimensional world,” capable to offer new unusual solutions, surprise with innovative ideas and simultaneously capable of collaborating in a group (Sajdak, 2008, p. 7). It determines the need for wider use of problem-based and seeking methods when working with a child.

Currently, teaching offers teachers not only traditional teaching methods, but also a wide range of modern methods, adapted to the new educational situation in which teachers and their pupils are involved in.

Klim-Klimaszewska (2010), as an important element of preparing teachers to work with children of preschool age, highlights a wide range of methods applied and their flexible selection depending on the group of children, situation and the desired effect of work. In turn, Kameduła represents a view that the frequency of practical use of these or other teaching methods – learning, is subordinated to the existing “specific trend.” The author cites arguments, that efficiency, effectiveness of various methods requires personal involvement from the teacher and taking into account the objectives, learning content, as well as the trend and the rules responsible for the education process and inclusion of a base education tools (Kameduła, 1998).

ACTIVATING METHODS IN THE WORK OF A KINDERGARTEN TEACHER

Along with occurrence of new teaching strategies, completely different methods and techniques emphasizing the use of mind of children and the ability for self-learning, there is a need for clarifying concepts on teaching–learning process and formation of new typologies and classifications.

One of the classification of activating methods resulting from the problem-based strategy was proposed by Krzyżewska. These methods are specific in terms of activity of learning subject, which exceeds the activity of learning subject in a situation in which a child, through involvement in self-solving of the problem, discovers new knowledge and relationships between information which has already been gained (Szlosek, 1995, p. 100). Catalog of methods and techniques created by Krzyżewska (1998, p. 20) is adapted to the ability of younger children development and is successfully used also in preschool education. Krzyżewska highlighted the importance of existence of multiple methodical possibilities, as in this diversity, she observes the advantages for teachers – safety of achieving the goal of education and the possibility of their flexible use. Activating methods and techniques are included within methods resulting from modern model of education, which was mentioned earlier, seeking model and collaborative learning model. She proposes cataloging also those according to the objective of application, pointing the fact that each method and technique, can be used for different purposes. She specifies such methods as: integrative formation and creation of concepts, hierarchization, creative problem solving, collaborative working, evaluation, creative thinking, group decision making, discussion, accelerated learning, diagnostic, planning, educational games.

MATERIAL AND RESEARCH METHODS

As indicated by the pedagogy teaching practice confirmed by the studies (Wilgocka-Okoń, 2003, p. 132), preschool teachers do not prefer this group of methods, preferring traditional teaching methods, even though the period of preschool education should in particular rely on the self-activity of a child.

In order to verify this opinion, studies were aimed at evaluation whether teachers know and use activating methods to some extent assessing which factors determine the level of their familiarity and frequency of use. These factors include professional work experience and the type of preschool institution.

The study involved 158 female teachers from kindergartens in Bydgoszcz: public (86 individuals) and private (72 individuals). Taking into account work experience, more than half of the respondents (84 individuals) are female teachers with long-standing work experience (16 years or more). Quite a large group (36 individuals) covered female teachers with long work experience (11–15 years). A smaller group (22 individuals) covered female teachers with short work experience (1–5 years), and only few of them (16) with intermediate work experience (6–10 years).

The data on knowledge and use of activating methods in the work of preschool female teachers were collected based on a diagnostic survey with the use of questionnaire for teachers.

RESULTS ANALYSIS

At the beginning, one established whether in method catalogue, one can find activating methods and if so, whether just few or more are used and what type of institution and work experience differentiate this resource.

Table 1. Activating methods in the catalogue of methods of teachers under study

Presence of activating methods in the catalogue	Institution type		Work experience			
	public %	private %	short %	intermediate %	long %	long-standing %
None	0	0	0	0	0	0
Few	36.1	30.5	27.3	12.5	47.3	33.3
Many	63.9	69.5	72.7	87.5	52.7	66.7

Source: study of author.

It was observed, that work experience differentiates respondents in terms of the presence of activating methods in the catalog. A vast majority of teachers involved

in the study with intermediate work experience (87.5%), possesses diverse activating methods in its catalog. The remaining groups of teachers did not reach such a high score, though in all, the results exceeded half of the size of the group, only among teachers with long experience, it was a little over half (52.7%). While as it turned out, nearly half of the teachers (47.3%) with long experience, possess only few activating methods in the catalog.

The type of institution did not affect the application frequency of activating methods by teachers. In both types of institutions, one reported a significant increase in the percentage (63.9% and 69.5%) of teachers with different activating methods in its catalog. The next stage of the research was to determine the level of knowledge of the particular activating method. Based on the answers provided, it was found that integrative methods (77.2%) and methods of defining terms (55.1%) are well-known by the vast majority of all respondents. Methods of hierarchization (19.6%) and diagnostic methods (18.4%) are not known by a vast majority of respondents.

Analyzing the results of study in terms of the type of institution that employs the respondents, it can be found that in public preschools, higher proportion of teachers perfectly knows methods derived from seven groups of activating methods in comparison to private preschools (methods of troubleshooting, evaluation, discussion, creative thinking, deciding within the group, accelerated learning and teaching games).

Taking into account work experience, it appeared that most methods are known by teachers with long work experience, subsequent score was given for female respondents with intermediate work experience while the worse scores were given for female teachers with short work experience.

Knowledge of different activating methods does not guarantee their use when working with children. The advantage of activating methods is the ability to use them during various educational activities. From the pedagogical practice, it appears that it is possible to plan activities with children so that during one day, these methods can be used even several times. Of course, this is a conscious choice of a teacher, not a top-down educational establishment. As so, how often do teachers enrolled in the study use activating methods in their work? The answer to this question constitutes a subject for further analysis of the data collected.

One used an indicator of the frequency of methods' use taking into account four levels: **often**, when the teacher uses activating methods once a week or once a day, **rare** (once every two weeks), **occasionally** (once a month), **does not use**.

Table 2. Frequency of using activating methods by the teachers involved in the study

Frequency of use	Institution type		Work experience			
	public %	private %	short %	intermediate %	long %	long-standing %
Does not use	11.6	13.9	13.6	12.5	5.55	15.5
Occasionally	4.7	6.9	0	0	5.55	8.3
Rare	7.0	18.1	22.7	18.75	13.9	7.1
Frequent	76.7	61.1	63.7	68.75	68.75	69.1

Source: study of author.

From the data obtained in the survey, it results that the largest group of teachers using activating methods is often represented by a vast majority of public institutions' employees (76.7%). In the "often" category, there is 43 teachers (50%) who use activating methods every day. Among the teachers of public institutions, one reports a small proportion of those who rarely use activating methods (7%) and negligible proportion of the ones, who use them occasionally, while the percentage of teachers who do not use them is low (11.6%).

It was found, that teachers from private institutions who often implement activating methods account for the majority(61.1%), and among them, there are 19 teachers (26.4%) who use these methods every day, a fairly large proportion (18.1%) who use them rarely and a small proportion who use them occasionally (6.9%). The proportion of teachers who does not use them is small (13.9%).

In terms of the frequency of use of the activating methods, taking into account work experience of teachers enrolled in the study, it can be noted that in all intervals, the vast majority of teachers uses these methods frequently, while the largest percentage (75%) of teachers were found in the group with long work experience. In the "often" category, there are 19 teachers (52%) using activating methods every day. Teachers with long work experience also showed the lowest, non-insignificant proportion of not using these methods (5.5%) and the same proportion applies them occasionally. The 13.9% of teachers from this group rarely use these methods.

In the remaining intervals, the proportion of those using activating methods frequently, is significant and is estimated at 63.7% among teachers with short work experience (including 36.4% who use these methods every day), 68.7% in the group with intermediate experience (25% of teachers use these methods every day) and 69.1% of teachers with long-standing work experience (including 36.9% of teachers using these methods every day). One found a large proportion of teachers rarely using activating method in a group with short (22.7%), intermediate (18.75%) work experience, and only a small proportion (7.1%) among respondents with long-

-standing work experience. Within these three groups of teachers, one found similar, small proportion of those who do not use activating methods (from 12.5% to 15.5%, respectively).

The study results presented lead to the conclusion that the activating methods are often used by the vast majority of teachers (69.7%). The highest proportion of those using activating methods “often” can be found among public institution teachers (76.7%), and half of them use them every day. The highest proportion of using activating methods “often” is observed among teachers with long-standing work experience (75%), and among them, more than half (52.8%) use them every day. In subsequent section, a detailed analysis of the use of particular activating methods by teachers is provided.

Table 3. Summary of frequency of using particular activating methods by respondents

Activating methods	Institution type		Work experience			
	public %	private %	short %	intermediate %	long %	long-standing %
Integrative	73.3	70.8	59.1	25.0	80.5	81.0
Work in collaboration	32.6	38.9	50.0	18.7	50.0	28.6
Create and define terms	52.4	55.5	50.0	56.2	66.7	48.8
Creative problem solving	52.3	45.9	45.4	25.0	61.1	50.0
Hierarchization	11.6	13.9	9.0	6.2	44.5	1.2
Evaluative	46.5	30.5	27.3	25.0	72.2	30.9
Diagnostic	27.9	29.2	18.1	12.5	41.6	28.6
Discussive	32.6	27.8	40.9	6.2	41.6	31.0
Creative thinking	47.7	32.0	54.5	25.0	52.7	34.5
Planning	40.7	34.7	31.8	25.0	47.2	38.1
Group decision making	46.6	41.7	27.3	18.7	69.5	42.9
Faster learning	52.3	41.6	45.5	18.7	69.5	44.0
Didactic games	60.5	18.1	36.4	31.3	58.3	37.0

Source: study of author.

In the table mentioned above (table 3), one clearly observes that teachers enrolled in the study are characterized by great diversity in terms of the use of activating methods, however there is a trend in the frequent use of integrating methods by almost all groups. Quite often, respondents use methods of creating and defining concepts and creative problem solving. Subsequently, one uses methods of group decision making type, accelerated learning, creative thinking and evaluative methods.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

To sum up this stage of the study, it can be concluded that the vast majority of preschool teachers moderately know, but often use activating methods and among the respondents, more than a half use activating methods every day. Moreover, it was found that the length of work experience in the teaching profession and the type of institution, in which the respondents work, are important in the use of various groups of activating methods. As it turned out, teachers who “often” use different groups of activating methods predominantly come from public institutions and possess long work experience.

The group of integrative methods is the best known and most frequently used by respondents, while hierarchization methods are the least known and used methods.

One should therefore make an effort to approximate the emphasized activating methods for teachers, indicated as unknown by most respondents (in terms of teachers involved in the study, these are hierarchization and diagnostic methods). Due to the developmental possibilities of a young child, one should popularize the ability to make modifications of these methods, adapting their application to the needs and abilities of the individual preschool child. It is worth to spread positive effects of the use of activating methods on child’s development observed by teachers (especially among those who reluctantly and rarely use them at work).

Among children, one observes higher interest towards learning in comparison to the use of traditional methods. Using activating methods, the teacher provides children conditions which facilitate acquirement of new knowledge, development of their own ideas, better communication, use of their creative potential. Joint action, participation in the activities of the group, characteristic for this group of methods, significantly affects the intrinsic motivation of a child to explore the environment.

Thanks to own activity during problem solving, as well as the need to undertake discussion with others, one observed an increase in the concentration of attention and child’s involvement. It is extremely important for effective learning (Łaguna, 1996). Many practitioners indicate numerous advantages of using activating methods. Particularly important is the favorable climate for action which should be achieved, the opportunity to exchange experiences without any stress, as its safety is not disturbed, and further improved relationship between children, the possibility of talking, negotiation, discussion, building of adequate self-image or the ability to self-realization.

One emphasizes the therapeutic advantages in supporting the development of less talented and shy children (Folejewska & Zarzycka, 2005). These are certainly advantages from which current teachers-practitioners in the changing educational reality, should often learn from using the catalog of activating methods.

Concluding the considerations above it can be stated that many of the teachers surveyed try to correspond with a current trend of modernity and find the most effective education strategy resulting from contemporary changes in early childhood

education. Child's education should be associated with multilateral activity, therefore teachers enthusiastically use the activating education strategy, based on constructivist learning theory. The study indicates that activating strategy application requires a broad knowledge and an ability to conduct classes with the use of activating methods. Not always did the declared willingness to use activating methods correspond to their perfect knowledge. In the modern system of teacher education, there already emerged classes in the course of which students explore contemporary trends and tendencies in early childhood education. Knowing the activating methods directory and acquiring the ability to use them, will contribute to a more conscious and effective implementation of such methods into educational practice by a modern teacher.

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Keywords: preschool teacher, preschool education, activating methods

Abstract: In the article, one demonstrated a modern concept of preschool education expressed in the self-activation of a child. One analyzed the use of activating methods by a preschool teacher, resulting from problematic strategy. The use of activating methods stimulates a child to involve itself in independent problem solving, which provides new knowledge and discovery of new links with the knowledge already gained. The study involved 158 female teachers. The data on knowledge and the use of activating methods in work with preschool children was collected based on a questionnaire. Based on their analysis, it was found that activating methods are moderately known, however often used by the vast majority of respondents.

NAUCZYCIEL PRZEDSZKOLA W NOWOCZESNEJ STRATEGII EDUKACYJNEJ

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel przedszkola, edukacja przedszkolna, metody aktywizujące

Streszczenie: W artykule ukazano współczesną koncepcję wychowania przedszkolnego wyrażającą się w aktywizacji własnej dziecka. Poddano analizie wykorzystanie przez nauczyciela przedszkola metod aktywizujących wynikających ze strategii problemowej. Stosowanie metod aktywizujących pobudza dziecko do zaangażowania się w samodzielne rozwiązywanie problemów, co prowadzi do zdobywania przez nie nowej wiedzy i odkrywania nowych powiązań z wiedzą już zdobytą. W badaniu wzięło udział 158 nauczycielek. Dane dotyczące znajomości i wykorzystania metod aktywizujących w pracy z dzieckiem przedszkolnym zebrano w oparciu o kwestionariusz ankiety dla nauczyciela. Na podstawie ich analizy stwierdzono, że zdecydowana większość badanych zna przeciętnie, ale często wykorzystuje metody aktywizujące.