

# Mariola Świdarska

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## A Nursery School as an Institution Supporting Parents in Raising their Childr

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Mariola Świdarska  
Academy of Management in Lodz, Poland

## **A Nursery School as an Institution Supporting Parents in Raising their Children**

### **1. Introduction**

School counselors and teachers share the view that the initial years of children's lives have a significant influence on their development. The upbringing is a complex process fostered not only by carefully planned form teacher's actions but also by varied family, environmental and peer factors. This is a family environment that influences the child's upbringing process the most and it shapes the child's character. A family introduces a child into a social life (Cudak, 1995).

An educational aspect of a family life initiates the process that is further continued by nursery schools and other educational institutions. So that the educational process is correct, parents need form teacher's professional support. It is obvious that appropriate management of child's development enhances the process of shaping his or her personality. It also helps the child to communicate with the world around and to get to know and express himself and herself better (Basak, 2011). Specialist centres (such as nursery schools and primary schools) are of vital importance as they provide the children with safety, stimulate their development and support families in raising children (Klim-Klimaszewska, 2005).

### **2. The origins of the creation of a nursery school – the institution that supports parents in raising children**

Until the 19th century, when the idea of an institutional care of the children of factory women workers was created, many wealthy parents had been supported by the people who helped to nurture their children, so-called wet-nurses. Parents brought their children to the places where wet-nurses lived or brought wet-nurses to their own houses. That resulted in the fact that the bond between children and their parents gradually became less strong. Parents found their children's needs less

important than their own ones and less important than their families' economic situation (Stolińska-Pobralska, 2002).

The first nursery schools in Europe were designed for Owen's factory women workers' children. In Poland they were established with the help of monastic associations and factories owners. These were mainly nurses who looked after children. Their main responsibility was to provide children with food and clean conditions and the other aspects of children's development were less important. The very name of the institution was originally connected with the place animals are fed and only later it became the name of the place where children are brought to (Telka, 2007).

The development of pedagogy and psychology changed the way children's needs were perceived. It turned out that apart from being fed and provided with clean conditions children also need their emotional and social needs to be fulfilled. In practice it meant that adults should also listen to children, observe them, and support their autonomy development (Kurcz, 1997).

In the past a nursery school was a place created only for children. Parents dressed their children up in nursery outfits and left under nannies' guidance. The place designed with that purpose was so called 'filter', which means the place where parents were not allowed to enter (Stolińska-Pobralska, 2012). Nowadays the way nursery schools work is totally different and children together with their parents are served there. A nursery school became an open and a family friendly place and the time children get used to a new conditions when assisted by their parents is less painful for them (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2003).

A nursery school is an educational care centre designed for children aged between 6 months and 3 years old. Thanks to the cooperation with parents the institution is able to provide children with correct biological development (food, sleep, clean conditions) as well as emotional and social ones. Children are assigned to appropriate age groups (infants – the youngest group, middle group and the oldest children). These are mainly healthy children who go to a nursery school, but there are also specialist places designed for the children with physical and psychological disorders e.g. suffering from Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, metabolic conversion disorders, with poor eyesight and hearing (Mazur, 2004).

The staff working in a nursery school is composed of nannies, nursery school cleaners, a manager and a nurse. Nannies work with children, nursery school cleaners support the nannies in taking care of children and are responsible for clean conditions. The manager coordinates care and educational tasks, assists parents when they broaden their knowledge concerning the functioning of a nursery school. A nurse composes the set of meals and a diet for particular children, nourishes sick children and is responsible health education among parents.

### 3. Educational space in a nursery school

A nursery school is an educational care centre. In varied European countries they are subordinate to different bodies. In Spain nursery schools constitute a part of an educational structure, just like pre-schools and schools. In Denmark they are subordinate to the Ministry of Social Affairs and in Poland to the Ministry of Health. The ideas concerning the functioning of nursery schools differ in European countries and are based on particular trends typical of the country. In Germany the trend is anti-pedagogy that helps to create the conditions where children can play freely and without constraints. In France the most important is to provide children with the opportunity for development, in Great Britain and Italy the major trend is to let children play without any constraints and preserving their feeling of autonomy (Telka, 2007).

Having put under scrutiny care and educational tasks in Polish nursery schools Poznańska, Wierzejska, Zygmunciak (1993) suggest that it is difficult to precise the one theoretical concept concerning the activity of those centres. Until the World War II the care provided by nursery schools was only to nourish children, take care of them and increase health awareness of their mothers. Only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century apart from those aspects there were also educational aims introduced. They encompassed all the spheres of children's development (Stolińska-Pobralaska, 2011). Appropriate conditions for children's playing games were created and nannies were encouraged not to assist children too much. Such an attitude enhances children's independence, helps to deal with obstacles, get to know varied objects and manipulate with them. Therefore nannies should be able to demonstrate the right way toys can be used, assist children whenever they perform a new task, provide them with verbal clues and, what is most important, to praise children in every situation. They may intervene if they notice the wrong way the game is performed, when the child damages toys or if a game becomes dangerous to the child. Kurcz (2005) says that the conditions in a nursery school should not be a continuation of the child's natural family environment.

Wojciechowska-Charkak (2003) points out that the assistance offered by a nursery school is a so-called non-directive style which differs from shaping, forming according to some schemes (irective interaction). Assisting children in their development is a less directive style, connected with the creation of the conditions for the best possible children's development and stimulating their actions. Prevention is of a vital importance as it enables to anticipate and react to varied forms of danger very quickly. So as to face all the needs of children's development, Murynowicz-Hetka (2006) thinks that this concept requires high professional competence of form teachers. So that they could be professional assistants of a child's development they should have an in-depth knowledge of the nature of human beings and their living conditions as well as the skills to be practiced in a creative way.

Bińczycka (1999) says that form teachers should be reliable and support children in their actions. Only if a child trusts the teacher he or she is able to develop in many spheres. This is because an interaction is the best way to influence on child's behaviour. She also adds that interpersonal contacts should be an inspiration and pleasure for the child when performing new activities.

The work of a form teacher may bring pleasure, satisfaction, and is very responsible. The idea that the child should have an assistance when growing up means to consciously support the child, to *stand behind* the child. To *stand behind* means not to perform actions instead of a child without reason if a child wants to do it on his or her own. It means to let the child to face the challenges and help if he or she needs help. The concept may also serve as an educational purpose for parents of children going to nursery schools. That will help them to foster their social imagination, to become involved in the games as well as to enjoy the time and space shared with their children. As a result parents can assist children in a difficult time of their development (Lepalczyk, Marynowicz-Hetka, 1988).

Duraj-Nowakowa (1993) described Korczak's concept on the form teacher's role in the childcare that includes the focus and the management of a child's development, creation of the conditions for the enhancement of his or her educational process, the use of varied methods and broadening of the scope of child's interests. She says that Korczak was focused on the creative approach towards bringing up children. Korczak's statement 'a child is a human being' means that the child feels and thinks, perceives and understands, strives for, is hurt and cannot bear the lack of concern, being bullied and being laughed out. Matyjas (1996) adds that the form teacher should examine children's abilities very thoroughly and follow a reasonable educational approach as children's well being is the most important factor. The author also emphasises that Korczak's provisions are very useful, even indispensable for contemporary form teachers as their main objective is children's well being.

Form teachers in nursery schools are improving their skills through external and internal training and workshops. External ones take place in educational institutions while internal ones are carried out in nursery schools and they broaden teachers' knowledge concerning e.g. practical implication of Sherborne Developmental Movement method or the Orff method supporting the development of a child's movement expression as well as the elements of Montessori pedagogy. Form teachers thanks to the training can become familiarized with some children's developmental disorders such as autism, ADHD, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy. They also learn how to manage with behavioural problems of sick children. Professional skills improvement is aimed at improving of their own competence through creativity and creative thinking when cooperating with a small child, pointing out of their own imperfections e.g. how to deal with negative emotions and to raise their own self-consciousness and self-esteem (Mazur, 2004).

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The staff in nursery schools is obliged to obey the rules of law (Statutes, 1998) and according to the law they organise the life in the centre and take measures that foster children's biological development (food, hygiene, sleep), social (assisting in children's development) psychological (providing children with a sense of security and help in developing their autonomy among peers) and cultural one (responding to their curiosity, creative expression) (Telka, 2007).

#### **4. An open centre – parental place in nursery schools**

Telka (2007) says that parental place in a nursery school can be understood in a several ways – from the point of view of the users of the centre (children), taking into considerations parents' expectations towards the staff of such a centre as well as mutual cooperation between them. Theoretical approach advocated by an institutional pedagogy focuses on the process of exchange and communication between the staff of a nursery school and its users (parents). As Telka (2007) adds, the cooperation with parents in the centre is regulated by law provisions and informational and educational aims can be found in the statute (Statutes, 1998).

In the past parents were not allowed to enter nursery schools, they could only see the place when signing their children up to the institution. Later they dressed their children up in a special outfit and gave them to nannies. A lot of authors (Kurcz, 1997, Marynowicz-Hetka, 1998) say that the current situation in this aspect in Polish nursery schools has changed a lot. The centres function in a different way and children always enter a nursery school together with their parents. That approach makes a nursery school an open and family friendly place and the process of children's adaptation in a new environment when assisted by their parents is less painful.

One may say that mother's support on an early stage of child's development is very important and therefore it is crucial that a nursery school is an place open for the whole family. A nursery school is a new and an unknown place for both children and their parents, the staff members are strangers. Taking that into account all the staff takes pains to make that period easier and to balance that painful emotional tension. The most important factor that makes the adaptation easier is parental support in the initial days in a nursery school.

It often happens that adults are very anxious and excited about the first days in a new place, even to the same extent like their children. So the question arises how to help children and their parents to go through these obstacles. The most important appears to be parental trust given to the nanny, they should also get to know each other closer. With this purpose adaptation meetings with parents are organised. That period can be divided into two parts. In the first one parents assist their child in a nursery school in the beginning so as to get to know the conditions and talk about all the aspects connected with their children stay in a new place.

Parents also and get to know the staff who will take care of their children. The second part begins when the child is placed in a nursery school for real. Since then the most important is to provide the child with the sense of security far away from the family and making the child feel good and to get to know his or her habits (Onisk-Przybylski, 2003).

A nursery school is not a substitute for parental guidance and will not take out from them the responsibility for children's development and their upbringing. However, the institution can support parents when needed. Therefore, it is necessary that a nursery school and parents work out common goals, the regulations on behavioural norms and on mutual interaction. An active role of parents will enable the child to set up a good relationship with a form teacher, peers and improve child's psychological comfort. The cooperation will encourage a child to come to the centre and make him or her feel secure. Parents have the right to be informed about their children's performance in any time and in any way. They often make use of the phone as they can easily be up to date with the news (Telka, 2007).

Everyday conversations with parents create a bond between a nursery school and parents. Moreover, an integration aspect is also of a vital importance. It can be e.g. Mother's Day, Children's Day etc. By taking part in such events parents, grandparents and other guests can spend time together with children, and adults could get to know the staff better.

Another important aspect is Parent Council created by a several of them. The body cooperates with the centre's manager and influences the money spent on didactic purposes and for toys for children.

It is very important for a nursery school to be perceived by parents as an institution supporting children and stimulating their creativity. Emotional bond between a child and a nanny is also of a vital importance. The nanny knows the child's needs and wants to fulfil them and provide him or her with a sense of security (Lepalczyk, Marynowicz-Hetka, 1998).

## **5. Communication in the process of protection and education**

The process of communication between human beings can be described as conveying some information (a message) and the ability to receive and understand this message. Often this notion is understood also as the way of passing the information and as the relations that occur in this exchange. Information passing is realised through some agreed signs such as words, gestures, sounds, letters, numbers, symbols (Stewart, 2002).

Faber, Mazalish (1997) say that communication skills are necessary to avoid educational failures, they are the chance for cooperation that is more powerful than screaming and punishments. The following principles should be applied towards children:

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- listen to the children carefully and calmly,
  - accept their feelings,
  - point out the reasons of the problems,
  - express your objections not an attack,
  - explain to the child how bad actions could be compensated,
  - offer a wide range of possible choices,
  - the initiative should be taken by a form teacher,
  - cooperation in solving problems.

Human beings in their interpersonal contacts use two kinds of communication: verbal and non verbal. Speech is a verbal kind of communication that distinguishes human beings from other animals. Domachowski (1993) says that verbal communication is connected with thinking process while non verbal communication refers to what is beyond control and we are unaware of. He adds that we manifest our emotions through mimics, body posture, space management, the way we speak, voice tone and modulation. Non verbal communication is a crucial aspect as well. This is the way parents communicate with their new born child.

Mc Kay, Davis, Fanning (2001) emphasise that body language of a form teacher is an underlying requirement of an effective work with a small child. One can have a specialist knowledge and skills and, at the same time, not to be able to communicate with a child effectively, especially as far as children with developmental disorders (e.g. ADHD, autism, Down syndrome) are concerned or children that have not developed their speech yet. So that they could communicate there have to be certain criteria fulfilled. Activities and games should be performed with involvement and the body has to express verbal messages. Schaffer (1994) adds that contradictory body messages and words have a negative influence on child's development. Moreover, a child with developmental disorders reacts mainly to non verbal messages sent by a form teacher, no matter of the intention he or she wants to express verbally.

Emotions are another crucial element in the relation between a form teacher and a child. Dolto (2002) points out that the emotions of an adult are expressed by his or her body language and they are received by such children subconsciously. Pease (2007) is of the same opinion and says that as far as developmental abilities are concerned, form teacher's body language is a reference point of a social way of behaviour. A spontaneous way teachers express their positive emotions makes children smile more often. While children in a contact with people who do not express their emotions, smile rarely and cannot respond to emotional messages sent by form teachers.

Łopatkowa (1989) shares the view that while observing children one needs to focus on their emotions, especially if they are apathetic, aggressive and hyperactive.



Form teachers have to pay attention on messages those children receive from them.

The ability to communicate is required not only to get to know the world and people around, but it also strengthens human interaction, enriches personality, fosters decision making and coping with difficult situations. Lack of communication skills breeds frustration and helplessness. So as to avoid that parents should cooperate with form teachers with the purpose to find ways how to communicate with their children (Hamer, 1994).

## **6. Form teachers in nursery schools and their challenges**

Every form teacher in a nursery school (similarly to pre-school and primary school) has to face new challenges, as contemporary pedagogy is far from uniformisation, which includes imposed solutions and ready-made norms that support raising up children. Sowiński (2000) proposes non directive approach that is when the process of upbringing is based on cooperation between an adult and a child, where an adult accepts the child the way he or she is. For Śliwerski (1989) non directive approach means not to impose on a child any role models to follow. Sowiński (2000) adds that a form teacher should follow an individual approach towards a child and his or her personality. That enables to build a relation based on mutual trust, acceptance and respect.

A form teacher influences a child's personality, therefore Gorgon (2007) pointed out other tasks to be applied by teachers. He shares the view that interpersonal contacts should be appealing for a child, they should be of a personal character and should stimulate his or her development. He does not provide us with answers for educational problems but advises us to work out possible solutions by both sides.

Form teachers in nursery schools are required mainly to improve their professional skills in every area connected with childcare. Telka (2007) points out to:

- expanding the knowledge concerning social and emotional development of a small child,
- improvement of teachers' relations with parents,
- knowledge and skills development in approach towards children with behavioural disorders,
- expanding the knowledge and skills with the aim to support creative expression of a small child,
- knowledge development concerning experiences verification when planning educational process,

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- improvement form teachers' methodical competence when planning and implementing games,
  - broadening educational knowledge of a child's development (Telka, 2007).

A form teacher assists children all the time, talks to them, is open and kind, observes their behaviour in a discrete manner, supports their actions and sometimes proposes new approach. He or she is patient and does not expect an immediate effect in a child's development, as he or she understands a child needs time to perform a task. It is obvious that small children expand their knowledge about the reality mainly through playing games, and therefore, form teachers should respect children's needs and expectations. A teacher and a child need to develop a mutual relation based on partnership. An adult cooperates with a child, they perform tasks together and experience the same things (Woźniak, 2010).

Okoń (1995) is of an opinion that when playing a game a child needs an adults' external stimulation and adults need to be directly involved in a child's social development.

The games initiated by form teachers are aimed at putting some pedagogical objectives into practice, which later become their goals. The games follow certain rules for children to obey as participants. However, Flemming (1999) emphasises that if when playing a game children are required to carefully obey didactic objectives and to learn something and master some abilities, as a result they may feel discouraged from performing a task.

Okoń (1995) shares the view that the basic advantage of playing games is the possibility to make choices. Moreover, playing games is spontaneous, natural and performed for pleasure. Glaton, Clero (1985) add that adults need to respect children's decisions if they feel reluctant to be participants, as after some time children are more inclined to play a game if they find teachers' actions attractive. Okoń (1995) discourages teachers from applying unnecessary competition, random victories as when playing games children learn how to cooperate in a group. That approach eliminates children's fear of being evaluated or defeated, but at the same time, children feel more motivated to make an effort. Silberg (1995) emphasises that such an approach stimulates children to release all of their energy and creativity.

Nursery schools apply varied methods of expression so as to stimulate children's senses. Group work includes movement, gestures, touch, dance, painting, role play and pantomime. Teachers use simple techniques and widely available materials. Following the guidelines that recognise human beings as individuals enables to create appropriate relations between a child and a nanny and between a child and his or her peers (Kurcz, 2005).

## 7. Support of a small child's development

Nursery schools, pre-schools and psychological and pedagogical information offices are the examples of varied centres performing services for small children and their families. The integration of health, educational, psychological and pedagogical services is realised mainly by an institutional childcare performed in nursery schools and pre-schools (Fredefon, 1992).

Taking into consideration the achievements of contemporary knowledge, children's psyche and intellect are closely connected with motor skills and, therefore, they significantly influence children's speech development. Those spheres are closely related with each other, and speech is often considered an indicator of a child's development. Mobile and intellectually developed children are able to construct simple sentences very early. Intellectual development depends also on varied stimulants as well as feelings and thoughts exchanged with the others (Birch, 2004).

In a nursery school children develop their mobility, intellect, emotional and psychological skills very intensively. Kielar-Turska (2000) suggests that the characteristic features of that period are the development of motor skills and thinking fostered by imagination as well as changes in peer relations. This is the time when symbolic games appear, which means the games replacing particular object by another ones. Children present in a game the objects already observed in reality. They reproduce their actions and pretend to perform them: pretend to cry or imitate the observed actions. Cibor (2000) adds that children try to make use of varied makeshift objects, perform roles and follow the rules connected with them. When playing games children create their own imaginary world: their home, shop, playground and perform varied social roles. Children often ask their teachers to play games with them.

Brzezińska, Lutomski, Smykowski (1995) state that children explore the reality through their own actions, which is natural, spontaneous, voluntary and depends on a child's mood and interests. Their actions together with their self-reliance constitute a crucial part of their personality. Therefore, form teachers should enable children to decide whether to play in a group or to play on their own, teachers should give them some time to reach decisions.

According to Halska (1992) a game is a basic cognitive instrument, the most important part of a child's everyday schedule. Child's activeness when playing games is considered by form teachers as a source of an inspiration, and suggests how to cooperate with children. Kielar-Turska (2000) thinks that in-depth analysis of children's performance makes it possible to work out main concepts and ideas useful when cooperating with children. That is possible mainly as far as a nondirective sphere is concerned. That enables a child to develop his or her self-reliance and is crucial for child's personality development.

Winnicott (1993) is convinced that when playing games children develop their minds, broaden the scope of their experiences, improve their psychological and physical skills and develop intellectually and emotionally. Moreover, games make it possible to explore reality. That fictional world has an impact on a child, which results in varied life experiences and influences children's further emotional approach towards the world and people around.

Sajder (2003) is of an opinion that when given a blank sheet of paper children are inclined to express themselves and their knowledge about the world around them. He also adds that starting from the moment when a child moves his or her hand accidentally, then he or she becomes more inclined to start drawing and creates dots, lines, ovals on sheets of paper. All that is described as doodles in literature. However, Schaffer (2005) is of an opinion that small children's drawings constitute a synthesis of iconic and symbolic marking aspects. That developmental trend includes initially doodles and finally graphic symbols. Initially, children's doodles do not describe anything specific and they are the result of children's pencil drawings on sheets of paper. Doodles that really convey a message are created when a child is able to draw simple geometric shapes, combinations of those shapes and to treat them as graphic symbols. A two and a half year old child is able to describe reality by using symbols in his or her drawings. This is an idioplastic period, the period of using schemes. The child discovers typical symbolic forms, such as a human, a tree, a house, an animal. Drawings show children's knowledge about reality and emphasise only those elements of the objects that are of the most significant importance for children.

According to Telka (2007) form teachers in nursery schools provide small children with appropriate cultural development. They applied the following means of expression: presentations (e.g. of holidays traditions), imbuing (e.g. polite expressions), expression (singing, dancing). All the above examples prove that the set of games also includes imitation and reproduction of some actions performed by adults. Form teachers try to adjust the conditions to the way children want to play games according to their own visions.

The change of behaviour of form teachers in nursery schools may be observed, which depicts mainly children's participation in an integrated game (Barkier, 2006):

- from a child perceived 'in parts' and specific developmental aspects that were to be improved when playing a game, to the child involved in a game with all of his or her personality dimensions,
- from perceiving a game as a method (technique) of achieving a goal to understanding that the game is the process involving children's experiences and interpretations,

- from a central role of a form teacher in a game to the understanding that a child needs to be given more space so that he or she could experience the game the way he or she wants.

That approach is aimed at the improvement of the way educational care centres perform their tasks, supporting small children's development and supporting children's families. A child plays the main role, is the main agent in the process of planning actions in the centres. Parents are introduced in an everyday life of a nursery school so as to gain experience of being close to their children (Telka, 2007).

## Żłobek jako instytucja wspierająca rodziców w wychowaniu ich dziecka

### Streszczenie

Rodzina stanowi pierwsze i najważniejsze środowisko dla prawidłowego rozwoju dziecka. W rodzinie dziecko poznaje normy i wzorce postępowania. W rodzinie rozpoczyna się działalność wychowawcza, następnie kontynuowana przez różne instytucje wychowawcze. Aby proces wychowanie dziecka został zwieńczony sukcesem, rodzice potrzebują profesjonalnego wsparcia ze strony opiekunów (w żłobku), nauczycieli i wychowawców (w przedszkolu i szkole). Tylko właściwe kierowanie rozwojem dziecka, pozwala na stymulację jego rozwoju oraz prawidłowe ukształtowanie się jego osobowości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** żłobek, wychowanie, opieka, wsparcie.

### Summary

A family is the first and basic environment for an appropriate child's development. In a family a child learns role models and norms of behaviour. In a family a child's educational process is initiated and it is further continued in varied educational institutions. So that the process of raising a child would be a success, parents need a professional support of form teachers in nursery schools and later in pre-schools and primary schools. Only an appropriate management of children's development enables its stimulation and fosters shaping of their personality.

**Keywords:** nursery, education, care, support.

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