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THE NEEDS OF TWO-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION ACCORDING TO THE OPINION OF KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Abstract: The study aims to present the views of kindergarten teachers on the needs of two-year-old children in pre-school education. We interviewed 49 kindergarten teachers from the Moravian-Silesian region, Czech Republic to investigate the provision of the needs of two-year-old children during their stay in kindergarten, whether they are positively or negatively met, concerning the selected conditions of education in kindergarten anchored in the Framework Educational Programme for pre-school education. The results identified the factors representing the most numerous opinions on the specific needs of a two-year-old child with reference to the educational condition directed towards the day organization that does not meet their needs. The need to consider the individual needs of the children and to meet them by the teacher was positively identified. This need is in line with the main principle of pre-school education in the Czech Republic, which is the personality-oriented model.

Keywords: pre-school education, kindergarten, two-year-old child, kindergarten teacher

POTRZEBY DWULETNICH DZIECI W ZAKRESIE EDUKACJI PRZEDSZKOLNEJ W OPINII NAUCZYCIELI PRZEDSZKOLNYCH W REPUBLICE CZESKIEJ

Streszczenie (abstrakt): Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników badań opinii nauczycieli przedszkoli na temat potrzeb dwuletnich dzieci objętych wczesną edukacją w instytucjach przedszkolnych. Metodą badawczą był wywiad. Badania przeprowadzono w regionie morawsko-śląskim Republiki Czeskiej. Respondentami byli nauczyciele przedszkola (49/100%). Zbadaliśmy poglądy na temat zaspokajania potrzeb dwuletnich dzieci podczas ich pobytu w przedszkolu, czy są one spełniane z pozytywnym czy negatywnym skutkiem, w odniesieniu do wybranych uwarunkowań edukacji w przedszkolu, mających umocowanie prawne w Podstawie Programowej Wychowania Przedszkolnego. Wyniki uzyskane z wypowiedzi badanych nauczycieli pozwoliły wyłonić reprezentatywne opinie na temat specyficznych potrzeb dwuletniego dziecka. Respondenci wskazali na uwarunkowania wychowawcze, ukierunkowane na organizację dnia w przedszkolu jako takie, które nie zaspokajają podstawowych potrzeb dziecka dwuletniego. Pozytywnie oceniono potrzebę indywidualnego podejścia nauczyciela do dzieci i jej realizacji. Potrzeba ta jest zgodna z główną zasadą edukacji przedszkolnej w Republice Czeskiej, która jest model skoncentrowany na osobie.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja przedszkolna, przedszkole, dziecko dwuletnie, nauczyciel przedszkola

Theoretical Framework

Need is a very common term nowadays. This is due, among other things, to the fact that we live in a time that is not structured as an organization for a purpose; the world is not an order, and life is not a direct or programmed path to adopting such an order. The changing environment requires constant adaptation, which everyone tries to manage as best as possible, although not always satisfactorily. The conception of need varies concerning the field that deals with it and explains its meaning.

In everyday life situations, a person most often associates a need with the expression of a certain lack. "A person is motivated by need. Needs help us maintain basic life functions and live a full life. Failure to satisfy a need (or some need) leads to a reduction or disruption of the exchange of values – any values – resulting in a negative emotional experience called frustration". The needs arrangement is determined developmentally and by the urgency with which they rise to consciousness. Thus, in general, developmentally higher needs only emerge as more urgent motives when developmentally lower needs are at least to some extent satisfied. The need for self-actualization (the name comes from K. Goldstein, 1939) or self-actualization has become popular. It is the developmentally supreme need at the core of the "growth needs" to be all that one can be². The essential characteristic of needs is their objectification or orientation towards a certain way of satisfaction and is a function of learning. It manifests itself in interindividual differences in need satisfaction, although there is a common feature: the achievement of a consummatory response.

Introduction to Research

In this paper, we present the needs of a two-year-old child in the daily routine of kindergarten. The education of 2-year-olds is anchored in the Education Act as of 1 September 2020, and, unlike children over the age of 3, they are not legally entitled to education (Article 34(1) of the Education Act states that a child under the age of 3 is not legally entitled to admission to kindergarten)³. This limit restricts the needs of working parents to place two-year-old children in kindergarten. At present, there is a great interest in children's education in kindergartens on the part of parents and guardians, and the capacity of kindergartens, especially in large cities, is insufficient to cover their demands. Another limitation is that, as Fodorová states⁴, kindergarten principals do not accept these children for preschool education also because they know and have experience with the difficulty of educating them in socio-emotional development. Another reason may be the legislative re-

¹ M. Havlínová and E. Vencálková, et al. *Kurikulum podpory zdraví v mateřské škole*, Praha: Portál 2008, s. 27. ISBN 978–80–7367–487–8.

M. Nakonečný, Základy psychologie, Akademie věd České republiky 1998, s. 466-499. ISBN 80-200-1290-7.

Zákon č. 561/2004 Sb., o předškolním, základním, středním, vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělávání. Pdf online. Available on the portal of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

⁴ K. Fodorová Vzdělávání dvouletých dětí jako klíčový aspekt socio-emocionálního vývoje. In Podmienky výchovy a vzdělávania 2-ročných dětí v materských školách. Bánská Bystrica: Belianium, 2023, s 46.

quirement to reduce the capacity of a classroom if it educates 2-year-olds, thereby reducing the number of older children enrolled. However, the non-admission of 2-year-old children to kindergarten may also be due to inadequate material equipment resulting from the Framework Educational Programme for Pre-School Education⁵ (FEPPE) and the conditions for the education of 2-year-old children set out therein. Fodorová⁶ Leans towards preschool education without limits for two-year-olds "We can take as a starting point the experience from abroad, where the education of two-year-old children is not formally ageseparated, as we can perceive it in the Czech Republic". Among other limitations, she cites the demands made by teachers on parents of two-year-olds, "Teachers must be prepared for all expressions of two-year-olds that reflect their developmental characteristics and are natural. Childcare, which for two-year-old children is the predominant activity of a kindergarten teacher, must not be perceived as something above standard in their profession"⁷. Two-year-old children who are educated in kindergarten are completely dependent on the teacher to meet their needs, who adapt not only the educational offer but also the daily routine to their developmental specificities. However, it is not always able to organize and "bend" everything to the needs of these young children. This is due to the arrangement of the classes, where these children are not assigned only to an age-homogeneous group. Therefore, teachers cannot work individually with these children regularly and according to their needs. Also, in education and its time allocation, the teacher fails to consider the needs of these young children who cannot sustain being focused and part of the ongoing activities all the time. Two-year-old children get bored and tired earlier; they need the teacher's closeness and individual attention. Educational and organizational conditions in the daily routine of the kindergarten go hand in hand and include meals. This has precise rules, including the time organization to which the workload of catering staff is linked. Two-year-old children need their daily routine, as they have an earlier need for main meals and then sleep. The set conditions of the day organization in kindergartens with ageheterogeneous classes, where these children are enrolled, do not take these needs into account.

Satisfaction of the above conditions for the provision of pre-school education is necessary for the child and their successful development, for the child to reach their potential, feel safe and secure, and for current needs to be met⁸.

Institutional education for two-year-olds has been the subject of research, and the benefits on child development are positive in some areas, but we also encounter negative find-

MŠMT. Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání [online]. [cit. 20.11.2023]. Available on WWW: Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání od 1. září 2021, MŠMT ČR (msmt.cz)

⁶ K. Fodorová, Vzdělávání dvouletých dětí jako klíčový aspekt socio-emocionálního vývoje. In Podmienky výchovy a vzdělávania 2-ročných dětí v materských školách. Bánská Bystrica: Belianium 2023, s 46.

⁷ K. Fodorová, Vzdělávání dvouletých dětí jako klíčový aspekt socio-emocionálního vývoje. In Podmienky výchovy a vzdělávania 2-ročných dětí v materských školách. Bánská Bystrica: Belianium 2023, s 46.

⁸ J. Kropáčková and H. Splavcová. *Dvouleté děti v předškolním vzdělávání: od jara do léta*. Praha: Raabe 2017, s. 39. ISBN 978-80-7496-316-2.

ings. Thorová⁹ states that education in two-year-olds develops social, intellectual and adaptive skills, teaching the child to function in a group of children and to be independent. On the other hand, separation from parents can put children at risk of psychological deprivation, and the emotional bond between parent and child necessary for healthy psychological development can be compromised. The views on the education of two-year-old children in society are subject to certain stereotypes, even on the part of professionals who implement it in practice. Teachers in kindergartens, the skills education of two-year-old children must not neglect their role as caregivers, which is predominant in activities with such young children, and professional educational activities are on a smaller scale. Two-yearold children frequently need to satisfy and regulate their development in the socioemotional sphere. Here, teachers need to focus more on studying the developmental specifics of two-year-olds. For a teacher to master the problems of educating a child in theory and practice and cooperate with other colleagues, school management, the professional public, and civic representatives of society, they need to have certain personal qualities. Above all, it is all about having a very sensitive and loving relationship with children, an active approach to work, being responsible, mentally balanced, constantly selfeducating and self-improving, increasing your all-around cultural maturity, and understanding their social role. However, we must not forget that in the education of two-yearold children, family upbringing still plays a primary role in the child's life. The FEPPE sets out the tasks of institutional education, including the task of complementing family education and providing a stimulating environment for the child¹⁰.

Methods

Regarding the education of two-year-old children in kindergarten, we focused on their needs and satisfaction in selected conditions of education based on the FEPPE, which sets the general guidelines for the education of children before the start of compulsory schooling. This education is intended for children aged 3 to 6 years, and there is no official FEPPE for two-year-olds. However, for 2-year-old children, some of the principles and guidelines of the FEPPE can be adapted and applied based on their needs and individual development.

In our research, we focused our attention on education conditions: 1. *material conditions*, 2. *organization, and 3. psychosocial conditions*. For our research, we have chosen two research methods. Using a case study method, we analyse and evaluate specific teachers' views on meeting the needs of two-year-old children in a selected educational condition-a case study. To obtain the necessary data in the case under study, we used a second research method of semi-structured interview, containing four open-ended questions, three related to the selected educational condition, and the fourth is a separate question.

⁹ K. Thorová, Vývojová psychologie: proměny lidské psychiky od početí po smrt. Praha: Portál 2015, 286-289. ISBN 978-80-262-0714-6.

J. Kropáčková and H. Splavcová. Dvouleté děti v předškolním vzdělávání: od podzimu do zimy. Praha: Raabe 2016. s. 40. ISBN 978-80-7496-316-2.

Research Results

The procedure for the preparation of the case study.

Case selection:

1. Material conditions

Two-year-olds are at the stage when they begin to develop their social and emotional intelligence. It is important to provide them with an environment where they can learn to share, cooperate, and resolve conflicts.

Two-year-olds are rapidly developing their ability to communicate. In kindergarten, they should be able to expand their vocabulary and develop communication skills. Classroom conditions should be set up to ensure this development in children. Bookshelves, play corners, and didactic material.

Two-year-olds should have access to an environment that supports their motor development. This includes didactic tools and toys, games, and activities that strengthen their fine and gross motor skills.

Two-year-olds should be offered activities that encourage creative thinking and art and are important for developing imagination and self-expression. The classroom should have appropriate furniture, tools, kits, art, and work equipment.

Two-year-olds can learn basic skills such as counting, shape and colour recognition. For this purpose, the classroom must be sufficiently equipped with didactic material and aids.

Two-year-olds need to play; games allow them to explore their environment and learn through play. The classroom must be equipped with age-appropriate toys and play areas with equipment.

2. Organization

Two-year-olds benefit from routine and clear structure throughout the day. A regular routine and predictability help them feel safe and confident.

Two-year-olds are learning new things and exploring everything around them. Hence, kindergarten should be a safe and supportive place for them.

3. Psychosocial conditions

Two-year-olds get tired sooner than older children, and some activities can impair their perceptions and reactions.

Two-year-olds have different learning needs from older children. Thus, it is important to keep their age and individual developmental needs in mind.

Two-year-olds are very individual and can vary in the speed of their development. The kindergarten should be flexible and adapt to the needs of each child, giving them space to grow, discover, and learn.

An important part of the education of two-year-old children in kindergarten is cooperation with parents. Communication with parents and involvement in the educational process is key to supporting the child.

Research Question: What are the views of kindergarten teachers on the needs of two-year-olds in kindergartens in selected educational settings, and are these needs being met?

Research Objective: The purpose of the research question is to analyse the teachers' views on meeting the needs of two-year-old children in selected educational settings in kindergartens.

Respondents: The research was carried out in 4 kindergartens in the towns of Ostrava, Orlová, Petřvald. In the direct contact, the principals were asked to cooperate and to approach the teachers in their kindergarten, also asking for cooperation in the research. 49/100% of respondents were cooperative, 45/91% of them teachers and 4/8% principals. They answered the research question individually. All respondents were female and had the required qualifications. The number of respondents with secondary education was 29/52%, with higher vocational education 2/4%, bachelor's degree 11/22%, and master's degree 7/14%. The length of experience of the respondents ranged from 2-36 years. The respondents were represented by four female principals and 45 female teachers (Table 1).

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Educational attainment		Length of practice	
Secondary school leaving exam	29/52%	0-2 years	3/6%
Higher vocational school	2/4%	3-15 years	9/18%
Bachelor	11/22%	16-25 years	21/42
Master	7/14%	over 26 years	16/32%

Table 1. Respondents -49/100%

Source Own study.

None of the kindergartens surveyed had a class for two-year-olds. Principals commented that the demand for education in their localities needs to consider the number of older children included in pre-school education in their kindergarten. These children have priority admission. The enrolled 2-year-olds are integrated into all kindergarten classes in the surveyed kindergartens, which are age-mixed/heterogeneous. We did not investigate how many two-year-olds are currently enrolled in the kindergarten. We based our research on the experiences and views of kindergarten teachers on the education of two-year-old children, which the interviewed teachers have, and draw on their personal experiences, including from their fluent years.

Data collection: Data were collected using a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview method comprising four open-ended questions.

There were three main questions and one separate question:

1. Share your experience in meeting the needs of a two-year-old child that you would include in **material conditions** education. What is your opinion on them – are they sufficient as set in your kindergarten?

- 2. Share your experience in meeting the needs of a two-year-old child that you would include in **organizational conditions** education. What is your opinion on them are they sufficient as set in your kindergarten?
- 3. Share your experience in meeting the needs of a two-year-old child that you would include in **psychosocial conditions** education. What is your opinion on them are they sufficient as set in your kindergarten?
- 4. In your opinion, which need of a two-year-old child is the one that is always satisfied?

Data Analysis: An analysis of the data and information gathered was undertaken, and from this, the key factors that emerged in the case were identified and related to the three main research questions we have identified. The fourth question, in the answers, related to all three factors. From the responses obtained, the factors representing the teachers' repeated responses were abstracted. They were assigned to individual research questions:

- 1. a) the need for appropriate game elements;
- 2. a) the need for individual length of time setting in activities;
- 2. b) the need for individual time for meals;
- 2. c) the need for individual rest/sleep time;
- 3. a) the need for individual attention from the teacher;
- 3. b) the need to respect the individual development of the child.

Solution Formulation: Based on the analysis, we proposed and formulated a solution for the problem identified in the case. The solution meets the stated research objective.

Research Results

The respondents commented on individual questions that monitored the satisfaction of the needs of two-year-old children in kindergarten in selected conditions of education according to the FEPPE.

Under each factor, we list two selected statements made by the teachers. The respondent is identified by the letter R and the number assigned to her in the data analysis. We further divided the statements into two poles, namely the statements of teachers with positive or negative evaluations of the selected factor of the given educational condition.

1. Material Conditions

1. a) the need for appropriate game elements

R 3/ "We have a well-equipped classroom even for two-year-olds; it is beneficial for them if they can bring a toy from home; it helps them to adapt to the new environment."

R12/ "So, the playroom is equipped as standard; here we did not buy anything extraordinary for two-year-old children; new toys are for play at the table. We had to get ones for the youngest children; they are not difficult in terms of building and rules of the game."

Positive/material conditions correspond to games for two-year-olds 31/63%

Negative/material conditions do not correspond to games for two-year-olds 18/37%

2. organizational conditions

2. a) the need for individual length of time setting in activities;

R15/ "I cannot, even if two-year-olds need it, adapt the set time for the activity to the needs of two-year-olds; they would play all the time. And activities focused on education and meeting educational goals for the older children, then I wouldn't be able to make it at all."

R/30 "I manage to set up my activities to give my two-year-olds enough time not to interrupt their activities. This is mainly due to the presence of an assistant in the classroom; she helps me with these children as well."

Positive/organizational conditions of the length of set time in activities meet the needs of two-year-olds 17/35%.

Negative/organizational conditions do not match the length of time in activities to the needs of two-year-olds 32/65%

2. b) the need for individual **time for meals**;

R/6 "I organize the meals by myself to satisfy two-year-olds. There is no problem with snacks, but we must start lunch earlier."

R/12 "The organization of the day, including the meals, would need to be arranged completely differently; my colleague and I always try to ensure that the two-year-olds are happy; they eat first. For example, we're starting to eat lunch earlier with them, and their afternoon snack; they have that when they've had enough sleep."

Positive/organizational conditions meet the needs of two-year-olds 15/31%

Negative/organizational conditions do not meet the needs of two-year-olds 34/69%

2. c) the need for individual **rest/sleep time**;

R/8 "I had two-year-olds falling asleep while having lunch. But we always organized everything to their satisfaction."

R/22 "Yes, they are tired earlier, but they can handle it, and if we see that they are already falling asleep at the table, we deal with it immediately and put them to bed."

Positive/organizational conditions for rest time meet the needs of two-year-olds 22/45%

Negative/organizational conditions for rest time do not meet the needs of two-year-olds 27/55%

3. psychosocial conditions

a) the need for individual attention from the teacher;

R/29 "Not only do the children receive care from the teachers, but the older children also like to be looked after or come to warn us when something is wrong."

R/34 "I am sure these children would enjoy the teachers more if the class size was lower. They need to cuddle; they like to hold the teacher's hand. But they always have the care from us teachers."

Teachers' positive/organizational provision of care time meets the needs of two-year-olds 29/59%

Negative/organizational conditions of teachers' care time do not meet the needs of two-year-old children 10/20%

3. b) the need to respect the individual **development of the child**

R/33 "They have space to realize their potential during the day, in that they do not yet desire to play together, but they are individualists; they try everything they want. The kindergarten environment brings them so many new moments of situations and activities. Children develop to the best of their ability and have ample opportunity to do so. Parents often comment on how the children have changed during their stay in kindergarten, what progress they are making."

R/26 "The number of children in a class is not good for their development, and young children also like quiet and a slower pace of the day. Often, they must adjust to older children."

Positive/organizational conditions for individual child development meet the needs of two-year-olds 23/47%

Negative/organizational conditions of time for individual child development do not meet the needs of two-year-old children 26/53%

Discussion

From all the respondents' statements, it is evident that kindergarten teachers want to ensure the smooth care and education of two-year-old children in kindergartens. Teachers have been "burdened" with the inclusion of two-year-olds in kindergarten. In kindergartens, material equipment has been acquired for two-year-old children, which was also evaluated positively by the respondents in the survey. Still, regarding the daily routine and its organization in its individual parts, nothing has been adapted to two-year-old children. From the respondents' statements, we have information that two-year-old children in kindergarten and the group of older children have a positive influence on them. Negative for their care and individual development is the number of children in the class (up to 28). Furthermore, there has also been no adaptation or change in the dietary needs to the age of the two-yearold child. There is a need to present these needs of two-year-olds more in the public space, not just to rely on teachers to "quietly" manage it, which our research confirms. Teachers often "complained" that something was not favourable for two-year-olds in kindergarten, but then they said that everything was fine because they do not follow the regime in special cases; they manage everything with the child so that it is always satisfied. A positive finding is that 2-year-olds are offered appropriate activities and activities for their development in kindergarten, thus confirming that their inclusion in kindergarten is the right choice. There is a need to change the conditions in the organization of the day to meet the needs of the two-year-old child so that the kindergarten can be flexible and adapt the curriculum and activities to suit this age group. Collaboration with an expert in early childhood education and psychology could also be useful for the proper management of the education of two-year-olds.

Summary

In our research, respondents were interviewed across a large time of their careers. Some of them are "novice" teachers in practice, and others are already "experienced" to "expert" teachers, enhanced by their length of experience. Therefore, we appreciate their cooperation in the research in which we investigated the needs of two-year-old children in kindergarten in selected education conditions according to the FEPPE. Respondents expressed that they always try to address the individual needs of two-year-olds satisfactorily. Teachers respect the individual peculiarities and needs of two-year-old children. These needs of two-year-old children are not in line with the regime and organization of the day in kindergarten, and teachers currently change and adapt them to the needs of the children. They negatively evaluated the selected educational condition concerning the time organization of activities, meals, and psychosocial conditions for the individual development of 2-yearold children. The high number of children in the classroom and the "fast" regime of the day have an unsatisfactory effect on two-year-olds. The results of the research can inspire us to make changes in the organization of the day in kindergarten to meet the needs of twoyear-old children. They can be a subject for discussion with the professional public and a stimulus for "changes". They also inspire us to partial innovations in the content of studies in the preparatory education of future kindergarten teachers. They inform us about the need to target the content of studies more on the developmental specifics of two-year-olds, on learning to plan educational activities for two-year-olds, and on practices in kindergartens educating two-year-olds in classes set up for them. The education of two-year-old children in kindergartens in the Czech Republic is not yet established in terms of the organization of the daily regime, but also to their needs, as well as the education provided for children from three years of age. In the conditions for the organization of the daily routine and in the rules for the education of two-year-old children, there is room for their actual adjustment to the specific needs of two-year-old children, for individual solutions and attitudes of head teachers and teachers, which they apply in practice. There should be a professional discussion on the issue of the education of two-year-old children in kindergartens, at conferences, in the professional press, and supported by research results. The issue of education of two-year-old children would thus gain more impetus for defining limits in the inclusion and subsequent education of children in kindergartens.

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