

CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WORKPLACE TEACHING/LEARNING OF TEACHERS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (THE CASE OF LITHUANIA)

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Abstract

The problem of learning in the workplace related to the activity of the Lithuanian educational (especially preschool) institutions today is the part of the culture of school activity that is still not sufficiently being actualized. A preschool education institution is the field of the research. Conducting the research on PTs' experiences of teaching/learning in the workplace, a qualitative research strategy was applied using the method of the group interview (i.e. focus group). Eighteen teachers of preschool education institutions participated in the research. The article presents the results of the empirical research that describe the conditions and opportunities of workplace teaching/learning of the teachers of a preschool educational institution and highlights the essential interferences to such teaching/learning. A qualitative method of content analysis was used for the analysis of the research data.

Keywords: preschool teacher's teaching/learning, teaching/learning in the workplace, conditions and opportunities of workplace teaching/learning.

Introduction

The life of society is often affected by intensive social, economical, and organizational changes of life, inevitably followed by constant teaching/learning processes. With regard to the impact of the education reforms in Lithuania, developing knowledge society, there are more and more opportunities and initiative to learn and participate in the processes of change. Already back in 2005, in the National Lisbon Strategy Implementation Programme, the problem of the improvement of the qualification of the pedagogical staff of educational institutions is emphasized. The demands for the improvement of the teacher's qualification and, consequently, the learning demands undergo change, they depend on the internal and external factors of the change in the system of education.

The importance of teachers' teaching/learning is justified by numerous researches conducted in the country. In the researches, teachers' constant learning is related to the quality of education, internal and external culture of the educational institution (Barkauskaitė,

2001; Jurašaitė-Harbison, 2008; Malinauskienė, 2010; Gumuliauskienė, 2014; Smilgienė & Masiliauskienė, 2017, etc.). The aforementioned researches revealed that teachers are able to set learning demands, to learn in the processes of social interaction, to take responsibility for their teaching/learning and its results, to plan their own learning, however, they lack the abilities and competences of self-managed learning (Kvederaitė & Juodaitytė, 2010). In the works of the scientists from other countries (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004; Werquin, 2010), attention is drawn to the problems of adults' non-formal learning, i.e., the policy and practice of the acknowledgement of non-formal and informal learning, its results, and the prospects of the development of the adult learning system. There is an increasing emphasis that there is an everyday opportunity for workplace learning during professional activity (Evans, Hodkinson, & Unwin, 2002; Forte & Flores, 2014; De & Kirsten, 2015; Pacchiano, Klein, & Hawley, 2016; McMahon & Patton, 2018). It has been revealed that speaking about teaching/learning in the organization, the authors use different concepts – the terms *workplace teaching/learning* or *learning organization*. The second term is polysemic and is understood broadly, however, the essence of the aforementioned concept is teaching/learning in the organization. The term *workplace teaching/learning* is commonly used in the works of the researchers of management sciences (Robbins, 2003; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2004; Bakanauskienė, 2008; Sakalas, 2012; etc.), meanwhile, the representatives of education science usually choose the term *learning organization* (Fullan, 1998; Arends, 2008; Jucevičienė, 2009; Simonaitienė, 2007, etc.). Only a small fraction of authors describing the processes of adult teaching/learning use the term *workplace teaching/learning* (Jurašaitė-Harbison, 2008). However, the diversity of terms does not change the essence of the understanding of the concept because *teaching/learning in the organization is such a teaching/learning process that takes place during professional activity and precisely indicates the teaching/learning environment, i.e., the place where various teaching/learning methods and forms are applied, in this case the workplace is important. Concerning the concept of the teaching/learning process in the workplace, the approach is followed that teaching/learning in a preschool education institution is a combination of teaching and learning processes, i.e., the process, during which teaching and learning take place at the same time (complement or affect each other).*

Apreschool education institution in case of the present research is treated as an educational organization, where teachers' activity is consciously coordinated and focused on achieving specific aims acting together, meanwhile, the aim of the preschool education institution is to educate a free and creative personality, to whom high-quality educational conditions would be established. Both in Lithuania and foreign countries, there is a lack of particular research related to the processes of the teaching/learning and development of teachers of preschool education institutions in the organization, i.e., in the workplace, that have decisive importance for the quality of preschool education, therefore, when broadening this context, it should be noted that this fact enhanced the relevance of the topic.

The problem questions of the research have been formulated in this context: *what are the experiences of preschool teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace? How are the conditions favourable for the expansion of the diversity of teachers' teaching/learning experiences created in the organization?*

The object of the research – the experience of teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace.

The aim of the research is to perform the analysis of the experience of teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace and identify the conditions and opportunities of their workplace teaching/learning.

Features of Teachers' Teaching/Learning in the Organization as a Workplace: Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical and directive documents on education of the European Union and other countries (including Lithuania) are increasingly based on the approach that the main aims and objectives of the individual's general education should be related to the development of competences necessary for life and professional activity. Learning is becoming a part of the culture of every organization because it helps it to actively adjust to changes that are taking place. Referring to the works of the scientists from Lithuania and other countries (Fullan, 1998; Tight, 2000; Blanchard & Thacker, 2007; Monkevičienė, 2012; Forte & Flores, 2014; Smilgienė & Juodaitytė, 2015, 2017; De & Kirsten, 2015; Pacchiano, Klein, Hawley, 2016, etc.), it is possible to conceptualize that learning is considered as a transfer of personal theoretical and practical knowledge, attitudes, values that are developed and the ability to apply them in professional activity. Teaching/learning is the creation of the process of personality that is based on individual human experience. Organizational learning "is the various ways in which a new or existing employee is provided with the skills needed to perform a particular job" (Dessler, 2001, p. 156). Dawey (2003) states that the factors that promote teaching/learning are the change in the organization, ensuring of the quality of work, and implementation of new technologies. Learning, i.e., a value both for the personality and the educational institution, should be meaningful and useful for both parties. Here it is important to emphasize such *learning that takes place in the process of the teacher's everyday professional activity, his/her workplace*. In every work situation there is an opportunity to learn. A tertiary or higher education system is not obligatory, as D. Albrecht and Koskinen (2010) state. Garrick (2001) relates workplace learning only to the concept of informal learning because it is related to group-directed learning, learning from the other's experience, peer talks, individual activity planning, incidental learning (participatory learning, learning from mistakes, etc.). Workplace learning (Cheatham & Chivers, 2001; Klein, 2016; Caruso, 2017, etc.) takes place when observing peers, working with experts, preparing common projects.

Referring to the research conducted in Lithuania and national documents regulating education that describe the diversity of types of learning (formal, non-formal and informal (self-directed)) and the opportunities to bring teaching/learning closer to the organization itself, it should be noted that workplace is treated as an excellent environment for teachers' teaching/learning combining non-formal and informal learning.

Preschool teachers' professional development in order to gain new knowledge and skills is inseparable from the everyday teaching/learning process in professional activity that is understood as an interactive, dynamic, permanent searching process. A preschool teacher must have clear aims and be a lifelong learning personality. He/she must constantly strive to develop his/her knowledge, to search for and use the opportunities to develop it personally and professionally (Ohio's Early Childhood Core Knowledge & Competencies, 2008; Harman, 2018). The more knowledge the preschool teacher has, the higher qualification he/she has, the more he/she is able to do something, the more interesting his/her activity gets. Preschool teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace in fact is not only economical and effective but also efficient because it meets teaching/learning needs and creates opportunities for teaching/learning, referring to which new knowledge continues to be applied at work, thus a better quality of children's education is pursued/ expected (Pineda-Herrero et al., 2010).

Methodology

For the investigation of the experiences of preschool teachers' (hereinafter – PTs) teaching/learning in the workplace, it is important that the proponents of the philosophy of pragmatism (Ozmon & Craver, 1996; Dewey, 2000, etc.) put the following in the first place: the learner's everyday experience, learning from experience, as well as open and education friendly environment. Following this approach, in the article the expression of teaching/learning in the organization, i.e., the workplace of teachers of preschool education institutions is viewed through teachers' everyday learning experiences. Conducting the research, it was also referred to the approach of the philosophy of sociocultural constructivism (Vygotsky, 1986) that social reality is created with regard to its interaction with the environment (including the institutional one). According to Berger and Luckmann (1999), the institutional world is perceived as objective reality.

When conducting the research on PTs' experiences of teaching/learning in the workplace, a qualitative research strategy was applied. The approach was followed that qualitative research allows getting to know the chosen object of cognition (Bitinas, Rupšienė, & Žydzūnaitė, 2008), i.e., the conditions and opportunities of teachers' workplace teaching/learning, and describing it in detail.

A qualitative research strategy was implemented using the method of the group interview (i.e. focus group) (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003; Hague, Hague, & Morgan, 2004; Ehigie & Ehigie, 2005). A focus group is a type of research, in which the group participants' experience, interests, attitudes, approaches, and opinions are emphasized (Hague, Hague, & Morgan, 2004; Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). For a holistic approach, the depth of analysis, the reliability of information, in order to notice contradictions and incongruities, three separate focus groups with the participants having individual and different teaching/learning experience – preschool and pre-primary teachers who work in different preschool education institutions of Lithuania – have been organized. In identifying the interview sample, the strategy of criteria sampling was employed, therefore, the following logic was used to determine the number of groups – the number of groups should be increased until the novelty of the information received in the last group decreases to the point where it is no longer worthwhile to involve new groups in the research. The research was conducted in December, 2018 – February 2019. Eighteen PTs (group 1–6 participants, group 2–5 participants; group 3–7 participants) from various preschool education institutions of Lithuania (working in the institutions of Jonava, Švenčionėliai, Kėdainiai, Pakruojis, Panevėžys, Telšiai, Mažeikiai, Šiauliai, Joniškis, Anykščiai, and Kelmė) participated in the research, consequently, the map of the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants is very broad, which gives the research an opportunity to look at the analyzed problem from many angles. The average age of the participants of the focus group is about forty years of age (seven educators, whose age group was 31-40 years; eight – from 41 to 50, the age of three respondents was 21-30 years). Eleven participants had under 5 years of pedagogical work experience, four – 6-10 years; two – 11-15 years, one participant of the focus group had over twenty years of work experience. It is possible to generalize that the research sample is representative and can reflect the attitude of the professionals of this field in the context of the problem analysed. In the context of the research, the common essential feature of the participants of the focus group is related to a common profession – teachers working in a preschool education institution are interviewed. During the research, the teachers were given questions about the opportunities for teaching/learning in the workplace, the adjustment of physical spaces of preschool educational institutions for PTs' workplace teaching/learning.

They were also asked how, in their opinion, teaching/learning in the workplace should be organized and what advantages of workplace teaching/learning they identify.

The discussion was led by one person (one of the authors of the article). The researcher communicating with the focus group sought to employ the traits that determine the success of the research: inductive thinking, insight in the ideas expressed by other people, flexibility of behaviour performing the roles of the researcher, ability to effectively interact with the research participants. The participants of the teachers' focus group were selected applying "sampling of a convenient situation and sampling based on a voluntary principle" (Ramanauskaitė, 2002, p. 64). The teachers of preschool education institutions were contacted coming to the lecture room in advance and presenting the problem of the research. Teachers who got interested in this research were invited to come to the discussion at a designated time and at a designated meeting point. Only a part of the research data has been presented and discussed in the article.

The members of the focus groups were invited to the lecture room of Šiauliai University. Before starting the conversation, the participants of the focus group were introduced with the process of work and the aim of the research, everyone was invited to discuss, those who wished to speak were given the floor in turn. The questions were given orally. In the discussion of the focus group, 5-7 persons were speaking in a separate premise. Verbal information (teachers' thoughts) obtained during the conversation was recorded with a voice recorder with the prior consent of the participants. Then the conversation was transcribed to a text document, the language was not edited because thus the teachers' attitude is more precisely expressed and their mood and emotions analysing various issues of teaching/learning in the organization are more precisely revealed. The speakers were asked to tell their name because audio recording was performed, therefore, the name was needed to recognize the speeches of the same participant. The discussions of the focus groups lasted from 1,5 to 2,5 hours.

The leader of the group directly interacted with the research participants, she was an active researcher and an equal participant of the process. Collecting the material during the group interview, the researcher posed questions, sought to specify whether she understood the thoughts expressed by the research participants well, tried to provoke, and encouraged the research participants' reflexivity. Active interaction between the researcher and research participants enabled to increase the validity of the data, and later their reliability as well.

The ethics of research was ensured by informing the research participants about the aim of the research, introducing them with the proceedings of the research, the use and dissemination of the research data. The informants' consent on the conduction of the research and the way of data recording (voice recording equipment was used) was taken. The research participants were ensured confidentiality and open and respectful communication atmosphere. In order to guarantee confidentiality, while transcribing the voice recording, the participant's name was replaced with the participant's code (number), for example, F (1), F(2), etc.

A qualitative method of content analysis was used for the analysis of the research data. The texts presented by the informants are the research material of qualitative content analysis, i.e., educational diagnostics, reflecting the process of the individual's reflection that is the "key" aspect of the experiential workplace learning (Jonušaitė, Žydžiūnaitė, & Merkys, 2005; Schön, 1983, 1991). For the analysis of the material of the focus group, the method of open coding was used, the essential and secondary categories (subcategories) expressing the relations between the conditions of PTs' workplace teaching/learning (including the adjustment of physical spaces), opportunities and interferences have been distinguished. The categories and subcategories have been illustrated with the excerpts of the authentic statements of the research participants.

The results of the research and their analysis

The results of the conducted empirical research have been presented in thematic categories. The thematic categories in the text of the article are written in inverted commas. The content analysis of the thematic categories has been illustrated with the informants' statements and reveals the situation of PTs' workplace teaching/learning. The interferences with PTs' workplace teaching/learning, its conditions and opportunities have been distinguished.

Interferences with preschool teachers' workplace teaching/learning. Referring to the results of the research, it is possible to state that the essential interferences with PTs' workplace teaching/learning are related to:

- *external factors (institutional level) and*
- *internal factors (personal level).*

The Lithuanian PTs identify the following interferences with workplace teaching/learning as the predominant ones: **“limited possibilities to concentrate”, “there is no possibility to leave the children learners”, “work duration and workload”**. It is becoming clear that for the research participants the essential interference with workplace teaching/learning is the **“specifics of pedagogical work”**, i.e., the fact that in the environment of the institution/group an uninterrupted educational process takes place, and, as a consequence, PTs do not have a possibility to leave the children in the group alone. The informants also mention another problem – **“unfavourable work schedule”** for preschool teachers' workplace teaching/learning and **“the workload teachers have”**, or **“activities not planned in advance but initiated by the administration”**:

“You get ready to do one thing, then someone from the administration comes and says, girls, you must do that immediately” (F1). “I will not be able at work either. It would be hard for me to concentrate, still there are some sources that distract you. I say, when you work at work, you switch on three eyes, four ears, then you see everything and there is no concentration. <...> you read and nothing remains, it simply comes in and out” (F3).

„Tu susiruoši daryti viena, ateina kažkas iš administracijos ir pasako, mergaitės, reikia būtinai greitai tą padaryti“ (F1). „Negalėčiau irgi darbe. Man būtų sunku susikaupt, vis tiek yra kažkokių šaltinių, kurie tave atitraukia. Sakau, kai dirbi darbe, įsijungi tris akis, keturias ausis, tada tu matai viską ir nėra to susikaupimo. <...> skaitai, tai neliuka, tiesiog įėjo ir išėjo“ (F3).

The processes of PTs' workplace teaching/learning are also restricted by **“lack of time”**, when the preparation for educational activities is especially time-consuming, moreover, **“during non-contact work hours the teacher must work in the group”**:

“It is the same for me as well, I would rather during the day's sleep then. There are a couple of hours, I can use them then. There are also those contact hours, which can be used. <...>” (F15). “Impossible. I also share this opinion. The preschool educator really has much work, much paperwork, to prepare for activities, to prepare teaching aids as well <...>” (F11).

„Man tai irgi tas pats, aš jau per pietų miegą tada. Pora valandų yra, tai tada galiu išnaudoti. Yra dar tos kontaktinės valandos, kurias gali išnaudoti. <...>“

(F15). „*Neįmanoma. Aš irgi tokios nuomonės. Auklėtojai tikrai yra daug darbo, daug popierizmo, pasiruošti veiklai ir priemonės turi pasiruošti <...>*“ (F11).

The research participants identify that other circumstances, i.e., **“personal attitudes”**, can also become interferences with workplace teaching/learning. One of such interferences is related to the perception of the meaning of professional activity, which obviously correlates with PTs’ age. In the country, there is a predominant tendency that senior PTs see no sense in learning. Pedagogical **“staff’s professional competition”** taking place in the institution also restricts workplace teaching/learning:

“Let us not forget that almost all of us are namely of retirement age.” (F5). *“In fact, when there is unhealthy competition, when it happens that I do something and someone copies from me or things like that. Exactly, this competition is unhealthy”* (F1).

„Nepamirškim, kad mūsų beveik visos pensinio amžiaus ir yra.“ (F5). *„Iš tikrųjų, kai būna nesveika konkurencija, kada būna, kad aš čia padariau ir kažkas nuo manęs nukopijavo ar dar kažką tai. Tai būtent nesveika ta konkurencija“* (F1).

The problematic of the internal and external interferences with workplace teaching/learning revealed during the research shows that in Lithuania PTs have rather limited opportunities to teach/learn in the workplace. Such limitations are significantly related to the principles of the organization of PTs’ professional activity in the country (specifics of teachers’ work schedule, insufficient number of teachers in the group, methods of the calculation of workload). This usually results in insufficient opportunities for improvement, gaining new skills, contribution to the development of the culture of workplace teaching/learning promoted in the organization.

Conditions of preschool teachers’ workplace teaching/learning. The learning paradigm and the constructive approach towards human learning distinguish the environment where the individual learns. Quite a number of authors (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996; Ahlberg, 1997; Klein, 2016; Caruso, 2017; Harman, 2018, etc.) understand the learning environment as a place where learners can work together and support each other using various learning aids and sources in achieving learning goals and problem solving. A rich educational environment should have the number of components that is necessary to ensure the possibility to apply various styles of learning and ways of the construction of knowledge in achieving learning goals.

The empirical research also attempted to reveal what working conditions are established for PTs to learn in the workplace. The results of the focus group have revealed that teachers mainly actualize the following conditions of workplace teaching/learning:

- *physical environment of the institution,*
- *time for teaching/learning and*
- *provision of work equipment (technologies and methodical resources).*

The data of the research have revealed that the informants actualize the suitability of the physical environment of the institution as a separate problem area of PTs’ professional activity, the data show that the teachers of the country have an opportunity **“to teach/learn in the administrative premises of the institution”**, i.e., “methodologist’s room”, **“methodical room”** or “administration room”. These results prove that workplace teaching/learning usually takes place in the room of the vice-principal of the institution, less frequently in the principal’s

room. Such results of the research show that simply there is no separate premise where a teacher could concentrate either:

“In the hall. Either in the hall, if there is a big number of people, or in the vice-principal’s room at the round table” (F14). “No, there is not. In the same rooms, at the principal’s, vice-principal’s” (F13). “There are also the rooms of the principal and vice-principals, but these are theirs” (F17).

„Salėje. Arba salėje jeigu didelis kiekis žmonių būna arba pas pavaduotoją kabinete prie apvalaus stalo“ (F14). „Ne, nėra. Tai tuose pačiuose kabinetuose, pas direktorę, pavaduotoją“ (F13). „Dar yra direktorės ir pavaduotojų kabinetai, bet tai ten jų“ (F17).

The choice of administrative premises for workplace teaching/learning is decisively affected by proper equipment of such rooms (for example, a round table, computer technologies, etc.) and by methodical or other literature/resources collected there. It should be noted that the research participants admit that being in the aforementioned premises they do not always feel well because they understand that these premises are not meant for their teaching/learning. On the other hand, a part of PTs in the institutions have an opportunity to choose alternative spaces for workplace teaching/learning, i.e., “methodologist’s room” or “methodical room”. In these spaces methodical literature is collected, there is a possibility to use the computer. However, the aspect of using such spaces is weakly expressed.

“How should I say, there are computers only in my room, the methodical room is also there, we have such a little rest room, we have meetings and discussions there, but in this case, for example, we should take literature from the methodical room and go to sit there” (F10).

„Kaip pasakyti, kompiuteriai tai yra tik mano kabinete, ten ir metodinis, mes turim tokį poilsio kambariuką, ten ir susirinkimus vedam ir diskutuojam, bet jau, pavyzdžiui, iš metodinio turėtų susirinkti literatūrą ir eiti ten atsisėsti“ (F10).

PTs reflecting about physical spaces chosen for workplace teaching/learning also mention **“entertainment or recreation zones/spaces”**, which are in the institution. The choice of such zones/spaces is also related to their respective equipment, i.e., the possibility to sit comfortably, use information technologies and methodical literature:

“In the hall. Either in the hall, if there is a big number of people, or in the vice-principal’s room at the round table” (F14).

„Salėje. Arba salėje jeigu didelis kiekis žmonių būna, arba pas pavaduotoją kabinete prie apvalaus stalo“ (F14).

The teachers analysing the suitability of the environment of the institution for workplace teaching/learning at the same time actualize that the spaces they usually choose for teaching/learning are not purposefully meant for the organization of this process. They also admit (this indicator is not strongly expressed) that there are cases when **“in the institution there is no zone/space for teaching/learning”** of PTs:

“There is not. There could be a separate space, some room, where we could come any time in case of need” (F2).

„Nėra .Galėtų būti atskira erdvė, toks kabinetas kažkoks, kur galėtume bet kada iškilus reikalui ateiti“ (F2).

PTs revealing what conditions established for workplace teaching/learning they have today (from the aspect of physical environment) state that the **“establishment of specialized spaces meant for learning”** would contribute to the development of the teaching/learning culture of the institution. In PTs’ opinion, it is especially important to adjust such spaces for individual and group/team work:

“In fact, some premises with some literature, internet” (F1). “<...> there would be a separate space, it would be quite acceptable indeed to learn at work and indeed not to take all these things home. It would be very good. But since it is not so, then this learning working in the group with children is complicated” (F18). “Well, it depends on the trainings to be organized, if these are group trainings, of course, a spacious one in this case, but if you want to learn something individually, you do not necessarily need a hall” (F12).

„Šiaip, kažkokios tai patalpos, kur būtų kažkokia tai literatūra, internetas“ (F1). „<...> būtų atskira erdvė, tai būtų visai priimtina iš tikrųjų, mokytis darbe ir nesinešti iš tikrųjų tų visų dalykų namo. Būtų labai gerai. Bet kadangi taip nėra, tai tas mokymasis, dirbant grupėje su vaikais, yra sudėtingas“ (F18). „Na, žiūrint kokius mokymus organizuoti, jeigu ten grupinius, aišku jau erdvi, bet jeigu individualiai kažką pasimokyti, tai jau nebūtinai salės reikia“ (F12).

Another condition of workplace teaching/learning emphasized by PTs is *teaching/learning time*. Referring to the results of the research, PTs admit that such time is **“using non-contact work hours”**. According to the current Lithuanian documents regulating preschool education, non-contact time is meant for indirect work with children (preparation for work, planning methodical activity, self-study, and other similar activity. PTs relate **“using non-contact working hours”** to the possibility to use time for teaching/learning but not for work with children. However, the reality of PTs’ professional activity shows that this time in preschool education institutions of Lithuania is tendentiously organized for working with children.

“Provision with technologies, other methodical resources” (for example, newest methodical literature, results of project activities, etc.), in the informants’ opinion, is also one of the conditions to perform teaching/learning activity in the workplace. It is expedient to note that this condition during the research was emphasized much more weakly than the problematic of the physical environment of the institution.

“I would be able to learn at work. But I simply need all the technologies, a computer” (F7). “Maybe now there is new literature, our programmes are older, and now everything is in an innovative way, and there are various textbooks, which we lack” (F14).

„Aš galėčiau darbe mokytis. Bet tik tiek, kad man yra būtinos visos technologijos, kompiuteris“ (F7). „Tai gal tos literatūros dabar yra naujos, pas mus tos programos yra senesnių metų, o dabar viskas naujoviškai, ir tų knygų visokių mokomųjų yra, kurių trūksta“ (F14).

The research participants also point out that for the improvement of the situation of PTs’ workplace teaching/learning systemic decisions are important. On the institutional level,

it was appealed that the administration of the institution must see a long-term prospect and profit of such PTs' development (at first, ensuring high-quality education of children) and, as a consequence, promote and support PTs' workplace teaching/learning. It is also supposed that in the institutions it is purposeful to have a person responsible for the organization of teachers' teaching/learning. Meanwhile, other pedagogical staff working in the institutions (social educator, speech therapist, non-formal education teacher, etc.), not only PTs, should be involved in common activities of workplace teaching/learning.

Opportunities for preschool teachers' workplace teaching/learning. In the context of the conducted research, the opportunities of PTs' workplace **teaching/learning are related only to:**

- *when (time aspect) and*
- *in which "ways" teachers can learn.*

Identifying the opportunities of workplace teaching/learning, the research informants mainly emphasize *time during work hours*, i.e., **"learning during the children learners' day sleep"**. Referring to the results of the research, it is possible to state that the PTs of the country understand the time when children sleep as one of the conditions favourable for workplace teaching/learning. The teachers suggest that this time could be used for team/group teaching/learning as well, when the trainings planned in advance take place in the institution:

"Well, for example, children sleep during their sleep time" (F1). "<...> during this day sleep it would be possible to find time and distribute it between these trainings, because the nannies are our helpers" (F8).

„Tai, pavyzdžiui, vaikai miega per pietų metą“ (F1). „<...> per tą pietų miegą atrastų laiko ir pasiskirstytų tiems mokymams, nes kadangi auklytės yra mūsų padėjėjos“ (F8).

Other ways of workplace teaching/learning relevant for PTs are **"participation in project activity"** and **"consultations"** with other specialists who work in the institution. PTs also significantly relate the opportunities of workplace teaching/learning to the participation in project activity, when teachers themselves create projects, implement them, and share best practices of such activity:

"<...> various projects are organized. It could also be attributed to trainings" (F15).

„<...> būna organizuojami visokie projektai. Tai irgi būtų galima priskirti prie mokymų“ (F15).

PTs also admit that workplace teaching/learning also takes place during the consultations with specialists who work in the institution on the issues of children's education, **"the newest methodical literature is collected and openly accessible in the institution"**:

"<...> you go to the vice-principal's, you will not be refused, always older works or something, and these two hours or so are for ordering and filling in, looking through books, reading what is necessary" (F8).

„<...> pas pavaduotoją nueini, tau neatsakys, visada ir senesnius tuos darbus, gal kažką tai, o tas dvi, dvi valandos ar kiek ir susitvarko, ir užsipildo, ir tas knygas pavarto, paskaito ką reikia“ (F8).

Conclusions

The essential interferences with PTs' workplace teaching/learning are related to the factors that are identified from the perspective of the teacher's relation to the environment of the institution and himself/herself. Such factors are identified as the institutional level (external factors) and the teacher's inner disposition (personal attitudes) for teaching/learning (personal level). The following external factors become the most strongly expressed interference with PTs' workplace teaching/learning: *uninterrupted pedagogical activity with children in the group*, as a consequence of which PTs experience limited possibilities to concentrate on purposeful workplace teaching/learning because during their professional activity they do not have a possibility to leave the children (a preschool teacher works in the group alone); *the workload of PTs' pedagogical activity and its duration* (work hours, work schedule, methods of the calculation of workload, etc.). *Personal level* is related to the perception of the meaning of professional activity, which obviously correlates with *PTs' age*. In the country, there is a predominant tendency that senior PTs see no sense in learning, and statistics show that the majority of preschool teachers working in the country are about sixty years of age. Pedagogical staff's professional competition taking place in the institution also restricts workplace teaching/learning.

PTs significantly relate workplace teaching/learning to the *physical environment of the institution* and *time resources* for teaching/learning, they slightly more weakly emphasize the *provision of the spaces* for workplace teaching/learning *with technologies and methodical resources*. Teachers' teaching/learning in the organization usually takes place in the spaces that are not purposefully equipped and are not meant for teachers' teaching/learning). The institution that supports the idea of teaching/learning establishes the conditions for teaching/learning in the work premises meant for administration or the spaces where children's educational activity takes place (for example, in the hall), in the spaces meant for recreation. The teachers see the possibility to learn in the workplace during non-contact hours, however, the tendency is observed that institutions do not establish conditions for PTs to teach/learn during non-contact hours, whereas practice shows that this time in preschool education institutions of Lithuania is modelled for working with children.

Although in preschool education institutions of Lithuania insufficiently favourable conditions for teachers' workplace teaching/learning are predominant, however, the pedagogical staff members of preschool education institutions envisage and emphasize certain opportunities of workplace teaching/learning as well. It is supposed that PTs can relate workplace teaching/learning to project activity performed in the institution. It is also possible to closely collaborate (exchanging information, consulting, together making respective decisions important for children's education) not only with PT colleagues but also with other specialists who work in the institution (speech therapist, special educator, non-formal education teacher, etc.). From the aspect of time, the opportunities of PTs' workplace teaching/learning are related to teachers' teaching/learning during the children learners' day sleep and the calculation of the appropriate workload (using non-contact hours for this purpose).

The importance of workplace teaching/learning of teachers of preschool education institutions in Lithuania has been investigated for the first time. The chosen research strategy enabled to investigate workplace teaching/learning as a sociocultural phenomenon, i.e., through teachers' teaching/learning experiences and the meanings attributed to them. The results of the empirical research identified the cases of workplace teaching/learning of teachers of preschool education institutions of Lithuania, revealed the opportunities of pedagogical

staff's workplace teaching/learning, the current conditions and highlighted the occurring interferences, therefore, the material of the research can be applied for the development of the qualification system of teachers of preschool education institutions of Lithuania and not only, i.e., striving to acknowledge and value teachers' teaching/learning experiences in the workplace and look for new ways and opportunities how to establish not only suitable but also high-quality conditions for ensuring such teaching/learning.

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CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WORKPLACE TEACHING/ LEARNING OF TEACHERS OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (THE CASE OF LITHUANIA)

Summary

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The problematic of learning in the workplace in the context of the activity of the Lithuanian educational (especially preschool) institutions today is the part of the culture of school activity that is still not sufficiently being actualized. Administrative staff of preschool educational institutions pays more attention to the arguments formulated on the basis of scientific research that teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace gives an opportunity to renew knowledge, skills, and competences, gain new skills and improve the quality of activity.

The article presents the results of the empirical research that describe the conditions and opportunities of workplace teaching/learning of the teachers of a preschool educational institution and highlights the essential interferences to such teaching/learning. The research is based on the interdisciplinary approach towards the research problem when methodology is based on the concepts of education science, andragogy, and management sciences. For the collection of the data of the qualitative research the method of the group interview (i.e. focus group) (Wilkinson, Birmingham, 2003; Hague, Hague, & Morgan, 2004, etc.) was used. In the context of the research the essential feature of the participants of the focus group is related to a common profession – teachers working in a preschool educational institution have been interviewed. The problem questions of the research:

what are the experiences of preschool education teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace? How are the conditions favourable for the expansion of the diversity of teachers' teaching/learning experiences created in the organization?

The aim of the research is to perform the analysis of the experience of teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace and identify the conditions and opportunities of their teaching/learning in the workplace. A qualitative research strategy has been chosen to conduct the research. The empirical research has been conducted using the methods of the group interview (i.e. focus group) (Barbour, 2007). The data of the research have been processed applying a qualitative interpretative content analysis.

The research has revealed that in Lithuania the essential interferences to teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace are the duration and load of work and limited possibilities to concentrate, i.e. to give respective time exceptionally to professional development. The research informants admit that the time usually given to their teaching/learning in the workplace is during the children learners' day rest (sleep). The informants mostly emphasize the necessity to create the environments suitable for teachers' teaching/learning in the workplace and to establish the conditions to properly use non-contact hours of work with children. The results of the research have also revealed that the majority of teachers consider learning in the workplace as an advantage because it saves time and financial costs.

The institution that supports the idea of teaching/learning in the workplace usually establishes the conditions for teaching/learning in the work premises meant for administration, the spaces where children's educational activity takes place or the spaces meant for recreation.

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