

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN A TYPICAL KINDERGARTEN OF LITHUANIA: THE ANALYSIS OF SITUATION AND INFLUENCING FACTORS

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Introduction

As *UNECE Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development* (2005) claims, human values, lifestyles and attitudes are established in early childhood, therefore, education of preschoolers including their educational environment and favourable attitude of a child towards it are significantly important.

Recently, tendencies of decentralization in managing, arranging and content-forming processes of preschool institutions have been noticed. However, Lithuanian system of educational and social services remains inflexible and therefore unable to adjust particular requirements and potential of parents. The range of modelling educational processes and moulds of educational support including diversity of educational environment is insufficient to meet requirements of citizens.

Modelling of educational environments has not been investigated considerably. The following surveys of this field were performed in Lithuania: “*Factors and Criterion for Sufficient Development of Preschoolers Aged from 5 to 7*”, (2003), “*Possibilities to Choose Preschool Education in Lithuania*” (2004), “*Diversity of Preschool Education: Present Situation and Expectations of Citizens*” (2008), “*Present Situation and Past Practises in Informing Population about Preschool Education*” (2008), “*Indexes of Social Justice in Education*” (2009). However, educational environment was investigated as a physical phenomenon (when compliances with sanitary standards and regulations are commonly considered and assessed) whereas interaction of child’s development and educational setting explored episodically despite this being one of

the factors determining child’s socialization.

Therefore, the **aim** of research is to identify the factors determining modelling of educational environments in a common preschool institution of Lithuania.

Methodology

Analysis of documents regulating educational system in Lithuania, the survey was performed throughout several stages. *First stage* – Sixteen state regulations and thirteen documents of particular institutions were examined (Table 1). *Second stage* – Analysis of scientific surveys and practices was performed (Table 2).

Results of Research

Since 2007 kindergartens in Lithuania develop the educational programs directly. In spite of the fact that decentralisation is appreciable in a preschool education, the organisation of educational process and social security is still rigid and difficult for the adaptation of family needs.

Kindergarten today is not only institution of socialization, but also educational environment. If educational environment is prepared professionally, the educational process needs less teacher’s inspiration. Educational environment should not be unified, standardized or too structured. As it is stated in national and international documents, environment in kindergarten should be close to home environment for maintenance of needs, the rights and interests of children. Results of research in Lithuania give fairly contradicting facts. Some researches show that educational environment of kindergarten does not correspond to preschool education models, forms of the educational assistance. Diversity of educational environment is not sufficient.

Table 1. *The Modeling of Educational Environments in a Typical Lithuanian Kindergarten: Analysis of Documents (*)*

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT (Related propositions)	REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT INDOORS (Related propositions)	REQUIREMENTS FOR EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OUTDOORS (Related propositions)
Educational Environments		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational environment is created so that the child would feel as a manager - he could change it without disturbing others, adapt for games and activities; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educational environment should be aesthetical and should have national elements. The relation with the object must acquire not only aesthetic but also moral sense – the relation with the person made it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The size of newly built kindergarten territory determinable considering how many kids are planning. Minimum inbuilt territory’s part, which is intended for children’s playgrounds should be no less than 6 square meters space per child;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational environment should be comfortable, playful, creative and aesthetical, functional, promoting children's activity; • To create educational environment that encourages children to show an interest in it, to know it and to improve. To care for educational means quality; • To create safe and healthy living and education conditions, allowing to experience the joy of childhood, promoting confidence, openness and independence; • To make conditions for children's culture development; • It's forbidden to show, sell, give, rent, etc. For children toys, movies, literature, which directly encourage war, cruelty, violence, damage the child's moral and spiritual development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Buildings should be divided into separate zones: the adoption- undressing, games, sleeping / resting, bathroom and toilet. • All equipment and furniture must be safe, clean, adapted for children according to their height, age characteristics; • Children's adoption-undressing room must be equipped with individual lockers or other equipments for children's clothes and personal belongings; • Floors, walls, toilet compartments and shelves in all rooms in office must be smooth, the facing must be easy to clean with a damp way, and detergent-resistant; • The main room space should be made of smaller spaces for individual, small groups and whole group activities, should be enough space for movement; • In the main room space child has to find everything, what he needs for games, activity and rest. • Toys and other items, which are typical for that local culture, living environment and community are using too; • Educational environment is created for knowing of social and natural environments: measures themselves, other people, people's lifestyle, relationships, community, homeland knowledge; there are growing plants, keeping fishes, parrots, turtles and other animals; there are a variety of natural materials; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kindergarten up to 50 children have access to other children's area suited for playing. In this case, it must be safe fro children's travel, stay in the area and return to the building; • It's forbidden to reduce territory's size. • Territory of kindergarten should be surrounded no less than 1.5 m high fence. • It's forbidden to plant and grow poisonous plants. • Sand in children's playing boxes should be exchangeable or renewable every year.
Educational Means and Toys		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-school educational means – toy, any item or matereal, which helps for child naturally develop for learning at school important abilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toys should correspond to children age, be clean. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational means can be used outside (in the yard, sport hall and field and etc.)
The Organisation of Educational Process at National and Institutional Levels		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States members recognize that every child's right to have the living conditions needed for his physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development; • To make optimal socialization and development conditions; • Kindergarten should be provided with equipment and teaching means to provide educational programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is necessary to find the material resources to create educational environment; • The creation of child's play and other activities conducive environments, the change of educational means; 	

To be continued Table 1

Safety and Welfare			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To protect and enhance children's health, to ensure children's physical and psychological security of the group, hall, other office spaces, playgrounds etc.. The promoter ensures healthy and safe learning and working environment; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toys should not raise danger to children's health or risk to be swallowed, inhaled or injure when children touch the skin, mucous membrane and eyes with them. Toys must be designed, constructed and manufactured in such a way that playing or using them does not cause danger to health or risk of injury, choking, and so on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Territory of educational institution must be systematically cleared. Safe grounds, unpolluted environment; Playgrounds, considering into the character of the games must be covered with a safe facing. Sand boxes should be protected from contamination. The possibility to protect playgrounds from direct sunlight and rain; All equipment in the territory must be safe: set at a safe distance, should correspond children's age and heigh, educational neeis; It's forbidden to grow poisonows plants; 	
Collaboration			
<i>National lvel:</i>	<p>Promouting education for sustainable development the especial attention should be addressed to the variety of living places, conditions in diffeent countires and regions, more global context. The global and local interests should be harmonine. International and national collaboration in a field of education for sustainable development in both levels school and prie-school.</p>	<i>Institutional level:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions are made not for child, but together with child. Child and adult relationship becomes equivalent; Parent's involvement in kindergarten activities. <p>To create a family-friendly environment in residential areas corresponding the needs of each family member (constructed green areas, children's games, sports parks and recreation areas).</p>

* **Analyze of documents the following table:** State Family Policy Concept, 2008; Concept of Preparatory Preschool Education in Lithuania, 1989; Concept of Education in Lithuania, 1992; Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, 1992; General Programme for Preparatory Preschool and Self-Education, 2002; Programme for Development of Preschool and Preparatory Preschool Education 2007-2012, 2007; Lithuanian Hygiene Norm HN 93:1999 Toys Hygiene Norms and Regulations, 1999, Amendment and Supplement, dated January 22, 2002; Lithuanian Hygiene Norm HN 75:2010 "Institution Implementing Preparatory Preschool and (or) Preschool Education Programme. General Standards for Health and Safety", 2010; Sustainable Development Education Strategy, issued by United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2005; Programme for Implementing Provisions of National Education Strategy 2003-2012, 2005; Law on Fundamentals of Protection of the Rights of the Child, 1996; Law of the Republic of Lithuania on Education, 2003; Concept of Alternative Education, 2010; United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1995; Concept of State Policy on Child Welfare, 2003; Record on Modelling Improvement of Conditions for Living and Education of the Child from Birth to Beginning of Compulsory Education, 2009.

The statements where environment is defined as a child-oriented setting and educational process as serving a means to meet children's needs and interests have been indicated as the most significant. The

importance of ergonomics has also been acknowledged. However, equipment with information technologies has failed to be significantly important in educational environment of a preschool pupil.



Pict. 1. Equipment of Preschool Institution (Educational Environment Outdoors)

Most preschool institution (are still used) equipment, but they until for use, of course the situation is not the same everywhere.

In summary, may be drawn to sum up the afore

said that favorable conditions for educational environment may be determined by educators' creativity and parents' consciousness, as well as collaboration and state maintenance.

Table 2. The Modelling of Educational Environments in a Typical Lithuanian Kindergarten: Analysis of Stimulating and Limiting Factors (*)

STIMULATING FACTORS		LIMITING FACTORS	
Factors	Related propositions	Factors	Related propositions
Renovation of educational environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve educational environment indoors and outdoors. To improve conditions of children's education from birth to the start of compulsory learning. 	Governmental requirements of hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of kindergarten's educational environments contravene hygiene requirements; Founders of kindergartens lack finance to renovate or to improve educational environments indoors and outdoors;
Accessibility of educational service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve accessibility of educational assistance to children and their parents, enlarging number and variety of educational institutions. 	Lack of financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 50 percent of neighborhoods lack of buildings or rooms for pre-school education;
Enlargement of possibilities to choose alternative educational institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote an establishment of new educational institutions, which are using non-traditional educational principles (traditional education institutions do not correspond to variety of community's needs; 	Uneven supply of pre-school education service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slippage between supply and demand of pre-school education service; Pedagogues often combine several educational technologies, but often they do it spontaneously;
Resources (the solving educational problems)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To rise an experience of complex assistance for children from birth to compulsory schooling 	Off-the-cuff using of educational technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedagogues have difficulties to understand and to use methods spontaneous education and constructive interaction between child and pedagogue;
Single-minded inter-institutional collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is expected to introduce kindergarten basket (from 1 January 2011); The using of EU structural funds for such goal is planed. 	Not sufficient competence of all pre-school pedagogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not always adequate opinion of pedagogues' about their abilities to use modern educational methods;
		Low requirements of family to the quality of educational environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents priorities (which is preferred) are often provided only for child's care, but not quality of educational environment.

* **Analyze of documents the following table:** General Constitutions for Preparatory Preschool and School Institutions, 2000; Order of Providing Educational Assistance for the 5-6-year-old Child Non-Attending Preparatory Preschool Institution, 2003; Concept of Means for Pre-School Education, 2003; Recommendations for Municipalities on Centralized

Children Admission to Preparatory Pre-School and Preschool Education groups of Educational Institutions, 2003; Record on Modelling Organization of Preschool Education, 2003; Requirements for Constitutions of State and Municipal Schools, 2004; List of Criteria for Establishing, Re-Organizing, Closing and Restructuring Comprehensive, Special Education and Vocational Training Schools including Institutions Providing Assistance for Pupils, Educators and Schools, 2004; Record on the Course Providing Educational Assistance for Families Raising the Child of Preparatory Preschool Age, 2004; Record on the Order of Organising Preparatory Preschool Education, 2005; Standard Description on Professional Requirements for Educators, 2005; List of Criteria for Programmes of Preparatory Preschool Education, 2005; Order of Assessing Maturity of the Child to be Educated According to Preschool and Primary Education Programmes, 2005; Methodical Recommendations on Implementation of Principal to Designate Preparatory Preschool Funds for Individual Children, 2007.

The most significant set-back in development of proper educational environment is inflexibility of founders and administrators of preschool institutions (absence of human factor) as well as insufficient competencies of educators and their failure to adjust new settings. Unsafe and insufficiently arranged facilities for educational practices as well as lack of educators' professional knowledge have proved to interfere with prospects to promote education outdoors. Moreover, the study has revealed that too many pupils are taught by one educator.

Conclusions

1. Educational environments in a common pre-school institution of Lithuania is determined by educators' professional knowledge, their creativity and initiative as well as parents' support and participation, also national policy in educational field, sufficient funding and assistance of other professionals and their collaboration.
2. The investigated documents commonly include information on child's custody, safety and health. Educational aspect is sufficiently considered, requirements for establishing educational environment is blurred whereas education environments outdoors are not properly discussed.

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Summary

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Kindergarten today is not only institution of socialization, but also educational environment. If educational environment is prepared professionally, the educational process needs less teacher's inspiration. Educational environment should not be unified, standardized or too structured. As it is stated in national and international documents, environment in kindergarten should be close to home environment for maintenance of needs, the rights and interests of children. Results of research in Lithuania give fairly contradicting facts. Some researches show that educational environment of kindergarten does not correspond to preschool education models, forms of the educational assistance. Diversity of educational environment is not sufficient.

The aim of the research is to find out the factors negatively influencing educational environment in the typical kindergartens of Lithuania. The main methods are the analysis of national documents.

Conclusion. The first, the investigated documents commonly include information on child's custody, safety and health; A second, educational aspect is sufficiently considered, requirements for establishing educational environment is blurred whereas education environments outdoors are not properly discussed.

Keywords: Pre-School Education, educational environment.

UGDOMOSIOS APLINKOS TIPINIAME LIETUVOS VAIKŲ DARŽELYJE: BŪKLĖS IR JĄ SĄLYGOJANČIŲ VEIKSNIŲ ANALIZĖ

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Santrauka

Nuo 2007 m. ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigos pačios modeliuoja ugdymo turinį bei rengia ugdymo programas. Pastaraisiais metais gerėja ikimokyklinio ugdymo valdymo, organizavimo ir turinio formavimo decentralizavimo procesai. Tačiau edukacinių ir socialinių paslaugų organizavimo sistema vis dar nelanksti bei sunkiai prisitaiko prie tėvų specifinių poreikių ir galimybių. Ikimokyklinio ugdymo organizavimo modelių, švietimo pagalbos formų bei ugdamosios aplinkos įvairovė netenkina šiandieninės visuomenės poreikių.

Taigi, šiandien itin svarbus tampa vaiko santykis su ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaiga ne tik kaip vienu iš socializacijos institutų, bet ir kaip ugdymo(si) aplinka, nes čia realizuojamu ugdymo turiniu ir įgyjamomis kompetencijomis formuojasi vaiko patirtis. Kuo profesionaliau paruošta ugdomoji aplinka, tuo mažiau reikalinga pedagogo inspiracija. Tačiau ugdomoji aplinka neturėtų būti unifikuota, standartizuota, per daug struktūruota, nes, kaip teigiama nacionalinio bei tarptautinio lygmens dokumentuose, ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigos aplinka turi būti artima namų aplinkai. Tikslas – visapusiškai užtikrinti prigimtinius vaiko poreikius, teises bei interesus. Tačiau atliktų mokslinių tyrimų duomenys rodo gana prieštarigus faktus. Daugelio Lietuvos ikimokyklinio ugdymo įstaigų ugdomoji aplinka neatitinka higienos reikalavimų, nes savivaldybės stokoja lėšų ikimokyklinio ugdymo paslaugas teikiančių įstaigų vidaus ir išorės aplinkai turtinti ir esamiems įrenginiams atnaujinti.

Šio tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti veiksnius, sąlygojančius ugdomųjų aplinkų tipiniame Lietuvos darželyje būklę. Tyrimo rezultatai grindžiami Lietuvos Respublikos ikimokyklinį ugdymą reglamentuojančių dokumentų bei mokslinės informacijos šaltinių turinio analize.

Nustatyta, kad dokumentuose vyrauja reikalavimai, susiję su vaiko globa, saugumu, sveikata. Edukacinis aspektas išreikštas silpnai, trūksta tikslesnių, aiškesnių reikalavimų ugdamosios aplinkos įrengimo įgyvendinimui, santykinai mažiau dėmesio skiriama ugdomosioms aplinkoms lauke.

Prasminiai žodžiai: priešmokyklinis ugdymas, ugdomoji aplinka.

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