

SELF-GUIDED LEARNING PROCESS IN PRESCHOOL: CHALLENGES OF THE PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The mandatory teaching/learning content of the preschool lays emphasis on the child's most essential interests and needs, acquiring them in such a process that leads to the formation of literacy or competence. Self-guided learning in the teaching/learning process appears as the major method that helps the pre-schooler acquire the content of all domains. According to the preschool guidelines, values and morals, general or transversal skills, cognitive, emotional and social aspects of the child's actions that help to acquire knowledge, understanding and key skills for man's functioning in important spheres of life and these are the key skills in the domains of language, social and civic, understanding of culture and self-expression in art, science, mathematics, technology, health and physical activities that form the mandatory teaching/learning content of preschool education. When acquiring all the necessary skills and knowledge, the child has to reach the planned learning outcomes that are attained in a self-guided learning process.

Self-guided learning is one of the most essential modern competences or the individual's readiness to adjust and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes when solving different situations. Are preschools ready for this, does this process take place and do preschool teachers understand the concept "self-guided learning process" – this is the topicality that definitely should be paid attention to relating it to teacher education, the development of the self-guided learning model and its piloting in the preschool environment.

A self-guided learning process should not be taken for granted because the child does not have such skills – to know / to feel how and what to do to start, for example, exploration. The child has not acquired these skills if the adult has not demonstrated how to do this. The child since young age should be gradually directed towards that – what and in which way to learn. The participation of the adult or teacher in this significant process is critical.

Keywords: *a preschool child, self-guided learning.*

Introduction

An individual who is ready to live in the constantly changing conditions is the challenge of the modern education system also for the preschool education in Latvia. The ability to act and adjust to any situation

is a competence or the outcome of the teaching/learning process, and it should be acquired purposefully already during the preschool period. If previously education was viewed as teaching something definite then the 21st century education is considered as a continuous process during which we acquire all the necessary for the changing life conditions and personal advancement. To supervise, control, and guide one's thinking, emotions, behaviour, to accept, understand one's mistakes and failures are essential conditions for everyone to be able not only to set the goals but also to reach these goals.

Considering the topicality of the issue, not only educational documents are considered, but also theoretical literature is analyzed: Purēns (2017); Perels, Merget-Kullmann, Wende, Shcmitz, Buchbinder, (2009); Kostelnik, Rupiper, Soderman, Whiren (2014); Jacob, Benick, Dörrenbächer, Perels (2020).

Due to this particular reason, the project Skola 2030 [School 2030] was launched in the education system of Latvia in 2016, having the aim "to ensure the approbation of the content of general comprehensive education based on the competence approach according to the description of the compulsory content of general comprehensive education and the introduction of the teaching/learning content in preschool education, basic education and secondary education" (Skola 2030..., 2017), which envisages reconsidering all the current teaching/learning content of all the education institutions on all levels and renewing this content in accordance with the requirements of modern education. The aim of implementing the content of preschool education is "an inquisitive, creative and joyful child who lives healthily, safely and actively, works independently, with interest and joy gaining experience about oneself, others, the surrounding world and the mutual interaction in it" (Noteikumi par..., 2018).

The mandatory teaching/learning content of the preschool lays emphasis on the child's most essential interests and needs, and the teaching/learning domains acquiring them in such a process that leads to the formation of literacy or competence. Seeking the answer to the question what competence is, the difference between the concepts of the skill and competence should be pointed out. In distinction from skills, that include a simple understanding about the order or way how the concrete task should be performed, the competence incorporates not only skills but also knowledge and attitudes. Purēns mentions the concept competence as the description for "the necessary knowledge, professional experience, and understanding in the particular field, question and the skills to apply the knowledge and experience in the concrete action" (Purēns, 2017, 8). A broader explanation of the concept competence looking at it from different dimensions is presented in Fig. 1.

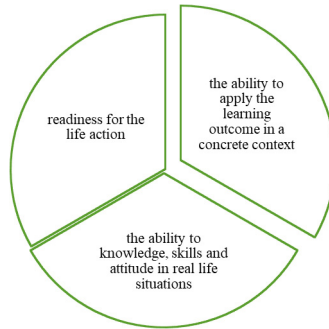


Figure 1. Explanation of the competence

Competence is the individual's feature that develops in action, self-experience. According to the guidelines, both the general skills for man's functioning in important spheres of life and these are the key skills in the domains of language, social and civic, understanding of culture and self-expression in art, science, mathematics, technology, health and physical activities and the values and morals as well as transversal skills (See Fig. 2) or competences that form the mandatory teaching/learning content of preschool education (Pirmsskolas mācību..., 2019, 7).

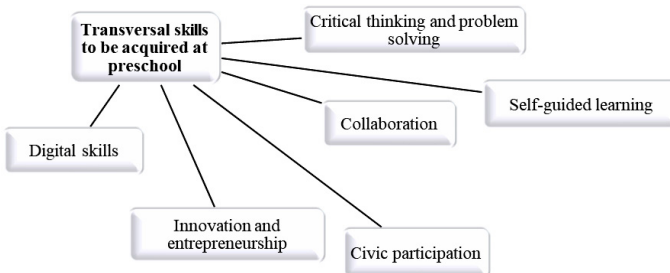


Figure 2. Transversal skills to be acquired at preschool

The attention from the point of view of theory in the present article will be paid to the transversal skill – self-guided learning and then how to promote its development in the pedagogical process in preschool because it is the determinant competence that the child needs to acquire as soon as possible. Besides, this is a new concept for preschool teachers because the previous Preschool education curriculum and preschool guidelines did not speak directly about such a competence.

Methodology

The aim of the study is to disclose theoretically self-guided learning as an important transversal skill and to establish a model for the possibility of its acquisition in the pedagogical process of the preschool. The study is a theoretical research – the analysis of literature and documents. The tasks of the research are to analyse scientific literature on self-guided learning in preschool. The research covers the analysis of preschool education guidelines (Noteikumi par..., 2018) developed by the National Centre for Education within the framework of the project “Competence-Based Approach to Curriculum,” preschool curriculum (Pirmsskolas mācību..., 2019) and document Education for modern literacy: description of the teaching/learning content and approach (Skola 2030..., 2017) giving particular attention to self-guided learning to be acquired at preschool. Theoretical approaches are based on the following scientific findings about self-guided learning in preschool (Zimmerman, Moylan, 2009; Perels, Merget-Kullman,... 2009; Jacob, Benick... 2020). The research methods used in the article: 1) study, analysis, and evaluation of scientific literature on self-guided learning; 2) reflection of authors' pedagogical experience.

Results

The development of the personality depends on the environment and the activity of the child (Vigotskis, 2002). The adult creates the environment (emotional, nature, things, and social environment), and when it is adequate, the child has the willingness to be engaged in it. The preschool child develops in action, in movement, observing what is happening around him. Observations are not only the child's passive participation – it is a very active process that takes a definite place in his life and action, performance. It should be emphasised that a preschool child has an explicitly intuitive ability to delve into the essence of human action. The child learns directly, imitating the adults, their actions. Thus, the adult transfers indirectly the information about his natural (unpretentious) actions to the child and this does not happen with tasks expressed in words. Therefore, the adult needs to offer the child diverse initiatives as well as the possibility to observe him in action. The representation of initiatives is closely connected with the first formation of the child's skills and the ability to implement one's intention. Figure 3 presents the advancement model of a self-guided action which has been developed based on the above-mentioned components.

The preschool teacher in the collaboration process, pedagogical observation explores the pre-schooler, his experience, skills, thus forming the idea about pre-schooler's self-experience. Based on the results of the

exploration, the teacher creates conditions (the environment of things, natural environment, social environment, emotional environment, possibilities of enriching feelings) for the development of the pre-schooler's cognitive interests offering possibilities to observe, explore, experiment, and listen.

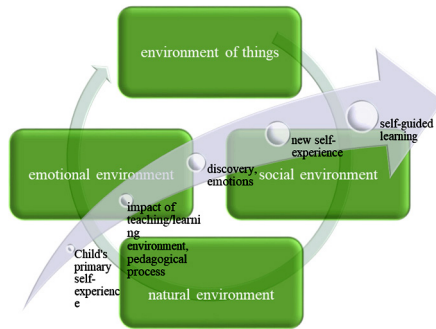


Figure 3. Advancement model of a self-guided action

During this activity the pre-schooler improves his skills (external expressions – behaviour, self-service skills, activities with objects); the pre-schooler forms the attitude (internal), habits and self-experience as self-regulation – conscious management or self-guidance of one's own action. Evaluating the pre-schooler's activity, the teacher, based on the observations, can successfully plan the pedagogical process in such a way that it is directed to the child's independent, exploratory, interested action corresponding to the child's needs and considering the pre-schooler's need of self-expression. Thus, every child's action would turn into a self-stimulating process in which the child's self-initiative, self-analysis, self-assessment, self-expression, and self-development are realised.

The environment has a decisive role in a successful implementation, development of a self-guided learning process. This does not only mean preparing and diversifying of the material basis in good time but also the creation of a safe psychological environment for the child and adult's mutual relations because the relations between the child and the teacher are never neutral. Everything that is said has importance. It is not always important what is said but how it is said. The teacher, especially, has to take this condition into account. Self-guided learning can be successful, providing that a child who acquires this competence is motivated, is in the environment that incites thinking as well as there is an adult next to him who supports the child.

Self-guided learning is a special kind of self-regulation when learning takes place transforming the mental abilities into the academic knowledge.

R. Fisher draws attention to the fact that “the skill to learn can be developed best using the approach of “thinking skills” the aim of which is to show children not only what the child must learn but also how to learn (Fišers, 2005, 5). In order to implement successfully the developed model, the teacher needs not only to manage the phases of self-guided learning: planning, supervision and assessment, to understand how to support the child in the action he has chosen himself but also to apply self-guidance skills in his own action thus promoting self-guidance skills in children.

Based on the analysis of the Curriculum of Preschool education (2018), Skola 2030 materials (2017), and having explored the models of preschool children’s learning developed by researchers Zimmermann, Moilen (2009), Jacob, Benick, Dörrenbächer, Perels (2020), the authors have created Table 1 which summarises and highlights not only the most important phases of self-guided learning but also summarises the questions by asking which the teacher not only supports the child but also helps him to master the skill to learn.

Table 1. Phases of self-guided learning

Phases of self-guided learning	Description of the phase of self-guided learning	Child’s action and the adult’s support
Planning	A plan is developed for achieving the aim, for performing the task. Elements of the phase – setting the aim, making strategic decisions, self-efficiency and natural interest.	The child thinks about his aims, considers, and thinks out how and with which methods, strategies to reach them, makes the action plan, criteria that will serve as evidence that the plan is fulfilled. What is my aim, task? Which information and strategies will I use? How much time will I need?
Supervision (performance)	The plan is implemented. Elements of the phase – stability of the attention, maintaining internal demands, planning of the time, seeking the assistance and support if needed, self-assessment as well as self-developed system of consequences.	The child implements his plan, supervises his action, checks for the mistakes, seeks better solutions, and decides whether to change the plan or the steps of action. What is the importance of the task? Did I reach my aim? Do I need to introduce changes?
Assessment (self-reflection)	The reflection on what has been done. Elements of the phase – the feedback, the analysis of causes and consequences and adjustment.	The child assesses how successfully he has reached the aim applying the chosen strategies. What helped me to reach the aim? What were the obstacles? What will I do differently next time?

The teacher will succeed in establishing a link with the child if instead of urging or criticising the child he will encourage him, will devote his attention to the child's thoughts, will take into account his interests, will listen carefully, will not interrupt, will treat him as an equal and will discuss what has been done (Fišers, 2005). This means that the teacher, talking with the child, asks questions both about the performed action and the planned action, and evaluates what has been done in order to help him guide (plan, supervise, assess) his learning. Thus, the child learns to reflect on the performed action, to think whether the way he thinks at the concrete moment means the best way how to reach the planned outcome. Besides, before the child engages in some action, activity the teacher should always ask himself – whether and for what purpose does the child need this? Before the process the teacher should also think about the child's possibilities, the broadness of freedom as well as the sequence of action so that it results in a meaningful situation in which the child acquires the transversal skill of self-guided learning which is so important in life, involving the emotional, thinking and behavioural processes.

Discussion

Self-guided learning when the individual demonstrates the initiative either with or without the assistance of others to diagnose his learning needs, to formulate the aims of learning, to identify the materials and human resources for the learning needs, to choose the learning strategies and to assess what he has mastered from the transversal skill or competence that had to be acquired and which is considered as one of the most important for modern man.

In preschool, this competence is expressed as skills in which the child “differentiates emotions and determines their causes, learns to manage his behaviour, observes the daily routine, is able to wait, is able to complete the activity, dresses independently and puts in order his things, learns to set the aim for his action, to plan the action in order to fulfil his intention, works independently, overcomes difficulties with some support, learns to accomplish the delegated responsibility, is proud of his achievement, assesses the failure and mistakes as part of learning, assesses one's own action and that of the others and the outcome, and explains his assessment” (Noteikumi par..., 2018). It is important for preschool teachers in work with the child, promoting the development of this transversal skill, to know that it is based on social emotional learning and the learning to learn skill.

The social emotional development is closely connected with learning because emotions influence the acquisition of new knowledge, the desire

to learn and to explore something new. The experience which develops during learning is connected with emotions, if the learning event evokes positive memories, interest then the acquired is memorised, while negative emotions make it more difficult to remember. It can be said that social emotional learning improves the child's attitude to learning, this meaning motivation and engagement in the learning process, behaviour participating and forming habits in the learning process, performance, showing competences in the learning process. In preschool, the social emotional learning takes place both through acquiring the names of emotions and their modelling and playing out different situations in games. Teachers help the child to master social emotional skills not only teaching them in games, playing them out and referring to one of the discussed themes at the right moment but also showing the example, demonstrating their own social and cooperation skills as well as the capability to regulate one's emotions (Guelder, Feuerborn,...2020). The teacher establishes the environment which accepts and supports the different, the unusual, in which every child feels good because he is valuable as he is. The child learns empathy, generosity, the willingness to help other pre-schoolers in a real environment in which these emotions are part of everyday routine. The recommended strategies in work with the preschool child for promoting the social emotional development are summarised in Figure 4.

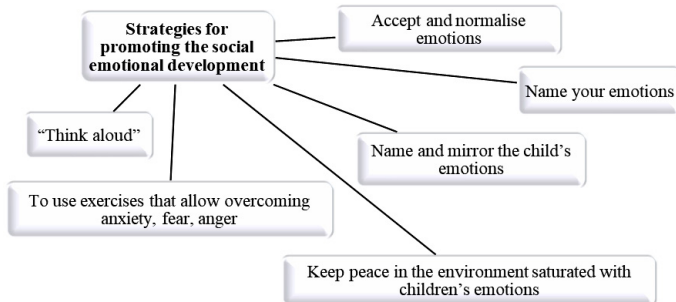


Figure 4. Strategies for promoting the social emotional development according to Kostelnik, Rupiper, Soderman, Whiren, 2014

Learning to learn is connected with the development of the metacognitive intellect which is the most important aspect of human intellect. This intellect helps to approach thoughts, emotions and helps to understand why we do what we do. "The development of metacognitive knowledge is the main factor that determines successful learning because it allows children to understand, plan, predict, remember and clarify" (Fišers, 2005, 22). Features of will (perseverance, determination), internal motivation, concentration skills, and self-control are important in the process of self-guided

learning. Self-control strategies that start developing in preschool age should be used. During the preschool age children are not able to fulfil properly the conditions of self-guided learning (Venitz, Perels, 2018). However, the research (Bronson, 2000; Perels, Merget–Kullmann, ... 2009; Jacob, Benick, ... 2020) shows that children of preschool age can and are able to learn to guide their learning, because already at this age there are those key skills that help to control and regulate one's own cognitive processes (Venitz, Perels, 2018). Thus, referring to the above-mentioned authors, it should be noted that the preschool age child can and is able to learn in a self-guided manner if he is able to apply the metacognitive processes. This means that the child has the ability to set the aim, to manage and supervise processes that help to implement the set aim, to improve and change the strategy, if necessary, as well as to evaluate what has been performed. Figure 5 presents the scheme of the child's self-guided action.

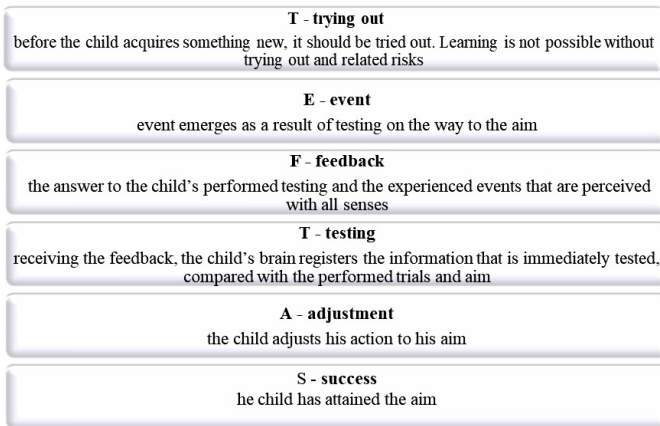


Figure 5. Child's self- guided action

It is important to indicate that the child needs motivation for the action because then he has the conviction that he is able to perform the necessary actions. Self-regulation of one's behaviour when the child controls his behaviour and attention for reaching the aim is also important (Daily, 2013). When the child is 5-6 years old, he more frequently displays the skills of grasping a bigger scope of information and understanding requirements of different tasks. His internal motivation is also developed which makes the learning process easier. The basic skill at this age is to supervise and implement one's own learning activities (Venitz, Perels, 2018). The child's own action, his motivation to do and the skill to do as well as the skill to make the decisions, to organise one's own work and not to be guided by another person confirms that the adult's role in preschool is invaluable in the acquisition of the above mentioned.

The child of the preschool age can think actively about facilitating and developing the self-guided learning skills and, undeniably, teachers have a significant role in this process. For this process to be continuous and improving, there should also be each child's motivation which depends not only on the child himself but also on the teacher's participation, on the environment in which the culture of thinking dominates. Learning to learn is not only the set of skills that the child acquires but also the teacher's disposition to what it means to think and learn (Harpaz, 2007).

The teacher's participation, the environment activates the preschool children if they have maximum possibilities of self-expression, to act freely and safely when implementing ideas fully corresponding to their intention.

Conclusions

Self-guided learning is one of the most essential competences or the individual's readiness to adjust and use his knowledge, skills and attitudes solving different problems in today's changing conditions.

The process of self-guided learning in preschool is reciprocally important – both for the child improving his skills and the adult organising the pedagogical process. It is vital to notice, emphasise and accept the child's abilities to use thinking and emotional tools and tools regulating the behaviour in order to orient oneself to planning of the action, to setting aims as well as being able to assess the achievement.

The process of self-guided learning means that for planning, supervision and assessment of every child and a successful run of the process it is important to know the developmental regularities of the children's age and also to ensure the support necessary for the child arranging, fitting out and creating the environment suitable for active engagement.

The child's self-guided action at the preschool age is formed based on the environment (emotional, social, natural and things), the child's self-experience and a supportive preschool teacher.

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